A poster is a visual presentation that showcases your scholarly research. The purpose of a poster is to present a piece of work that colleagues can easily view and which can stimulate an exchange of ideas between the presenter and the audience reading the poster. A poster is different from a paper or a talk, and so distinct techniques need to be employed in its preparation.

Introduction

Academic posters are often displayed at conferences and other academic forums, with times allocated for presenters to be available to discuss the content with attendees. A poster is an excellent way for presenters to introduce their scholarly work to peers and can allow for valuable networking opportunities.

When you prepare an academic poster, it is important that it be eye-catching and readable from a distance of 2-3 metres. Most of your audience will spend a limited amount of time scanning your poster and will only stop and read it in more detail if something catches their attention.

Developing your poster - General considerations

There are many features of an academic poster that should be taken into account. Consider the following:

- Adhere to the presentation requirements i.e. poster dimensions, mandatory content inclusions and method of fixing poster to the display.
- Critically review other discipline-specific posters for academic design, clarity and layout.
- Decide the main message you want to convey to attendees and brainstorm the information you want and/or need to include.
- Consider the interests and academic levels of the audience, and be gender inclusive.
- An attractive poster takes time, so it will be necessary to give yourself ample opportunity for its design, creation and production.
- Experiment with different layout concepts and develop them in the actual size of the poster to give yourself a realistic idea of how the completed poster will appear.
- Irrespective of how you create and produce your poster, you will need to work through a series of drafts to guarantee the quality of the final product.
- Explore computer programs that will assist you in the preparation of your poster, save you time, and enhance the overall quality of the final product. PowerPoint, Publisher and Excel by Microsoft are usually available to students in university computer labs; Illustrator, Photoshop and InDesign by Adobe may need to be purchased and can be expensive.
Poster text

- The main idea and title of your poster should be identifiable from approximately 2-3 metres.
- Font sizes must be legible from approximately 2-3 metres i.e. at least 96-100 point for main heading, 30-36 point for subheadings and 18-24 point for standard text.
- Recommended typefaces include Arial, Verdana, Tahoma and Times New Roman.
- For emphasis underline, italicise or colour highlight text, but do not CAPITALISE as this is often considered the equivalent of shouting.
- Blocks of text should not exceed three paragraphs and should be left-aligned; avoid centred and right-aligned text.
- Use dot points, lists or tables to increase clarity and quantity of information.
- Avoid abbreviations, acronyms and jargon, unless it is pertinent detail specific to your discipline.

Poster colours

- Use a light coloured background with dark coloured text for contrast. Avoid dark backgrounds with light letters.
- When possible, stick to a theme of 2-3 colours that are thematically linked e.g. water = blue.
- If you use multiple colours, use them in a consistent pattern, otherwise viewers will spend their time wondering what the pattern is rather than reading the specifics of your poster.
- Overly bright colours will attract attention, but may become visually overwhelming or distracting on the eyes.
- Consider people who have problems differentiating colours, especially when designing graphics. One of the most common problems is an inability to tell green from red.

Poster graphics

- Use only high quality graphics (i.e. graphs, illustrations and photos) as the centrepiece of your poster, as they need to communicate themes and relationships quickly.
- Present numerical data in the form of graphs rather than tables, as graphs make trends in the data much more evident. If data must be presented as a table, keep it simple.
- Avoid 3D graphs unless you are displaying 3D data, as 3D images can be difficult to interpret.
- Text on graphs must follow the same guidelines as all other text on your poster, in order to be visible.
Overall poster presentation

- Leave a 3-5cm border around the entire poster to frame your work.
- Eye movement should be neutral i.e. vertically-down columns, horizontally-along rows, top to bottom. Use font sizes, arrows, letters or numbers to clarify a sequence.
- Colour selection should be simple and pleasing to the eye to help unify the poster.
- Intense colours can be used for borders, contrast and emphasis.
- Keep the layout basic and the text brief without overloading the poster. More material can mean less communication. Text should be balanced with graphics, about 50 : 50.
- Include blank space to create a visually attractive poster that is not too ‘busy’. Viewers will be able to recognise the most important information if it is not buried in the poster.
- Visuals should be uncomplicated and bold. Leave out unnecessary details and ensure that visuals can ‘stand alone’ i.e. that graph axes are properly labelled, that maps have north arrows and distance scales, and that symbols are self-explanatory or explicitly explained.
- Make sure that the text and the visuals are integrated i.e. figures are numbered and labelled consecutively according to the order in which they are found in the text and are in close proximity to the corresponding text.

Other recommendations

- Create a handout for your readers that includes a miniature version of your poster and more detailed information about your work. Consider doing this on A4 paper, folded to A5. This will allow for three pages of information and one page for your poster image.
- Provide your contact information, such as an email address and/or a URL, where the viewer can download a PDF version of your poster and additional information on your research. Place handouts and business cards nearby e.g. on a table or in an envelope hung with the poster.

Useful resources

Websites

http://www.essex.ac.uk/myskills/skills/presentations/doingPosterPres.asp
http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/
http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/sciences/learning_and_teaching/SSposter.htm
http://www2.napier.ac.uk/getready/writing_presenting/academic_posters.html

Poster Templates


Online Tutorial

http://connect.le.ac.uk/posters