

Academic posters

All about academic posters

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

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

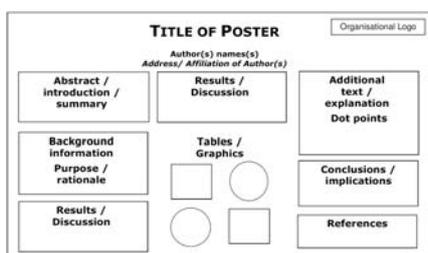
Why present a poster?

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 postgraduate students. Posters are often included in the scientific program of a conference, and are usually displayed during a conference with times allocated for presenters to be available to discuss their content with attendees.

A poster is an excellent way for beginning presenters to introduce their work to their peers. This also 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 of something; describe an educational program; explain research in progress; demonstrate a piece 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 to plan and produce it. A good poster takes time.
- Know the presentation requirements including: poster dimensions; method of 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.

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

Developing your poster

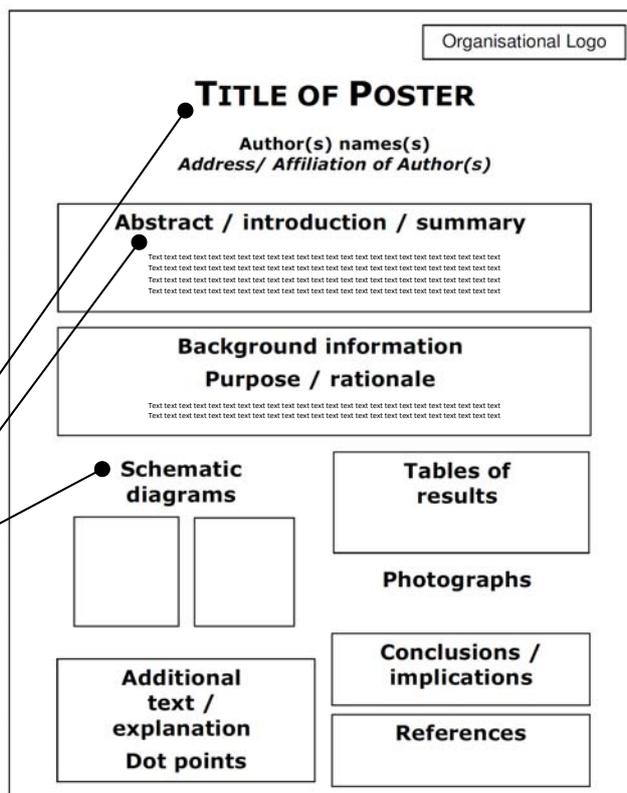
1. Consider the main message you'd like to convey. Write down the information you want to include. You will probably need to edit this further as you develop your poster.
2. Rough out some different format concepts and develop drafts on paper that are the actual size of the poster. This will also give 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 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 and accessible, and
 - there is a balance between text and graphics.

6. Check and correct spelling, clarity of meaning, illustrations, figures etc.
7. Avoid abbreviations, acronyms and jargon (Technical words are OK, but make sure the audience understands them or definitions are used appropriately where needed.)

Keys to effective and visually attractive posters

- The main idea of the poster should be **easily** identifiable (a big, clear title helps here).
- The abstract or introduction should be brief and informative.
- Make font size legible from approximately 2–3 metres, at least:
 - **80 – 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 or Arial) is usually the clearest.
- Look for flow of information; eye movement should be natural – down columns, along rows, or from larger to smaller. You can also use font size, arrows, pointing hands, numbers and letters to clarify a sequence.
- Colour selections should be simple and pleasing to the eye. Don't overuse colours: 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 and be harder to read. Keep the layout simple and the text brief. Text should be balanced with graphics, about 50:50 is a good balance.
- Use bullet points, lists or tables to increase accessibility, clarity and quantity of information.
- Use emphatic devices sparingly, i.e. don't overuse **bold**, *italics*, underline, colour, highlight.
- Include 'white space' (blank areas with no text) 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 software like PowerPoint 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.

The following diagram and the one on page 1 depict the features and layout of a simple poster.



Further Resources

- Asper, N. (2010). *Instructions for poster presentations*. Retrieved 1 June, 2011, from <http://www.tcnj.edu/~asper/posterrules.html>
- Gosling, P. (1999). *Scientist's guide to poster presentations*. New York: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Pub.
- Hess, G., Tosney, K. & Liegel, L. (2011). *Creating Effective Poster Presentations: An Effective Poster*. Retrieved 1 June, 2011, from <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters>
- Radel, J. (1999). *Creating Effective Posters*. Retrieved 1 June, 2011, from www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Poster_Presentations/PstrStart.html
- Lethbridge, R. (1991). *Techniques for successful seminars and poster presentations*. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.

Academic Skills