Hints and tips for making a great poster!

These are general guidelines and you do not need to adhere to them strictly. In some disciplines, a 'poster equivalent', such as a model, installation or artwork may be more appropriate. If you are unsure about what is appropriate, please contact Professor Susan Brooks, Director of Researcher Development sbrooks@brookes.ac.uk.

Getting started making a poster

The easiest way to do it is to use PowerPoint. The eventual size of the poster should be A0 size (it doesn't have to be, but this is a good size), which is 841 x 1189 mm (approx!). On 'page setup' (hidden under the Design tab now) select 'custom' and plug in the dimensions. Choose your orientation, either portrait or landscape. It will be too big for you to make much sense of it as a whole on your pc screen, but you can focus on specific areas – change the 'percentage' box on the screen header to focus in – and you can look at the whole thing (click on 'fit' in the 'percentage' box) in miniature to get an impression of how the whole thing looks.

The colour scheme

This is a HIGHLY VISUAL way of presenting information. The reader is going to choose to read your poster because of how it looks superficially and from a distance. Think about the colour scheme carefully. It should be eye catching but not an eyesore! A dark background (black, dark blue, dark green etc) works well with light coloured (white, yellow, light blue, pink) writing. Or a light background with dark writing. A *subtly* patterned background – you can use your own image or look at 'fill colour / fill effects / texture' in PowerPoint – can look good. Keep the colour scheme simple – no more than three or four colours. It is sometimes helpful to start with your illustrations / figures and decide what colour scheme will show them to their best advantage. Don't make it too garish, too fancy or too busy.

Font size & style

Think about the font size and style. You want the writing to be big enough that someone (even someone with poor eyesight – there are going to be lots of aging professors looking at this!) can read it effortlessly about a metre away. As a rough guide, the title / heading probably should be about 50-60 point. The text should be about 20-30 point (depending on what font style you use). Choose a font style that's easy on the eye. 'Comic Sans', 'Times New Roman' and 'Ariel' are easily readable. Avoid anything too fancy.

General layout

There are no hard and fast rules, but you want it to tell a story – so it needs to have a clear and logical progression that the reader will easily follow. A common way of doing this is to think of it like a paper (but simpler) with an

introduction, materials & methods, results, discussion. A very clear, short 'aims' and 'conclusion' section – possibly bullet pointed – are helpful. As are brief, to the point 'summary' or 'linking' statements.

Use subheadings and your colour scheme to guide the reader through the story. For example, you might highlight important points in a particular colour; you might have the introduction in blue and the methods in green etc. Arrows also sometimes work well (like a flow diagram).

Keep it simple. Less is more!

You want the reader to be able to take in all the important information in one quick (2 minute) read / glance. <u>Keep text to an absolute minimum</u>. Use illustrations to the max. Make sure that everything is very, very, clear and straightforward – 'lay it on a platter' for the reader – they'll get bored if there's too much writing or if it's too hard work. They'll be drawn to a simple, clear, visually attractive layout.

Don't try and cram too much in. It's tempting to include everything you're ever done! A poster should really tell one simple story.

Illustrations should 'stand-alone'

The thing that the reader is going to be most drawn to is the illustrations / figures. These are therefore really important. Make sure they are (a) attractive to look at (b) clear and not too 'busy '(c) they stand-alone – meaning they are either self explanatory or have a brief but fully explained legend.

Look around for ideas

Take the opportunity to look at as many posters as possible – around the School / University and at conferences etc. Decide, from an artistic / visual point of view what works and what doesn't. If you see something that doesn't work, remember it and avoid doing it yourself. Also look for good ideas – if you see a colour scheme or design that you like, file it away in your head for future use. Get into the habit of 'critiquing' posters you see not just for their content but also for their design. You'll probably be making a lot of posters if you stay in academia – it's always good to collect fresh ideas.

Have fun!

Making posters is enjoyable! It's one of the few 'artistic' things that many of us get to do as academics and it's really rewarding when you get your creation back from the printer or get to show it off at a conference. Have fun!

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