Poster Presentations: Top Tips

One of the most common mistakes people make when creating a poster is to overload it with information - TRY AND AVOID THIS! No one wants to read a poster that is jammed full of text.

A poster should represent a ‘snapshot’ of your work - so show the bits that are most interesting and which can be represented by both text AND high quality images.

Your poster should be eye-catching; it should draw people towards it. However, be aware that your use of colours is just as important in the poster as it is when you’re making a PowerPoint presentation. So, avoid clashing colours!

A background colour for the poster board that contrasts with the colour of the paper used for the text often works well, e.g. a dark blue poster board with text printed on white paper.

Your title, affiliation and authors should be clearly represented at the top of your poster.

It is useful to design your poster around the standard ‘Introduction’, ‘Methods’, ‘Results’ and ‘Conclusions’ approach. However, since posters often represent work currently in progress, there is more flexibility to represent a few (or perhaps only pilot) results along with a speculative set of conclusions.

Make sure that your poster is actually legible and remember that people may be reading it from a distance of a metre or more away - SO KEEP THE TEXT SIZE LARGE (minimum 24 point font).

Keep the text formatting consistent throughout (i.e. use the same font and colours for main text, titles of individual sections etc.).

Make sure that your poster has a ‘story’ to tell but remember that people will not necessarily be reading all of it, or they may read just bits of it…. so make sure that whatever you include, that it is interesting!

Make good use of images throughout your poster - but make sure these are of high quality and are relevant to the work you are presenting.

If you are creating a poster using board and text/images that will be glued onto it, make sure you try out various combinations of where these pieces of text/images will go. It can be very helpful to put the board onto the floor and arrange your text/images onto it to see how they look. Ask colleagues and
friends for their opinions of how your poster looks in different combinations of text/image placement. Remember, you want your poster to attract people to come and read it, so test this out before you print the final versions and stick them onto your board!

Posters can also be produced using PowerPoint, which has the advantage that changes can easily be made on screen before final printing. However, printing large posters in this way can be expensive.

Make sure that your contact details are clearly given on the poster and make acknowledgements to all those who helped you at the end of the poster (usually placed somewhere in the bottom left or right-hand side)

It can be useful to attach some of your business cards to your poster (in a plastic wallet attached to the bottom of the poster) so that people can take one if you are not actually standing next to your poster when they view it. This is an important way of making contacts, and is particularly relevant if you are presenting your poster at a conference.

Make sure that your poster conforms to the size specified by the conference organisers etc. You should take Velcro tape with you on the day of your poster presentation just in case none is available when you arrive.

Making a high quality poster is time-consuming. Do not underestimate how long it will take! You should allow for at least 4 weeks from original plans to the final version.

Useful Websites

Designing Effective Poster Presentations
Biological Sciences in the Science and Engineering, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York Library. This site contains numerous links to other websites that deal with communication via posters.

Poster Presentations
(See also “Effective Presentations”) Compiled by Jeff Radel at Kansas University Medical Center, this guide is intended to:
- Illustrate elements of layout and design for poster presentations
- Illustrate common errors in design and how to avoid them
- Provide a convenient reference for students and faculty

Presentation Skills
By Ming T. Tham of Chemical and Process Engineering, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne.
Also includes useful hyperlinks to related websites on presentations (posters and oral), public speaking etc. In particular, See: Poster Presentation of Research Work

Oral and Poster Presentation Guidelines by American Society for Microbiology

Developing a Poster Presentation, The University Writing Center, George Mason University.

Poster Presentation
A very good step-by-step guide to preparing a poster using Powerpoint. (The University of Strathclyde)

Poster Presentations
Comprehensive and impressive account of poster presentation. Part of BIO 801: Scientific Literature and Writing: By Gary Richison, Department of Biological Sciences, Eastern Kentucky University.

