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Poster Presentations



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Introduction

Poster presentations are a new skill for many students and are a concise way of presenting information, usually on a specific project. For research students, particularly, you may be required to attend a conference and present a poster which documents the research that you have undertaken. This requires the development of new skills with which you may not be familiar: poster design including selection of appropriate font and colour, and the ability to give a clear and concise oral presentation within a limited time.

Computer software appropriate to poster design

There are a number of software packages appropriate to poster design. Most of the time students will use Microsoft PowerPoint but there are others such as Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop or InDesign which will allow you to develop a more sophisticated poster as layers of text can be superimposed over each other. Most students will use PowerPoint and if you require help visit the following link to find out about workshop dates and times:

<http://www.salford.ac.uk/skills-for-learning/home/it-and-digital-skills>

Visual impact

Key things to consider when designing your poster:

- **Font size and type** - the main title should be readable at approximately 3 metres, so consider a font size of 90 - 100 point. The main body text should be around 24 point and readable from 1.5 metres. Select a sans serif font such as Arial or Verdana rather than Times New Roman.
- **The use of visuals** - the most effective way of conveying the maximum amount of information is to use graphs or diagrams. However, care has to be taken that these are appropriately labelled and provide appropriate information so that they tell the story.
- **Use of white space** - ensure there is plenty of white space on your poster. The viewer finds it easier to focus and process information if there is approximately 30% white space on the poster.
- **Poster layout** - The eye moves from left to right and information is more easily processed if the text is effectively 'boxed' or in columns as shown in Figure 1 below.
- **Poster background** - the use of colour in the background is important in that it helps to unify the various elements of the poster. However, use muted tones and avoid any that clash.

Poster layout

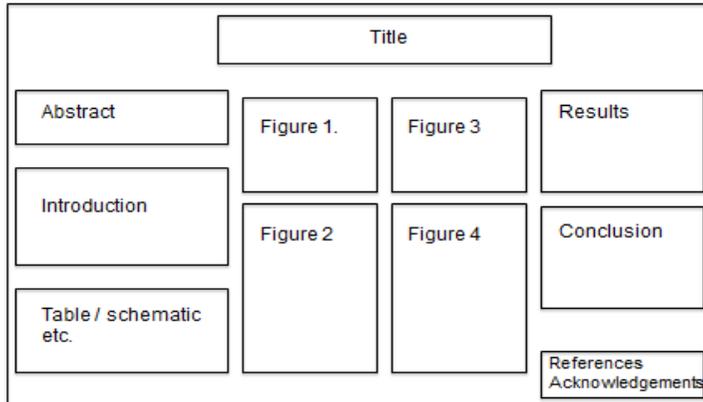


Figure 1. Using columns to align text, photographs and diagrams helps develop a well-structured poster which helps lead the eye across the page.

The poster as a visual medium

As far as possible, allow the graphs, photographs and diagrams to 'tell the story'. This means that attention needs to be paid so that they are:

- Properly labelled.
- Have an associated legend.
- Simply presented, not cluttered and over-complicated.
- Consistent in terms of text being presented horizontally, axes etc.

The content

Content needs to be presented in a logical way, so viewers can follow the 'story' of your project or research. If we use Figure 1 as an example, you can see that the structure of the poster reads left to right, and top to bottom. What sections you will include will depend on the type of research you are doing, but a poster might include the following kinds of sections, plus any figures:

1. Title
2. Abstract
3. Introduction
4. Materials and Methods
5. Results
6. Conclusions

Title

Make sure that the title is concise, yet gives a fair reflection of what the poster is about.

Abstract

If an abstract is necessary (if your poster is accompanying a paper which includes an abstract, or your tutor has not asked for one, don't include one) it should only be around 50 to 100 words in length.

Introduction

The introduction needs to be around 200 words in length and should provide context for the poster. You'll be standing next to the poster so will be on hand to give more detail if required.

Materials and Methods

This is necessary for a scientific poster based on experimentation. For a poster it is advisable to make this part as visual as possible and restrict the word count to around 200 words. However, care must be taken when including tables or graphs; if more than one ensure there is consistency in terms of gradations on the axes, make sure they are correctly labelled with the **figure** legend at the **foot** of the image and the title of the **table** at the **top**.

Results

Again, consider displaying the results in as visual a format as possible but concentrate on the most important results. It may be unrealistic to include absolutely all the results, so prioritise for the purposes of the poster, and bear in mind other results for discussion with interested parties.

Conclusions

Maybe only two to four points may be necessary for the conclusions section and these can be presented using bullet points, italics or arrows as necessary.

Review of your poster

The following points, as compiled by Imperial College London (2014), are useful in assessing your poster.

- Would you stop to look at your poster?
- Is the title concise and appealing?
- Is the subject matter clear?
- Does the layout guide the audience through the content?
- Does the poster target a specific audience?

- Is it well organised?
- Is the message clear?

Presentation of your poster

Remember the importance of practicing your presentation. Aim to explain your research in 3 minutes, if the person you are talking to is still interested at the end of those 3 minutes, they will ask further questions so be prepared for those questions! So time yourself when you practise and remember the importance of practising any visual material. You may think you will be able to talk someone through a graph, but until you actually say it out loud, you may not be aware of the stumbling blocks.

Answering questions

Students are often worried about their ability to answer questions at the end of a presentation. Matthews & Matthews (2008, p.95) suggest the following methods for answering difficult questions:

You don't know the answer

- Say simply that your research has not supplied an answer to that question.
- Suggest how you would investigate the question.

- Offer an educated speculation on the topic.
- Offer information on a closely related area.
- Ask the questioner his / her thoughts.

Question is too complicated

- Acknowledge that it is a difficult question.
- Give the beginning part of an answer, and suggest more discussion afterwards.

Questioner seems hostile

- Stay cool.
- Accept the question with a smile, followed by a serious, professional reply that is related to the subject.

Questioner asks repeated questions or wants extended discussion

- Make a positive comment about the complexity of the subject, and suggest you meet to discuss the matter further after the session.

Questioner interrupts during your talk

- Respond courteously, answer as briefly as you can, and return to the prepared speech.

Staying calm

Students often feel nervous when giving presentations. You may not be as nervous when doing a poster presentation as you may have only one or two people at any one time. However, if you are trying to impress someone because they may be a potential employer, remember the importance of overcoming your nerves (easier said than done!). Always remember to breathe deeply and talk slowly so that you don't run out of breath and feel panicky. It's a good idea to have a glass of water nearby just in case you get a tickle or your mouth dries up...but make sure you don't spill it over your poster!

Reference List

Hofmann, A.H. (2010). *Scientific Writing and Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lindsay, D. (2010). *Scientific Writing: Thinking in Words*. Retrieved from <http://www.EBSCOhost.com>.

Matthews, J.R. & Matthews, R.W. (2008). *Successful Scientific Writing* (3rd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Imperial College, London. (2014). Retrieved 20 June 2014 from: [www3.imperial.ac.uk/graduateschool/transferable skills programme](http://www3.imperial.ac.uk/graduateschool/transferable_skills_programme)

Other Study Basics guides which you may find useful:

Study Basics: Scientific Writing

Study Basics: Scientific Report Writing

Study Basics: Writing a Scientific Paper