

Dos and Don'ts of Making a Poster Presentation


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A poster is a communication tool used for sharing the results of a study, usually before it is formally published in a scholarly journal. In a poster session, several posters are displayed and the authors present at the same time. This means that visitors only have a few seconds or minutes to spend on one poster.

So you have to concentrate on putting all information on a poster, in a small space, and express it effectively and explicitly, in order to convey the result of the research to the visitor in a very short amount of time.



There are three aspects to perfecting a poster presentation:

- Planning
- Designing
- Presenting

In this article, we will discuss the dos and don'ts of planning your poster. Planning involves everything from deciding the content to the type of layout and format that you want to follow.



Poster Space

✓ Find out how much poster space you are allowed beforehand. If you are presenting your poster at a conference or convention, you would have limited space. The space you are allowed will determine the content of the poster.

✘ Don't wait till the day of presentation to find out how much poster space is allowed. You might end-up with a poster larger than the board allotted to you. The poster space is usually determined by the size of poster stands.

For example,

Maximum Poster Size usually allowed is 4' w × 4' h.



Poster Style

✓ Opt for either of the following poster styles:

- One large poster (e.g., 33 × 44 cm)
- Individual columns (e.g., three 11 × 48 cm)
- Individual pages (e.g., twelve 8 × 11 cm)

✘ Don't mix these styles, as it would lead to a very messy-looking poster.

Software Options

✓ Choose a software depending on your technical expertise and design skills.

Options

Beginner: PowerPoint is a relatively easy-to-use tool for creating posters.

Advanced: Adobe Illustrator, Corel, and InDesign have more features and can provide very professional results, especially for posters including lots of high-resolution images.



Tip 1!

You can produce draft posters, i.e., reduced versions of the poster, using these softwares and use them for editing as well as instant handouts!!!

✘ Do not go for a difficult software or mix results using many tools.



Poster Placement

✓ Place your poster such that the average viewer will have about 60% of the poster above eye level and 40% below because looking up is easier than looking down.

✗ Don't place it such that the viewers have to bend down or squat to see the lower portion, since you may lose their attention.

Tip 2!

Choosing a Landscape orientation rather than Portrait might be beneficial

Time Management

✓ Allow yourself lots of time to plan the poster—at least a month!

✗ Don't wait until the last minute since things will inevitably take longer than planned. Remember to allow time (and money) for printing/laminating.



Tip 3!

You can plan a schedule for yourself using project management software available for free on the internet.

Poster Content

✓Decide on the poster content beforehand. Your poster should ideally answer the following five questions:

- Why is the research question important?
- What strategy is used?
- What are the results?
- Why are these results unique/important?
- How does this relate to other research? What comes next?

✘Don't make the following five common errors when deciding the content:

- Don't trying to convey too much information. Only stick to the essentials highlighted above
- Don't use too much text. More words take longer to read
- Don't use too many illustrations with no supporting text either



- Don't put too much detail in the graphs and diagrams. Keep it clean
- Don't have a very long title

Designing

Well-designed posters catch your interest and communicate a clear message through pictures and only the most essential words.

Title

- ✓ Use a short title. Highlight the study and not necessarily the conclusions.

Example

Average: *A Study on How to Design Effective Posters*

Better: *Designing Effective Posters*

- ✗ Don't use long, all-inclusive titles.

These might be appropriate for a journal article but not a poster. Titles with excess jargon or punctuation are tedious to read.



Author Credentials, References, and Acknowledgements

✓ Give clear attribution to the names of the authors and affiliations—place this section below or next to the title. References and Acknowledgements are auxiliary sections that can be placed in the lower left corner of a poster.

✗ Don't leave people to wonder about who did the work or omit References and Acknowledgements to save space. Also, avoid excessive citations and footnotes.

Layout

✓ Determine a logical sequence for the material. Sketch your layout by opting for either of the following:

- Arrange materials into columns (3–5 columns)
- Arrange materials vertically from top left corner to bottom right corner
- Organize material into sections and number to make the flow obvious

✗ Don't confuse your reader by segregating text, figure, and legends in separate areas and in a haphazard arrangement.



