

# Poster Presentation: A How-To Guide

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Posters afford a wide array of opportunities: **promotion** of authors, institutions, and scientific information and views; **potential** to attract funding; **acknowledgment** and **feedback** from peers; and **enhancement** of reputation (Gosling). We will show you here how to create a clearly organized, easily readable, attractive poster that will maximize these opportunities.

## CONTENT

- Verbalize *one key message*. BE SUCCINCT!
- Make *one to three main points* from your findings that support the key message.
- Use *visual elements* for emphasis.
- Use *text* to guide the viewer through the poster in a coherent manner.



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## ORGANIZATION

### Title

- Make it legible, assertive, and clear, worded exactly as it appears in the conference papers.
- Clearly show the full names of the authors and affiliations (abbreviations acceptable where needed).
- Include, if possible, a photograph of the authors so that readers who see the poster when it is unattended can recognize you and discuss your work.
- Position the title as high as possible on the display board, leaving a margin of 10-20 cm, so that it can be seen above the crowd. Use 30 -34 point letters in a bold color (such as bright blue or dark green) in a sans serif font.

### Introduction

Keep it brief—just enough to justify your research and state your aims in list form.



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## **ORGANIZATION (cont'd)**

### **Methods**

Again, brevity counts. Say enough to create credibility and to explain how you arrived at your results. Established techniques and equipment can be referred to first by name and subsequently by accepted abbreviations.

### **Results and Discussion**

- Present data in support of your findings.
- Use your graphic elements to the greatest effect possible.
- See the text as a support structure for the visual display of your work.

### **Conclusions**

List them by bullets or numbers, using bold type and a prominent color.

### **References**

These are necessary if other sources have been cited in the text.



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## TEXT

- Think of your text as an *enhancement of the abstract* rather than a summary of all of the research.
- Paragraphs should approximate 10 to 20 unbroken lines containing between 20 and 60 characters per line.
- If necessary, use double-columns so that the lines are not too long.
- Make it easily readable at 1-2 meters; a serif font such as Times, Courier, or Prestige in single-spaced 24-point type generally works well (see Gosling's table below).

### Appropriate Text Characteristics for Components of Posters

Textual Element	Reading Distance (m)	Type Size (mm)	Type Weight
Main Title	3-4	30-45	<b>Bold</b>
Authors and affiliations	3-4	25-30	<b>Bold</b>
Main Headings	2-3	10 (36pt)	<b>Bold</b>
Subheadings	1-2	5 (24pt)	<b>Normal/Bold</b>
Main Text	1-2	5 (24pt)	<b>Normal</b>



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## TEXT (cont'd)

- Decide on margins. Justified left and ragged right type is easier to scan, but even margins look cleaner.
- Use *italics* for emphasis within sentences and **bold** for subheadings.
- Use the same font for headings and subheadings for a professional, unified look.
- Use a different font, a box around a heading, or rules to emphasize a particular word or phrase.
- Make cross-references specific, i.e., “See figure 1” as opposed to “See above.” Don’t overuse cross references, as they can interrupt the flow of your text.
- Print out a hard copy of your text and have a fresh pair of eyes (not yours) proofread it.



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## GRAPHICS

- Keep them *simple* and surround them with white space so that they stand out.
- Stick with straightforward facts and comparisons of quantity or trends over time.
- Reserve complex data, which is best presented using conventional tables, for a separate information sheet in an envelope on the lower part of the display board. (Gosling)
- Refer to graphic elements *in the* text and place them as close to that reference as possible.
- Number figures and tables. This will make the text references easy.
- Place captions, which should be in a smaller point size than the main text. Ideally, captions will present information that complements, rather than repeats, what is in the main text.

A **table** may be an appropriate graphic, if you have 20 or fewer items to represent in it. The columns will have brief descriptive headings, and the rows (on the left-hand side) occasionally bear some description as well. When you design your poster, *consider the path of the viewer's eye* and bear in mind that vertical rules or spaces may interrupt a horizontal reading path while horizontal rules or spaces may interrupt a vertical path. Notes to tables should be used sparingly. Avoid ditto marks. Instead, repeat the relevant term or number. If you are missing information, you may leave a blank space or insert "N/A" for "not available" or "not applicable."



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## GRAPHICS (cont'd)

**Graphs** also need to be simple to be effective. The scale should be set to accentuate the graph's message. If you intend to use different graph lines, use *no more than three* and distinguish among them clearly by using a *different color for each*. Let the color use established in one graph be *consistent* with its use in other graphic elements. The advantage of a **chart** is that words and figures can be built into it. In illustrating a bar chart, it is best to limit the bars to six. Again, use colors to differentiate results.

- The *basic bar chart* allows readers to compare data that evolves over time.
- The *horizontal bar chart* displays comparisons that do not involve time.
- The *100% stacked vertical bar chart* shows the various parts that make up a whole.
- The *three-dimensional vertical bar chart* adds visual interest.
- A bar chart with the *y-axis midway along the x-axis* displays negative and positive results.
- The *pie chart*, like the stacked chart, shows the parts that make up a whole. Use no more than six pie segments. Put the most important sector at 12:00, and if all of the components are of equal value, arrange them smallest to the largest or vice versa. Words should appear horizontally. Use a different color for each segment.

