

Developing an Effective Poster Presentation

Since we have been receiving posters to edit for meetings, we decided to publish a newsletter on developing an effective poster presentation.

Using a combination of visuals and text, posters communicate concepts and data to an audience, allowing the author to meet and speak informally with interested viewers. Poster presentations provide an opportunity for investigators to present their work at scientific meetings and are preparatory for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Here is some advice to help you in developing an effective poster.

Plan, Plan, Plan. Start the process early. Planning is crucial. Start with the due date and work back to create milestones. Allow time for peer review and heavy editing. Make it simple, attractive, and large.

Follow the Guidelines. Just like with a manuscript, you need to follow the guidelines established by the meeting. It is your responsibility to know the physical requirements for the poster, including acceptable size and display format.

Graphics. Let graphics and images tell the story; use text sparingly. All visuals should relate to all your points and conclusions. Usually 4-6 figures are included in a poster. Make them simple, readily comprehensible, and self-contained. Keep figure legends very short (10-25 words maximum).

Organization. Organize posters for a vertical flow of information (up to down in columns) so the audience can view the entire poster in one left-to-right pass. Keep the sequence well ordered and obvious. If necessary, use cues - numbers, letters, arrows - to guide them.

Headings and Title. Use headings to help guide individuals through your poster, find your main points, and summarize your work in large letters. A reader should be able to get the main points from the headings alone. Headings should be at least 36 point in size, the title, at least 5 cm tall.

Text. The text should be readable, at least 24 point in size. We recommend that you use bulleted points and use an active voice. Keep text elements to 50 words or fewer. If you can read all aspects of the text when you are standing above it, then the font size is adequate. Individuals will likely be viewing and reading your poster at a distance of about 3 feet.

Fonts. There are two styles of fonts, sans serif and serif. For bullet points use sans serif fonts such as Arial, Helvetica, and Avant Garde. Since they are easier to read, use serif fonts, such as Times, Roman, and Palatino, for blocks of text.

Poster Size. Check well in advance the size poster you will be permitted to display. Plan your poster so that it will make the best use of this space without exceeding it.

Colors. Use a light color background and dark color letters for contrast. Use a theme of only 2-3 colors and avoid overly bright colors.

Mounting. Since you will need to transport the poster to the conference, don't try to mount all of the text onto one large piece of poster board – use several smaller pieces. If you are able, create the entire poster on a single large computer generated page. This can be rolled into a tube and transported easily. This has the added advantage of enabling you to print out a miniature version and providing it to people who come to your presentation.

Presentation. Your poster is not your presentation, only your visual aid. Everything you put on your poster relates to a carefully crafted message. Plan and practice a three-minute presentation (Introduction: 0.5 min., Main points: 2 min, Closing: 0.5 min). Visitors to your poster may ask for additional details, so be prepared to provide more information if requested.

Questions. You should be able to anticipate many of the questions individuals will have and you should prepare and practice a response to those questions.

Mistakes. The three most common mistakes made in constructing a poster are (1) including too much text, (2) using a font size that is too small, and (3) not planning for the available space.