Tip 4!

Use arrows or numbers that lead the reader from one block to the next one to enable them to follow your sequence.

Type Size

✓ Use a type size which is easily readable from a distance of about 5 feet:

- **Title** should be readable from 25–50 feet distance.
- **Author credentials** should be a type size smaller than the title but larger than poster text.
- **Poster text** should preferably be of the same type size throughout, except, headings, which can be larger, and references, which can be smaller.

✗ Don't make the type size too large or too small

Examples of type proportion

- Title: 96 pt
- Authors: 72 pt
- Affiliations: 36–48 pt
- Section headings: 36 pt
- Text: 24 pt
- Acknowledgements: 18 pt



Fonts

✓ Use plain fonts, e.g., Times New Roman, Century, Palatino, with italics or bold for emphasis.

✗ Don't use many font styles. Shifting styles unnecessarily and using too creative styles can make reading your poster tedious, e.g., text written in Helvetica and Courier, as well as in uppercase are hard to read.

Tip 5!

Serif fonts help guide the eye along the line, thus improving readability and comprehension.

Color

✓ Use colors in your poster in a way that they help convey additional meaning:

- Use contrast scheme—light color background and dark color text
- Use 2 or 3 colors—too many will distract and confuse viewers
- Use multiple colors in a consistent pattern—or else viewers will spend their time wondering about the pattern rather than the content



✘ Don't make the following errors when deciding the color:

- Avoid background colors that transition from light to dark—they will reduce the contrast between the text and the background
- Avoid gratuitous colors
- Avoid dark backgrounds with light letters—very tiring to read
- Avoid overly bright colors—they wear out readers' eyes
- Don't use red/green combinations—red/green colorblindness is common

Graphics

✓ Use self-explanatory graphics

Good graphics—graphs, illustrations, photos, pictures—should be used to reinforce content and not solely as embellishments.

- Graphs should be large enough for viewing from a distance of at least 3 feet
- Use simple 2-D line graphs, bar charts, pie charts



- Use bright, contrasting lines, and symbols, e.g., avoid dark red lines against a dark blue background
 - Use heavier lines in tables and graphs for easier viewing
- ✘ Don't use 3-D graphs unless you are displaying 3-D data, since these are difficult to interpret. Don't use too many pictures and photographs in your poster.

Examples

- ✓ Example of a well-designed poster

<http://tinyurl.com/c3h3qo>



The design in this poster follows a logical sequence. The text has been arranged in different columns and numbers have been used to make the flow obvious, making it an ideal poster!

✘ Example of a poorly designed

poster <http://tinyurl.com/cygz7v>

In this poster, more than 3 colors are used with too much text and many figures leading to a cluttered image.

Presenting the Poster

Effective presentation skills play an equally important role in poster presentation as a good poster. Making a good presentation is an art that involves attention to the needs of your audience, careful planning, and attention to delivery. Here we explain some of the basics of effective presentation.



Where to stand?

✓ Allow the viewers to take a look at your poster. Arrive early at the display site and stand next to the poster.

✗ Don't stand directly in front of poster but don't completely disappear either!

Explanations

✓ Be concise when explaining a point to the viewer. You should be able to give an overview of your work in 3–5 min. Practice your presentation ahead of time, and time yourself!

✗ Don't read your poster when explaining; instead, use it as a visual aid.

Studies show an audience can remember only three or four things you present in a talk.



Tip 6!

- **Make eye contact**
- **Avoid jargon and acronyms**
- **Speak clearly and slowly**
- **Don't overload on detail**

Getting the Message Through

✓ Decide what the purpose of your talk really is. What is the “take-home” message you want to give to your audience? Organize your talk accordingly, explaining the main focus of your poster. Summarize your conclusions and their importance.

✗ Don't distract from your message by including peripheral topics or excessive arcane detail.

Technical Terminology

✓ Clearly define any terms that may not be familiar to your audience.

Remember, they're may not all be from the same specialty as you!

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