

Poster presentations

This guide presents a strategy for producing poster presentations that encourages clarity as well as creativity, helping you to make the most of your poster design.

Other useful guides from Learning Development: *Using visual aids, Presenting numerical data*

Introduction

Posters are often used to share information and are an important part of many conferences, seminars and exhibitions. They may be used to present quite complex material, and so it is important that the information on them is well laid out, legible and attractively presented.

General points about posters

- Poster presenters are usually offered a large area to display their material (typically 1m² or 2m by 1m).
- Posters are usually read at a viewing distance of more than one metre. You will need to make sure that your poster is legible and easy to scan at this distance so that your information is understood quickly.
- The temptation to fill the space with as much material as possible should be avoided; poster presentations should never be as dense as a printed page.
- Many seminar or workshops organisers supply guidelines suggesting suitable typeface styles and sizes, along with conventions for titles and subheadings. Use these to guide your basic poster design.
- When making posters it is essential that you give careful consideration to their visual appearance as well as their content.

Methods of making posters

There are two popular approaches to making a poster.

Approach one: one-piece method

The presenter chooses to design the poster in one large piece (Figure 1). The design is prepared using a versatile software application such as CorelDRAW, Aldus Freehand or Powerpoint. It is designed and produced in A3 or A4 size and is then enlarged at the printout stage.

(Note: producing one-piece posters can take a little while to get used to. Make sure you start working on your first poster in plenty of time.)

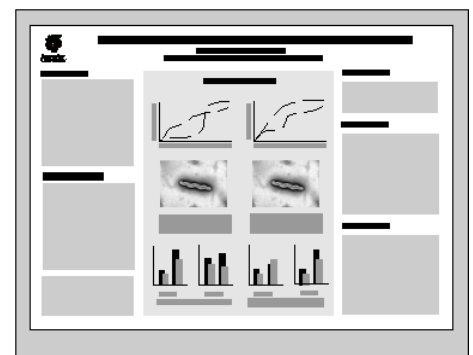


Figure 1: One piece method

Approach two: panel method

The allocated poster area is divided up into a number of separate panels (Figure 2). These may consist of different elements such as text, pictures, tables or titles. Standard word-processor or presentation software (e.g. Microsoft Word or PowerPoint) is used to prepare the panels which are then mounted onto a background. Laminating the individual elements can improve their appearance and robustness.

Choose the production method that is most appropriate to your needs, abilities and resources. The panel method allows for greater flexibility and can be adapted to changing layouts. The one-piece method can be very eye-catching, making your poster stand out from the rest.



Figure 2: Panel method

Stages in producing a poster

1. Choosing content

The first step is to clarify the task that you have been set and the type of information that you will need to include on your poster. The following questions are useful reminders of the range of factors that you might need to consider before you start writing the text of your poster.

- What is the purpose of your poster - to report findings, present an argument, convince an audience or promote a product?
- Who will be looking at your poster - a specialist audience, the general public, other students?
- What will your audience be looking for - detailed information or a brief summary?
- Where will your poster be displayed - in a busy conference hall or in your department?
- Are there any guidelines governing the content of your poster? These might specify the nature and structure of the material to be displayed (as well as practical issues such as the size of the poster and the size and amount of text to be used).

The answers to these questions will influence the nature and amount of material that you display. If you think that you are including too much information in your display, think about what could be taken out; remember that 'less' is often 'more' in visual displays.

2. Making a plan

Once you have decided on the content of your poster, you need to consider the way the information should be displayed. A useful starting point is to prepare an outline plan that will help you make the most effective use of the space available to you.

Structure

Your overall structure should be clear and logical so that the viewer's eye naturally follows the flow of information in your display. To help establish a clear sequence of information, think about planning your poster on a grid system as in the diagram on the following page (Figure 3).

As you can see, the grids help break down the large space into convenient sized areas. Also, two main visual sequences become apparent: rows travelling across the page or columns travelling down the page. These natural 'pathways' can be used to structure your information in both panel and one-piece poster displays, guiding your reader's eye through your information in a logical and fluid way.