A large, matte **photograph** can be a great asset to your poster. Too many small, glossy photos can, by contrast, be distracting.





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## DIMENSIONS

- Keep the body of your poster between waist level and shoulder height
- Use the space above shoulder height for the title.
- Use the space below waist level to attach envelopes containing handouts.
- Resist the temptation to fill all available space on the display board.

To calculate the approximate number of lines of text you will be able to fit into a certain number of inches (depth) of your poster:

- Remember that there are 72 points to one inch. If you follow the guidelines here, the text is 24 pt with interlinear spacing of 4 pt, so each line and the space following will occupy 28 pt.
- Multiply the number of inches you plan to fill with text by 72. (Call that number x.)
- Divide x by 28. The answer is the number of lines of text you can accommodate.

**If you need to save space**, try making a few of the visual elements smaller, setting the bibliography to a double column, or kerning (reducing the spacing between specified characters, while leaving the rest of the settings the same).



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## COMPOSITION

- *Select* aspects of your research that are of particular interest to your audience.
- Using graph paper positioned in landscape view, *create three columns or four squares*. You may do this by simply folding the paper accordingly.
- *Sketch out a plan* for your poster. This should be done *before you begin* to produce final drafts of any individual segments.
- Decide how much space the title will occupy, where the following pieces will appear and how much room you will allow each one: title, introduction, methods, results, conclusions, references, chart(s), diagram(s), graph(s), table(s), map(s), photo(s), etc.
- *Choose visual elements* that are necessary to visually convey your message. You may need to experiment with layout using index cards cut to size or sticky-notes as movable pieces, until you've assembled something visually appealing.
- *Create a focal point* for your poster. Perhaps it's a photo that reveals the most dramatic results, a colorful bar chart, or a phenomenal graph. Whatever it is, make it a highlight without allowing it to overwhelm the rest of your poster.
- Consider the *flow* of your poster and the course a reader's eye would naturally follow. Arrows are especially useful for directing the eye.
- *Don't crowd* the edges of the paper; also avoid too many elements, which can exhaust the eye. Think "*balance*." Once you have a rough lay-out, you can calculate more exact measurements. (See "Dimensions" above.)



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## COLOR

Colored borders can add appeal to your poster. Three-dimensional mounting will highlight critical graphic displays. Use color, but use it wisely.

Choose *no more than three major colors* for your poster, including the background color. If you want something other than white for the background, choose a pale, neutral color for its versatility. The two other colors could be complementary (e.g., blue and orange, aqua and orange-red, or violet and yellow) to create excitement, or ones that are closer together (blue and purple or red and orange) for a more soothing effect. Warm colors are aggressive and eye-catching and make objects appear closer. Cool colors appear clean and refreshing and make objects recede. Bright colors, such as red, orange, and sky blue, convey energy and optimism; dark colors, such as navy and maroon, convey conservatism.

- Use your colors boldly and purposefully, with your design and your scientific message in mind.
- Use colors to organize blocks of related text, frame graphics, or emphasize one aspect that appears in various graphic elements.
- Remember that key text set off in color is harder to read and should therefore be bigger.

Also, if you choose to frame a photograph, remember that dark photos will look darker on a light background and that color photos will look more colorful on a neutral color such as gray, and less colorful on white.



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## SET-UP

Bring your scrolled poster to the meeting in a ridged tube (available at stationery or art supply stores) that will protect its edges. You can then easily remove it from its case and affix it to the board with the push-pins provided during the allotted time frame. (Please consult the agenda.)

If your poster is a smooth, computer generated sheet, it is preassembled, and you'll save yourself a lot of time and stress on the day of the conference. However, if you have individual elements to affix to the poster, allow yourself plenty of time to do so on site. Bring a tape measure, ruler, and right-angle. A piece of string can be used to create a plumb line; similarly, two pieces of string can be criss-crossed from corner to corner to find the middle of the display board.

### Informal Oral Presentations

You may have 2-5 minutes during one of the attended poster sessions to make an oral presentation of your work.

- Introduce yourself fully--your name, what it is that you do, and what your aims are.
- Briefly justify your research and present your objectives.
- State your conclusions; clearly make each point and show where the relevant information appears on your poster.
- Give an overview of your conclusions and deliver your "takehome message." (Gosling)
- Practice your presentation aloud while standing beside your poster (in private!). You need to know where to find information quickly.



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## **SET-UP (cont'd)**

### **Formal Oral Presentations**

Again, and as always, focus on the key message. “Stay away from details. Make a conscious decision about what material will be left out.” (Walters and Walters, p. 116)

For more guidance, see [How to Give Your Best Presentation](#).

Now, relax, breathe, and have fun. Good luck!



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## Bibliography

Gosling, P.J., *Scientists Guide to Poster Presentations*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishing, New York, 1999.

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