Preparing an Effective Poster Presentation

Designing Your Poster. Space on a poster is limited, so pick what to present wisely. Your display should be self-explanatory and have a logical flow—viewers should be able to follow the order even if you are not present. Start with a rough draft of your design on paper, using graph paper or Post-it notes to simulate sections. The sample layouts at the end of these Guidelines may give you some layout ideas.

Place your title at the top of the poster and make sure that the text is large and clear. Include your name and major, and the name and department of your faculty mentor, in addition to other co-authors.

Incorporate appropriate graphics in your poster. Label or describe any charts, tables, figures, graphs, or photos that you use. Make sure all edges line up evenly.

Does Your Poster Communicate its Message?

Many posters look great but fail to communicate their information clearly. Ask yourself these questions when you are designing your poster.

Is your message clear? Focus on the results and their importance. Avoid overly detailed descriptions of your methods.

Is everything on your poster critical to communicating your message? Remove everything that is not vitally important. Simplify your text by using short bullet points and phrases instead of complete sentences.

Is your organization easy to follow? Most people read from top to bottom, then left to right. Consider numbering your headings to further clarify the flow of information.

Do your headings deliver real information? Good headings by themselves can summarize the main points of your poster if readers are in a hurry.

Is your text easy to read? The poster title should be at least 144 point text, and information about the student(s) and mentor(s) should be 72 points. Headings should be at least 36 point text and easily readable from at least 6 feet. All other text should be at least 18 point and legible from 4 feet.

Is your poster cluttered by too many fonts? Do not use more than two typefaces. Instead use bold, italic and size to set type differently. Times New Roman, Arial, Garamond, and Verdana are suggested typefaces.

Are your colors distracting? Stick to a simple color scheme (try a couple that complement or contrast with each other, such as black or navy on white). Avoid red/green combinations, as this is the most common form of color blindness.

Are your graphics clear and easy to understand? Avoid elements—such as unnecessary background colors and overly specific labels—that do not add useful information. Explanations should be within or next to figures, not referred to from elsewhere.

Does your poster have a good balance between text, graphics, and white space? Use white space consistently to emphasize separate sections and to keep the poster from becoming too cluttered and difficult to read.

Do readers have to move back and forth to read your poster? Arranging your information in columns makes the poster easy to read in crowded situations.

Can you talk about your poster without reading directly from it? Be ready to discuss details that questioners cannot read for themselves. People are interested in additional information and your interpretations.

Sample Design for Poster Presentations