

Preparing and Presenting Powerful Posters

Research Poster as a Genre

Research posters are typically recognized presentation². Posters generally serve two functions¹: 1.) a stand-alone and 2.) a prop in a performance facilitating mini oral presentations and discussions. Posters should contain sufficient information that an individual could understand the material presented without having the presenter standing next to the poster. However, a distinguishing element of research posters are their interactive nature so the poster should also serve as a reference point for conversation.

Another important component of research poster presentations is supplying handouts that can be distributed to conference attendees². Handouts vary in form and may include: slides created in power point, the poster itself on an 8 ½ by 11 sheet of paper, or an executive brief/ summary. Another option is to collect business cards or names and e-mails to send electronic copies of information to attendees following the conference.

Conference attendees will engage with the research posters in varying ways. Some attendees may only stop by your poster long enough to pick up a handout while other conference attendees will read through your entire poster and ask targeted questions from the information provided on the poster. Others will merely glance at your poster and ask that you describe your study. This is why it is extremely important that you have “an elevator speech” prepared that provides a brief overview of the information on your poster. This speech should last no more than two minutes.

Ultimately the most challenging aspect of presenting research posters is the ability to highlight the essence of the poster by presenting two to three key findings².

General Framework or Sections to be included in a poster

- Title
- Authors' names, credentials, & affiliations
- Abstract/Purpose/Introduction
- Background/Literature Review
- Objectives/Research Questions
- Methods/Procedures
- Results/Findings
- Discussion/Implications
- Conclusion/Summary

Technical Components of Preparing a Research Poster

There are a variety of software packages that can be used to create and submit research posters. One of the most common formats is Microsoft PowerPoint (PPT). When creating a poster using PPT, you will design your poster on a single slide. You may choose to design your own poster in PowerPoint by selecting **Blank presentation** and then choosing the blank layout or you may choose to use a PowerPoint template which may be available through your academic program or can be found through internet searches. Using a template saves time by providing a pre-established structure that can be modified (color, text style, organization) to create a poster that suites your personal aesthetic. Be sure to determine the size of the poster before beginning to create your poster. To size the poster in PPT: under the **File** menu choose **Page setup**. In the **Slides sized for** box, select **custom** then type in the width and height of the poster (usually in inches)⁴. The maximum width and height PowerPoint can manage is 54 inches. If your poster is wider or higher than 4.5' (54"), create the poster in a proportional dimension smaller than 54".

Layout

There should be only 2 to 5 minutes of reading material on a poster³ because including more than this is overwhelming to those viewing the poster. Be sure to arrange components in a simple, appealing and logical style³ that makes it easy for views to understand the key message. There are a variety of techniques that can facilitate this process for those viewing the poster:

- Order content from left to right and top to bottom
- Number panels or use arrows to direct viewers' attention in the desired order³
- Use an adequate amount of blank space to avoid a cluttered look, and to separate the elements of your poster

Text Formatting³

Text should be readable from a distance of 4 to 6 feet away. Practically speaking this means that print size should be at least 24 to 30 points and titles should be 36 point type. It has been suggested that the main content text should be serif type face (have tails or feet) while titles should be sans serif type face. You should use both upper and lower case letters (as all caps is difficult to read) and use bold and/or italics for emphasis.

Content of the Poster

Because the poster is primarily a visual display, the content of the poster should maximize use of appropriate visuals¹. The four commonly used visual forms that are used to display the content of a poster include: 1. Numerical (statistics) 2. Scriptural (text) 3. Graphical (graphs, diagrams, maps) and 4. Figurative (photos, images). Paragraphs should be no longer than 10-20 lines long using compact language and bullets to break up long sections.

Your audience will influence the content and layout of your research poster. A research poster presented at an academic or research based conference, such as NCFR, should focus on the research methodology and findings and will likely include numerical, scriptural and graphical visuals. Posters presented at a professional development conference intended for practitioners, for example MCFR conferences, will typically include less text, figurative visuals, and will focus on practical implications.

Screen to Print

The final poster on your screen will NOT adequately represent the final printed poster. Color schemes on your computer screen will likely translate slightly differently when printed. Also be very careful when resizing images, charts, and graphs. Although they may appear ok on the screen, they may be distorted when printed. It is also important to use high resolution photographs to ensure that photos do not appear "fuzzy" when printed. In general, you want at least 150 dpi (dots per inch)⁴. Increasing the dpi increases the file size which makes the image more difficult to work with. If possible, it's a good idea to get a test print (usually smaller in size) and ask employees at the printing center if you are concerned about the quality of your images for print.

PRINTED IMAGE SIZE SIZE OF FILE NEEDED ⁴ 4 inches by 6 inches 1.5MB 8 inches by 10 inches 5 MB

Poster Printing

At the University of Minnesota, the College of Biological Sciences Imaging Center provides reduced rates for U of M students. The rate for U of M students is \$5.75 per square foot whereas the external rate is \$9.00 per square foot. This provides an idea of how much posters cost to print (of course price varies based on how large your poster is). Faculty in your program will likely be able to suggest printing services on campus that have the capacity to print posters. Otherwise there are always commercial options, such as Kinko's or locally owned print businesses.

Another important consideration is how long it will take to have your poster printed. At the CBS Imaging Center poster turnaround is relatively quick. Posters submitted by 10 am are typically printed by 4:30 pm the next working day. It is often possible to get a faster turnaround time but a rush fee is often charged.

NCFR has posted Tips for Effective Presentations that includes a section on presenting posters.

http://www.ncfr.org/pdf/conf/Presenter_Presentation_Tips.pdf

References

1. MacIntosh-Murray, A. (2007). Poster presentations as a genre in knowledge communication: A case study of forms, norms, and values. *Science Communication, 28*. (347-376).
2. Miller, J. E. (2007). Preparing and presenting effective research posters. *Health Research and Educational Trust, 42*. (311-328).
3. Russell, C. K., Gregory, D. M. & Gates, M. F. (1996). Aesthetics and substance in qualitative research posters. *Qualitative Health Research, 6* (542-552).as an informal presentation format. A poster is essentially a hybrid of a published paper & an oral
4. CBS Imaging Center. Power point: Creating posters. (Handout). www.cbs.umn.edu/ic