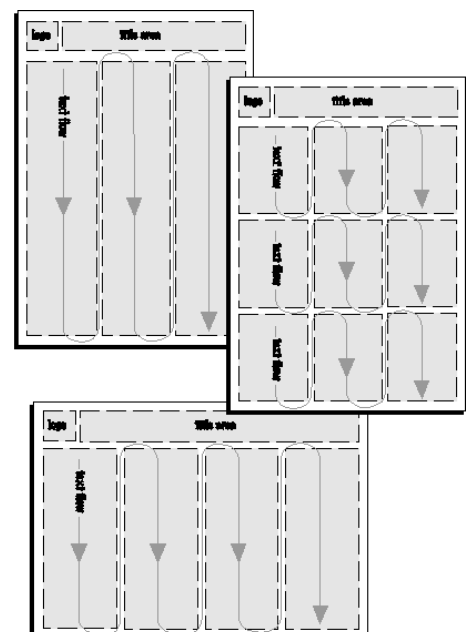


Figure 3: Grid systems

Using a grid system, try producing a rough sketch of your poster layout working in a reduced scale to get a feel for how you might assemble your information in the final display. Use a pencil and some scrap paper to help you think freely and experiment with different designs.

Developing your poster design

Once you have established a basic layout for your poster, try printing out rough versions of the text and use scissors and glue to move things around. This can be used to experiment with different sequences and spacings and will help you gauge the amount of information needed for an effective display

3. Preparing your final poster

When you have a fairly good idea of where you want things to go, you can start to prepare your final poster. If you are aware of a few design principles as you prepare your material, you are more likely to achieve good results. Sticking to the following rules will help you produce an effective poster. Once you have more experience of poster production you can become more adventurous.

Using text

Once you have written your text, you need to choose how to present it. There are five main variables to consider.

- **Font** - choose a font that is easy to read at a distance. Most of the standard fonts are fine for this (e.g. Helvetica, Palatino, Times). Avoid mixing too many fonts as this can look messy. Two is often ideal; one for the headings and one for the main text.
- **Type size** - remember that your poster will be read by someone standing at about a metre away so the text will need to be legible at a distance. Use large type sizes; the following examples are at 24 point and 36 point and can be clearly read at a distance.

24 point 36 point

Titles and headings will need to be larger than your main text. Developing a hierarchy of type sizes can help to differentiate between your main body text and the other text elements in your poster. Keep the number of type sizes to a minimum to avoid over-cluttering your poster. Apply your hierarchy to all aspects of your poster design to ensure consistency.

- **Line spacing or 'leading'** - using one and a half or double spacing between lines of text greatly increases the legibility of your poster design.
- **Alignment** - most word-processing packages give you the option of aligning your text in different ways on the page; the main choices are left, right, centre and justified. Avoid mixing alignments as this can look very awkward. Left aligned is the easiest to read, particularly when using large type.
- **Case** - text in UPPER CASE can be very difficult to read, even at close distances, and is best avoided.

Colour palette

Colour can add an extra dimension to your poster design, making a poster more attractive and giving you another method of highlighting particular aspects of your information. Choose colours that work well together so that they don't detract from the information in your display. It is sensible to use a small range of colours so that your poster doesn't look chaotic.

Diagrams

Displaying information on a poster gives you an opportunity to represent your data in an interesting and eye-catching way. Think about how your display can be enhanced through the use of illustrations, tables, charts or photographs. The inclusion of one carefully chosen image can be a very powerful way of drawing people's attention to your poster. The companion study guide **Presenting numerical data** offers advice and guidance on effective ways of communicating numerical information in your poster presentations.

4. Showing your poster

Poster presentations can take many forms. Sometimes you will be asked to stand next to your poster, talking to people as they browse and answering questions about your work. At other times, your poster will simply need to 'stand alone' as part of a general display. It might be useful to think about how you can help an interested reader take information away from your poster: printing off A4 copies of one-piece posters or producing bullet-point summaries of panel posters are very effective ways of sharing your information.

Summary

Posters are a highly visual medium and can be a very effective way of communicating information to a wide audience. The challenge is to produce a poster design that is both pleasing to the eye and logical to the mind. Time taken to produce a coherent and creative display can produce stunning results.

Further help

The University's Graphics Department (a part of AVS) provide a range of useful services, including:

- help with the design and layout of your poster;
- large format printing for one-piece posters;
- small and large format encapsulation (laminating);
- B&W and colour photocopying and laser printing.

For more information on all of these services, visit the Open Access User Area on the ground floor of the main library, or call extension 5257 during normal office hours.

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