

What Makes A Good Poster

Planning

Poster preparation should provide a sense of creativity and satisfaction; therefore, don't leave the planning and preparation of your poster until the last minute:

Plan ahead – this is IMPORTANT!

This is a public presentation; by planning carefully, making sure you're clear in what you say and how you say it and assuming a professional attitude you will avoid making it a public spectacle.

Talk to medical illustration well in advance of the event. Find out how long it takes them to process a poster and plan accordingly. Ask their advice about colour schemes and layout, find out what software they use and what format they want pictures, graphs and tables in. Make sure you know the meeting's poster instructions; is the poster board landscape or portrait? What size is it?

What do you want the central message and content to be?

Let's assume you've written an abstract and it's been accepted. What is the one essential concept you want to get across to the audience?

Check your submitted abstract again to ensure **consistency in message**.

General Layout

Approach

The room will be full of posters, consider the visual impact your presentation needs to make in order to attract readers. You need to design your poster to be as eye-catching and attractive as possible. A large or bright centre of interest can draw the eye to the most important aspect of the poster.

The basic rules are:

- **Simplicity**
- **Clarity**
- **Legibility**

Avoid clutter, take out unnecessary data, make everything legible from at least 3 feet, and attempt to communicate your message clearly, even to the non-experts in your field.

The table below can be used as a guide to determine font sizes for text in your poster which will be legible at distance:

Content	Reading distance (meters)	Type size (mm)	Type weight
Title	5-7	30-45	Bold
Authors and affiliations	5-7	25	Bold
Main headings	2-3	10 (36 point)	Bold
Supporting text	1	5 (24 point)	Regular

Make sure your presentation flows in a logical sequence. It is important to present the information in a sequence which is easy to follow. It should be obvious where to start inspecting the poster and where to go from there (generally left to right, top to bottom). The poster should not rely upon your verbal explanation to link together the various portions.

Arrange the layout before you prepare the content. Make a scale drawing of your layout. Have a few colleagues comment on the overall design before final drafting. Check with medical photography.

Participants may not have had the opportunity to read the abstract of a poster presentation before they walk into the display area. Nevertheless, a poster should NOT be a standard paper in pictures or, worse still, in words. Neither should it restate the abstract.

Size, Space, and Overall Design

Poster boards usually measure 8 feet (wide) x 4 feet (high).

At first glance, at a distance of about 15 feet away, the viewer should see an easy to read title and an uncluttered, neat arrangement of visual elements and text. Studies show that you need to capture the attention of your audience in 11 seconds

Leave some open space in the design. Work with 40% open space, 30% visual elements, and 30% text. Space is a visual pause and a poster is a visual experience.

Arrange the material into columns, and use landscape rather than portrait format. More content will be at eye level, which makes reading and interpretation easier.

Determine a logical sequence for the content you will be presenting. Remember that humans use spatial sequencing, we track vertically from centre to top and bottom, and horizontally from left to right.

Use elements of different sizes, proportions or shapes to increase visual interest

Organise the content into sections but keep the text in methods to an absolute minimum. Use diagrams to give a visual message where possible.

For data and results use figures, charts, graphs, line graphs, or tabular data but keep them all simple and avoid using too many colours. Eliminate all unnecessary data and be RUTHLESS

Specifics

Make the title snappy and have the audience in mind. Use the title to grab the attention of the viewer; think of a title as a newspaper headline vying for attention. The title can be provocative, for example, ending in a question mark. It should be:

- readable from about 15 feet away
- concise, the letters should be bold and at least 5 cm (2 inches or 84 points) high, preferably larger. Think BIG!
- text under the title should include the author's names and their institution or organization affiliations. Subheadings should be about 1 to 3 cm, 0.5 to 1.5 inches, or 36 to 72 points high.
- If space permits, use first names for authors to facilitate interactions, don't include degrees, they waste space
- Use abbreviations where possible. City names, or even states, often may be dropped from the institutional affiliations.
- By all means include institutional logos, but only if you have space

The text should be concise, legible and easily comprehended. Keep text on each panel relatively short and to the point. More than 25 lines won't get read, but 15 to 18 usually will:

- choose a simple font such as Times, Helvetica or Prestige Elite and stick with it. Don't use anything flowery. Choose one font and use it consistently.
- avoid overuse of outlining and shadowing, it can be distracting. To make something stand out, use a larger font size, bold or underline instead.

- present supporting text in brief segments along with appropriate illustrations. State the significance of the findings forcefully and concisely at the end. Aim for “Wow!” from the viewer.
- text should be large enough to be read easily from at least 6 feet. Framing the text with a border can help readers to focus.
- text can also be presented as short “bullet” lists.

For section headings (Conclusions, Methods, Results, etc.) use 36 point, bold type. Capitals and lower-case letters in combination ARE MUCH EASIER TO READ THAN ALL CAPITALS.

Again, keep the introduction and methods sections short, for a poster presentation more is actually less:

- careful use of 2 or 3 colours for emphasis is valuable; overuse is not.
- remove all non-essential information from graphs, tables and figures and eliminate legends and keys as much as possible
- label data lines in graphs directly using at least 18 pt type
- all line drawings should be at least 2 pts thick, labels or arrows should be bold
- avoid patterns or open bars in histograms and convert tabular data to simple graphic displays where possible
- keep illustrations simple and leave out extraneous details
- don't forget that imported figures may lose clarity

A coloured poster board background that contrasts well with the text is eye-catching but too many colours can lead to confusion and don't forget that lighting in the poster display area may not be optimal.

Don't forget to acknowledge funding.

Include appropriate literature citations only, keep these to a minimum and place them on the lower right of the poster beneath the acknowledgements of funding.

Travel

If possible make sure your poster is laminated and transport it in a poster tube, they're cheap and worth the investment.

If you're flying to a meeting carry the poster with you.

Make sure you have a pdf copy in case of disaster, all conferences these days have people falling over themselves to produce your poster on the spot.

At the conference

Familiarise yourself with local arrangements well in advance and find out exactly where your poster is going to be hung.

Although materials to hang the poster will usually be provided don't rely on this, so prepare in advance.

Bring print handouts of your poster and attach them to your poster board in a folder or envelop where they can be easily found. If you want people to have an opportunity to contact you about your poster make sure your contact details are on the poster copies.

Make sure you are present for your poster viewing, preferably neatly dressed, sober and with your conference badge displayed so that your audience realise the author is present.

Have 3 different length explanations of your work prepared:

- **a very rapid description of the central message**
- **a 30-second description for those who want a little more**
- **a 2-3 minute description for those wanting the in depth version or for moderated poster sessions**

If your poster session is being moderated be aware of the background noise and the need to make yourself heard without disturbing other moderated groups in the surrounding area.

A great and effective poster is

- visually attractive, visible and legible
- well organised
- self-explanatory
- informative but digestible
- careful in linking text and imagery
- succinct
- sensitive to its intended audience