Effective Poster Design for Academic Conferences

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A Scientific Poster

• communicates your research at a conference.

• is a *visual* presentation of information.
  – It should not simply reproduce your written paper at poster size.

• should be understandable to the viewer without verbal explanation.
Know Your Audience

- Distracted academics walking through a crowded, noisy room
Know Your Audience

• In 3 seconds, a viewer decides whether to approach your poster or leave.
  – Subject must be clearly understandable from at least 10 feet away.
  – Use a statement, photograph, or diagram as a focal point to attract attention.
Know Your Audience

• In the next 30 seconds, the viewer decides if your content is worthy of further exploration.
  
  – Provide a clear flow of information from introduction to conclusion.
  
  – Focus on major findings—do not try to include everything you know.
  
  – Text should be concise enough to be read in under 10 minutes.
Organize Your Information

- Title, Author(s) and affiliation(s)
- **Abstract:** include *only* if required by the conference
- **Introduction:** a brief but important overview to secure the viewer’s attention
- **Problem:** concise statement of the problem
- **Materials and Methods:** brief description of the processes and procedures
- **Results:** outcomes, findings, data
- **Conclusion:** summary, discussion of significance and relevance of results, a few easily remembered key conclusions, possible future research
- References
- Acknowledgments
- Contact Information
Design Your Poster

• Determine final overall size:
  - Find out the maximum size allowed by the conference.
  - Find out the maximum size the printer can produce (e.g. CADGIS lab can print 36” wide by any length, LSU Graphic Services can print 48” wide by any length).
  - Find out the maximum size your software can produce (e.g. PowerPoint maximum page size is 56” x 56”).
Layout — Title Block

- Most prominent feature
- Located at the top of the poster
- Centered or justified left
Layout — Body of Poster

- Landscape-oriented layout
  - Often best to visually divide space into 2 or more columns (do not have to be equal width) which are read left to right.
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- Portrait-oriented layout
  - Read top to bottom
Layout — Body of Poster

• Alignment:
  - The eye looks for edges — align and size text blocks, headings, figures, etc. consistently
Layout — Body of Poster

- Blank space:
  - Leave enough room so that the viewer can stay focused on individual sections
Color

• **Should**
  – highlight or emphasize
  – separate and define sections
  – associate related information

• **Should not**
  – compete with the information
  – overwhelm the viewer
Color Scheme

- The number of different colors should be limited, but different tones of the same color can be used.

- If you have colorful photographs, use them as an inspiration for your color scheme.
Background

• Keep the background in the back!
  – Use cool and/or muted colors
  – Avoid bright, warm colors

Photo by Nicole Barker
Background

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• Background may be
  – A solid color
Background

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- Background may be
  - A solid color
  - A gradient
Background

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- Background may be
  - A solid color
  - A gradient
  - A texture
Background

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• Background may be
  – A solid color
  – A gradient
  – A texture
  – A photograph
Figures

- No figures should be smaller than 5” x 7”.

- All figures should have captions.

- Photographs
  - At least 300 dpi at final size
  - Avoid web captures—they are usually of low resolution
  - Crop photos to highlight the important feature
  - Put a thin outline around photos to help them stand out from the background
Figures

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• All figures should have captions.
• Photographs
  – At least 300 dpi at final size
  – Avoid web captures—they are usually of low resolution
  – Crop photos to highlight the important feature
  – Put a thin outline around photos to help them stand out from the background
  – Consider removing background from photo where possible.
Figures

• Graphs
  – Don’t just accept the default colors and layout of your graphing program—match your color scheme.
  – Avoid 3-D graphs—they are very hard to interpret.
Images

• **Public Domain images**
do not *require* attribution, but it is good practice to attribute anyway.
(Usually a work enters the public domain 70 years after the death of creator—but there are exceptions. Some creators designate works to be in the public domain during their lifetime.)

• **Creative Commons images**
permit reproduction as long as proper attribution is given.
(Available through Flickr, free stock photos archives)

• **Royalty/Subscription images**
provide high quality images for a single image fee or membership—expensive!
(iStockphoto, Jupiter Images, Getty Images)

• **Copyright Protected images**
can be used under the fair use doctrine for educational purposes including as part of a display or presentation at professional symposia. Proper attribution should be given.
Sites to obtain copyright-free images to use in your poster:

- **Morgue File** - probably the best single source of free photos.
- **Wikimedia Commons** - archive of free multimedia content submitted by Wikipedia users.
- **http://www.loc.gov/pictures/** Library of Congress Prints & Photographs online (not all are copyright-free)
- **Education Image Gallery**. Free images from the Getty collection.
- **Google Images** using the 'usage rights' filter.
- **Flickr Creative Commons** - an index of all Flickr images for which the owner has specified a Creative Commons license (which usually means you can use it)
- **FreeFoto.com**. A collection of free photographs for private non-commercial use.
- **Image*After** - large, free photo collection, with images free for any use.
- The **Creative Commons search** allows you to search Google, Yahoo, Flickr and other sites for material that is licensed under the Creative Commons - which usually means you can use it without charge in a non-commercial context.

For more sources of images, see CLT's multimedia resources listing.

Information about copyright protection and public domain images:

- **http://www.copyright.gov/help/faq/faq/fairuse.html**
- **http://www.utsystem.edu/ogc/intellectualproperty/copypol2.htm**
Lettering

- Title: at least 72 pt., bold preferred
- Section Headings: at least 48 pt., bold preferred
- Body Text: at least 24 pt.
- Avoid using all capital letters
- Use sans serif (Arial) for titles & headings
- Use serif (Times New Roman) for body text
- Use bulleted lists where possible instead of paragraphs
- Use italics instead of underlining
- White or light colored lettering is hard to read on a dark background when printed. Use black lettering instead on a light colored rectangle
Have a colleague evaluate your poster to make sure it reads as smoothly as you think it does.

Proofread carefully! Ask someone else to proofread it, too.

Glossy or Matte paper?

- Glossy
  - Better repro of photos
  - Richer color
  - Glare/reflected light can make poster hard to see at distance
  - More expensive
  - More durable

- Matte
  - No glare/reflection
  - Less expensive
References

• Advice on designing scientific posters
  Colin Purrington, Department of Biology, Swarthmore College, PA
  http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm

• Design of Scientific Posters
  http://www.writing.engr.psu.edu/posters.html

• Poster Design Tips
  http://clt.lse.ac.uk/workshops-and-courses/Course-resources/Poster-Design-Tips.php

• Effective Poster Design
  http://www.soe.uoguelph.ca/webfiles/agalvez/poster/