

Guide to Producing a Poster for Presentation

A poster is a great way to advertise your work. It is a visual communication which should be concise, attractive and a conversation starter.

Before you start writing

- **Preparation:** Give yourself plenty of time to write, edit and produce your poster.
- **Check the small print:** Check the organiser's specifications - remember that you do not want to give the organising committee any grounds to reject your poster.
- **Audience:** Who are you presenting to? What will your audience be made up of? This may affect the language you use so that you will be easily understood by all.

Content

- **Key message:** You need to consider the message that you are trying to convey to your audience.
 - Why will your work be important to them? What is it that you want them to remember about it?
 - What is your take home message? You should make this message the focal point of your poster.
- **More information and your contact details:** If you are presenting particularly novel or complex work it may be advisable to put background information on a separate printed A4 sheet for delegates to read at the stand or take away. ***Remember to include your contact details.***
- **Title:** Your title needs to capture the audience and draw them in so make it as interesting and informative as possible.
- **Edit your text, then edit it again:** On average your poster will only attract five minutes attention. Write the text, and then go over it again taking out anything that is not completely necessary. Short sentences and bullet points are good.
- **Tables and charts:** Are a useful way to communicate information. They are very visual and easy to scan.

- **Plain English:** Remember to avoid acronyms and specialist medical jargon. Make it easily understood by all.
- **Authors:** Write the names of the authors in full and without title (this is usual practice in poster presentation). If you are the poster author and presenter put your name first - a good way to emphasise this is by underlining it. Make sure you include all who have contributed to the work presented and poster.
- **Sponsors:** If your work has been supported or sponsored by an official body you will need to acknowledge this.
- **References:** It is very important to reference your work.

Design

- **Get help:** If you have time enlist the help of the medical illustration or print department at your hospital or higher education institution to help with the design and writing of your poster.
- **DIY:** If you are designing the poster yourself using PowerPoint a poster template is a good start. Most medical illustration departments can help you with this. Alternatively, ask a colleague from your department who has presented posters if they have a template you could use.
- **Design a great poster:** Good posters are very visual. Most people will scan a poster to try and find the 'meaty' parts and key messages. Avoid long chunks of text and make your poster easier to read by using more images, graphs or tables. You should have almost as much space as images and text in a poster.

Do leave some space. Don't make the poster overcrowded.

Font

- **Capitals:** Avoid using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS as this is much harder to read. Try and stick to plain fonts such as 'Arial', 'Verdana' or 'Calibri'.
- **Title:** Use a font size which can be read from several feet away – 80 pt is ideal on an A1 poster.

- **Body text:** Use a font size **no less than 24 pt**. Keep sentences short and minimise unnecessary words – the fewer words the better!
- **Authors:** The names of the authors usually appear alongside or underneath the title.
- **Sponsors:** Place any sponsors either at the bottom with your references, or you could list below your list of authors.
- **References:** You should keep references in small text. Place them at the bottom or edge of your poster (or in a handout) so as not to detract from your main content.

Layout

- **Structure:** When designing your poster try to create an obvious path for the reader to follow. Divide the poster in to sections with clearly labelled section titles. Show the reader how to read through it - you can use arrows, steps or symmetry to show the required flow through your poster. Most people will read from left to right and from top to bottom. If you choose to alter this flow ensure there is a well signed path to follow.

Consider different designs ensuring that your poster looks balanced.

- **Colour:** Think about your background and text colours. These should not detract from the poster content and should add to its ease of reading. Using **dark text on a pale background** is easiest to read. Remember not to use red on green which will appear the same to those who are red-green colour-blind.
- **Graphics and images:** Using an eye catching image will help to attract the passer-by to your poster. Think about using images to pull the eye to the centre/start of your poster and to the key messages you want the reader to take home.

You could have a central image/message with arrows pointing to sections around it. You could have sections starting at the top and working down. Experiment and see what you prefer.

Ensure you clearly label your graphs and images.

Finished?

- **Proof-read:** When your poster is written, but before you have it printed, ask a colleague (or relative) to proof-read it for you to spot any typos or errors that you can no longer see.

Ask yourself whether your key message is clear.

Presenting your poster

- **Be ready:** When you are standing by your poster be ready to answer questions about your work. Find out what has attracted people to your poster – why they are interested? Guide them through your work letting them read and ask you questions.

It is also a good idea to have a hand-out with a summary containing your key points and your contact details to take away.

Be proud of your work and enjoy presenting it – you have earned it!

Further sources of advice about poster presentations

1. Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement:
Communication Notes - Designing a Great Poster
<http://www.cfhi-fcass.ca/publicationsandresources/resourcesandtools/communicationnotes/10-06-01/792275c8-da93-48dd-a7f0-98bc9d864284.aspx>
Accessed 12/12/12
2. Erren TC, Bourne PE (2007) Ten Simple Rules for a Good Poster Presentation. PLoS Comput Biol 3(5): e102.
doi:10.1371/journal.pcbi.0030102
3. <http://colinpurrington.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/scientific-poster-advice-purrington.jpg>