

# Tips, Tricks and What to Avoid when Creating a Scientific Poster

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So you've submitted an abstract to a scientific conference and the organizing committee has invited you to present a scientific poster. What do you do?

The first thing to do is figure out the poster requirements and likely audience of the conference. Is it a more general conference (for example a public health conference) or a more disease- or specialty-focused conference (for example African Epilepsy Congress)? What do they need to know? What will interest them?

Next, sketch out your poster. Include such sections as:

**Title** (1-2 lines)

**Introduction** (200 words)

**Materials and methods** (200 words)

**Results** (200 words)

**Conclusions** (200 words)

**References**

**Acknowledgments** (including funders)

**Further information** (this would include your contact details or the address of a website with more or related detail)

## **Remember that less is more! A picture is worth a thousand words!**

Avoid long-winded sentences. Instead, use bullet points to highlight key methods, results, and conclusions. Results are often better represented with simple figures than with words.

Make sure to answer the questions:

What did I do?

What are the key (or unexpected) findings from my research?

How does my research add to the universal body of research?

Where is this research leading?

Now, choose a design program. People often use Microsoft PowerPoint but remember that it does have limitations – such as inflexibility and colour issues – as its main purpose is for overhead use.

## **Tips**

**Don't clutter the poster. As a rule, about 35% of the poster should be white space.**

**Use a light, single-colour background and a darker colour for the text**

**Keep the width of text boxes to ~11 words and height to roughly 7 rows (or ~10 sentences)**

**Include simple, informative titles for all figures and graphs**

**Do NOT use 3D graphs**

**Ensure that all graphs and photographs can be seen and understood when standing six feet or two metres away**

**Use high quality images (.png, etc)**

**Add a black or grey border on photos to make them stand out**

**Design your poster in an 'eye friendly' manner. Avoid making the reader guess where to go next**

After you've drafted it, print out your poster on smaller A3 or A4 paper and proofread and edit for both content and aesthetics.

Once you're satisfied with what you've created, ask friends and colleagues for constructive criticism. Ask somebody who doesn't work in your field (or even a non-scientist) to review the poster. If possible, find somebody with a creative or artistic flair to also review your poster.

**Good posters are found where good aesthetics and good science (content) meet. Posters are about effectively communicating your results. You want your readers to be thinking about the science – not (for example) about how the background makes the text difficult to read.**

Once you've received feedback, correct the poster and send it off to the printers. If you have the resources, laminate the poster as well. The poster's life doesn't end at the end of the conference – you can hang it in your office, lab or even your bedroom.

Prepare talk of three to five minutes that highlights and draws attention to key aspects of your research. You could also prepare A4 copies of your poster as well as business cards or contact details to hand out at the conference.

Finally, get a good night's sleep the night before the conference and look forward to the next day. Remember, you're presenting your hard work and you're likely to know more about that specific subject than most people you'll speak to the next day. The people that view your poster will be interested in what you've done. Give it your best shot and remember that creating a poster is a skill that takes experience and effort – don't leave doing it until the night before!

Other, helpful resources when creating a poster:

<http://colinpurrington.com/tips/academic/posterdesign>

<http://www.makesigns.com/tutorials/>

### Warning

