COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
FACULTY RESEARCH CENTER

Tips for Creating Professional Posters

Written Spring 2008 By
Janet Rinker, B.S.
Graduate Research Assistant

Planning

Sketch it out.
Start your poster by sketching out our printing and laying out your design before beginning construction.

Remember your purpose.
A poster’s purpose is to quickly orient the audience to your subject – not to reprint an entire report. What parts are MOST important?!

Keep it simple.
Always keep a poster simple to read, simple to understand, and simple to remember. Few people will stop to view your poster if it takes 40 minutes to read!

Posters are visual.
Posters are intended to visually communicate your topic to the audience. Use charts, graphs, pictures and colors to make a point. Separate ideas with “white space” and limit your text.

Title

Purpose.
A title should include the title of your work, authors, and an affiliation. It can be written in sentence form, but keep in clear and concise.

Prominence.
The title is the first thing your audience will look for, so it should be the most prominent part of the poster, and should be readable from 15-20 feet away.

Across the top.
Whether it is left-aligned or centered, a poster’s title should be located at the top.

Over-formatting.
Do not over-format your title. Do not use all caps- they are difficult to read from a distance. Use the same font as the remainder of your poster for a uniform look.
Abstract
An abstract, unless requested by a group or conference, is generally not included on a poster. An abstract is a summary of your work, as is a poster. Therefore, including one would be... well, redundant. Not to mention, abstracts are wordy and occupy valuable poster property.

Headers
Purpose.
Headers are intended to separate sections of a poster.

Location.
Separate section of your poster should be easy to locate, so make header just slightly less prominent than your title, and don’t be afraid of “white space.”

Format.
Heading text should be no smaller than 36-point font. Keep the font style consistent with your title, other headings, and text.

Visual, not textual.
Headers, like posters, should be visual. Format your headings with size and color. Avoid bullets, special characters and extra punctuation – they become distracting over the course of an entire poster.

Text
Limits.
Set limits on your text and keep them. Try to keep blocks of text at 50 words or less. To minimize text, use phrases and lists when possible, rather than whole sentences

Condense first.
Edit and condense your text before you start adding it to your poster. Remember what is important and include only what your audience NEEDS to know. (They can always read a copy of your report if they like what they see.)

Edit ruthlessly.
If you think there’s too much text, there probably is.

Size and format.
On a standard poster, text should be no smaller than 24-point. Left-justify and avoid centering. Use the same font throughout. Changing fonts looks less professional and may accent something inadvertently. Instead use size, bold and italics to make a point.

Text on graphics.
Pay close attention to text on graphics. This text is just as important as the rest and should be just as easy to read – otherwise, take it out.

Talking in code.
Avoid short-hand and acronyms. This is easy to miss, so ask someone outside of your research to proof your work. If they do not understand, some members of your audience may not understand either.
Images

*In place of text.*

Graphs, charts, diagrams and photos are a terrific way to replace text. Remember that they are going to get the audiences’ attention before text, so use them in the areas that are most important.

*Give it flair.*

Images add color and life to a poster. If you don’t have fascinating graphs to illustrate findings, take a photo or two that illustrates your subject well.

*Professional and pertinent.*

Images can break a poster as easily as they can make a poster, for the same reasons – images stand out. Be sure your images are relevant to your subject and findings, and that they are professional. Do not use clipart. Images should be as concise as your text, so avoid snapshots your audience won’t understand.

*Thin grey line.*

When using photos, or images with a background color, add a thin grey line border. When printing, this gives your images more visual appeal and a cleaner looking edge.

Color

*Simple color scheme*

Choose two or three colors for your theme and stick to them. Using too many colors looses the effect colors can have. Find inspiration in a photo or image you already have. Affiliation colors usually work well.

*Color is a science*

Certain color just do not work – alone or together. Light and bright colors are lost on a white background. Blue on red (and vice versa) look blurry.

*Use color wisely.* Like images, color catches the audience’s attention. Use color where you want to draw attention. Avoid dark posters with light text. They are overwhelming (and expensive).

*Coordinate.*

Use colors to coordinate the title, headings and images. Use consistency throughout to give your poster a pleasing and simple flow. This applies to both text and backgrounds.

Editing

*Recruit an editor, or ten.*

Ask everyone you know to look at and evaluate your poster. Others will see what you do not. An unbiased third party is able evaluate what stands out, what is lost, and give you an honest overall impression of your poster.

*Consult.*

Find others who have created posters. Ask their advice and look at their work to decide what you like and don’t like. Remember that some things can only be learned by experience.

*Look around.*

Look at other posters at conferences and professional meetings. Pay attention to what works and what does not. The internet is another good source for looking at sample posters. Just remember that what looks good in a slide show, may not work when printed.
References, Other Resources, & Sample Posters
Advice on Designing Scientific Posters – Swarthmore
   http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm

Creating Effective Poster Presentations – North Carolina State
   http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/NewSite/CreatePosterText.html

Design of Scientific Posters – Virginia Tech
   http://www.writing.eng.vt.edu/posters.html

Poster Presentations - Easter Kentucky
   http://people.eku.edu/ritchisong/posterpres.html