

Tips on Designing an Effective Poster

Know the amount of space that you will be allotted and plan accordingly. For *Posters-at-the-Capitol*, your poster may NOT exceed 48" x 48" (4' x 4'). You will be furnished with a 48" x 48" (4' x 4') foam backing board along with a metal easel for use in displaying your poster.

You may use any color you wish for a background (you do not have to use white or cream); just use good judgment in your choice of color. Fluorescent colors are extremely distracting and make reading difficult. When cutting the edges of your posterboard, be certain the edges are straight. Use a ruler or T-square.

Put the poster title on a separate line(s) at the top of the poster. Your name, your mentor's name, and the name of any collaborators should appear on the next line(s). The name of your university should be listed on a separate line below the list of names. If space is an issue, the list of names and institution may appear on the same line. The font size for the title of your poster, list of names and institution should be at least 1" high (100 point font). The line that contains your project title should be in a larger-size font than your name/institution.

You should attach the title/list of names/ institution name as a single banner across the top of the poster. If you cannot print one continuous banner, you can glue separate pages together on which the words are printed in order to form the banner. Do not cut between words or glue words separately onto the poster.

For text lettering, use black or some other dark color. Use an easy-to-read typeface like Times Roman, Courier, or Ariel. While Gothic, Italic or Script fonts can be used to highlight words and phrases, they should not be used over the entire poster. Use the same font for all parts of the poster: titles, section headings, and text (except when using a special font to highlight a word or phrase).

The text of your poster should be large enough to be easily read from a distance of 3 feet. Text should be printed in 20, 24, or 30 point font (no smaller than 20 point!!). The same applies to tables and figures. Use the same size font for axis labels, legends, etc. that you use in the text of your poster. When printing your text or tables on a page, you may use 0.5" margins rather than 1" margins, if necessary. Do not, however, crowd the edges.

This is a poster, not a manuscript, so focus on the most important information and say it efficiently. Use a heading for each major section: Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion (or Conclusions), and References (if you had citations). Single space the text in each section. Ideally, each section should take up no more than a single page. You may use half or three-quarter size pages for shorter sections. When appropriate, a bulleted list saves space and gives your reader the most important points in an easy-to-understand format. Arrange materials in columns rather than rows. It is easier and more logical for viewers to read from top to bottom and left to right than to have to scan across or zigzag across a page.

Use either rubber cement or spray adhesive (especially designed for paper) to adhere text pages, title banners and other paper materials to the poster backing. DO NOT use white glue (Elmer's glue), paste, mucilage, glue sticks, craft glue, airplane cement, or other similar substances. They either do not adhere well (as in the case of glue sticks) or they cause the paper and even the poster board shrink, wrinkle, and generally look bad.

An excellent tutorial on preparing effective posters can be found at the following web sites:

"Designing Effective Posters" – Jeff Radel, Univ. of Kansas:
http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Poster_Presentations/PstrStart.html

Very attractive posters can also be designed and printed if you have access to a large format printer. If laminated, these posters are also easily transportable. You might discuss this option with your mentor.

Remember that people will make assumptions about your project and even you based on the appearance of your poster. While those assumptions may not be accurate, they nevertheless make lasting first impressions. Work carefully on your poster. Allow yourself plenty of time to create it, arrange it, and get it right. Make it look professional.