

Academic posters

What is an academic poster?

An academic poster is a graphic and textual method of presenting information.

An effective poster considers a balance between the content (information) and the layout (how the information is presented). To convey your information, you can use a range of visual techniques such as illustrations or schematic diagrams, arrows or flow charts (to direct visual attention) and cues such as dot points, and colour and design rather than just an explanation using text.

Why present a poster?

Posters are an effective method of presenting academic work or research in progress and, because some information is better presented visually, a poster may be more memorable than a verbal presentation.

A poster presentation may be a required assessment task for undergraduate or post-graduate students. Posters are often included in the scientific program of a conference, and are usually displayed during the conference with times allocated for presenters to be available to discuss the content with conference participants. A poster is an excellent way for beginning presenters to introduce their work to their peers. This allows for valuable networking opportunities.

Features of an academic poster

The features and content of each poster will vary depending on the purpose and the topic. For example the purpose of the poster may be to: chart a history, describe an educational or a health care program, explain research in progress, demonstrate a piece



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of equipment or a technique, document an organisational structure or describe a product or process.

The main message of a poster needs to be clear and understandable without a verbal explanation.

Before starting your poster

- Consider your audience: their interests and/or academic level
- Allow enough time. A good poster takes time to plan and produce
- Know the presentation requirements including: poster dimensions, method of fixing to display, any mandatory content inclusions or presentation details, or if handouts are required as part of the presentation
- Know the evaluation criteria for both the abstract (if required) and the poster
- Critically review other posters for design, clarity, layout and overall quality
- Consider different methods of production. These can range from cut and paste to a professionally developed and computer generated poster

NOTE: Beautiful diagrams and professionally presented posters do not substitute for CONTENT. You must have something worthwhile to present in your poster.

Developing your poster

1. Decide the main message you want to convey. Write down the information you want to include. You will probably need to edit this further as you develop your poster.
2. Try some different layout concepts and develop these on paper that is the actual size of the poster. This will also give you a realistic idea of how the finished poster will look.
3. Irrespective of how you will create and produce the poster (either manually or computer generated) you will need to work through a series of drafts to ensure the quality of the final product.
4. During development check the poster frequently for clarity and accuracy.
5. Stand back about 3 metres to check that:
 - the message is clear
 - there is a balance between words and graphics.
6. Check and correct spelling, unclear meaning, illustrations, figures etc.
7. Avoid abbreviations, acronyms and jargon.

Keys to effective and visually attractive posters

- The main idea of the poster should be easily identifiable
- The abstract or introduction should be brief and informative
- Make font size legible from approximately 2 – 3 metres (at least 96 point for titles, 30 – 36 point for headings and 18 – 24 point for text)
- Text should have a legible, uncluttered, consistent look. A san serif font (for example Helvetica) is usually the most clear
- Eye movement should be natural – down columns, along rows, or from larger to smaller. You can also use size, arrows, pointing hands, numbers and letters to clarify a sequence
- Colour selections should be simple and pleasing to the eye. Using only two or three colours will help unify the poster. Use more intense colours for borders, contrast and emphasis
- Don't overload the poster; more material can mean less communication. Keep the layout simple and the text brief. Text should be balanced with graphics, about 50% to 50%
- Use dot points, lists or tables to increase clarity and quantity of information
- Include blank space to create a visually attractive poster that is not too cramped or 'busy' so viewers can easily take in the most important information
- Explore using a computer program to assist in the design and preparation of your poster. This will save you time and enhance the overall quality of the finished product
- Use sturdy layout materials or poster board for mounting your information

Resources for poster presentations

http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Poster_Presentations/PstrStart.html

<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/NewSite/>

<http://www.tcnj.edu/~asper/posterrules.html>

Gosling, P. (1999). *Scientist's guide to poster presentations*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Pub.

Lethbridge, R. (1991). *Techniques for successful seminars and poster presentations*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

This diagram depicts the features and layout of a simple poster

ORGANISATIONAL LOGO

TITLE OF POSTER

Author(s)

Address/ Affiliation of Author(s)

Abstract / introduction / summary

Background information

Purpose / rationale

**Schematic
Diagrams**

**Table/s of
results/
information**

Photographs

Additional text / explanation

dot points

Conclusion / implications

References