Creating Effective Posters

Poster presentations are hybrids of speech and writing. We create posters to disseminate knowledge, attract an audience of similar interest, encourage discussion, allow creative expression, and build collegial relationships.

What should I put on the poster?

Your initial impulse may be to try fitting all the content from your research paper on the poster to ensure viewers understand your ideas. However, this approach will ultimately make your poster overwhelming, cluttered, and confusing.

Instead, you must carefully consider the message you want to convey. Think of your poster as a highlight reel or abstract that presents the most important information.

- Introduction – 2-3 key points. Use your research questions to provide structure
- Methods – Keep it brief, simple, and avoid technical jargon
- Results – Include only most notable results and use graphics to illustrate
- Discussion – Make your findings applicable to the audience and real-world issues

A strong poster will:

- Prioritize information
- Present the most important points
- Consist of 500-800 words
- Balance visuals with narrative
- Have a clear flow and direction
- Show real-world applications

How should I engage my audience?

It’s easy to assume that only a person knowledgeable in your field would be interested in your research, but this does a major disservice to your audience. Don’t assume that the audience consists of experts. Avoid overly technical or complex vocabulary, which makes it difficult for the audience to understand the information.

Prioritize information based on the following questions:

- How familiar is the audience with your topic?
- What do they not know?
- What information do they care about or want to know?

How should I present my poster?

Considering you spent time assembling a poster that displays all the pertinent information to understanding your topic, you may think that you do not need to engage with your audience. However, if you step back and let your poster stand alone, you are creating a passive experience that allows viewers to possibly misinterpret your research.

Instead, your poster presentation should include a balance of visual and oral elements.

A strong presenter will:

- Interact with viewers
- Answer questions
- Clarify the research process and findings
Other Tips

- Prepare an “elevator speech” – a one to two-minute summary of your project that you could deliver to anyone during a typical elevator ride.
- Be sure to speak loudly enough to be heard, slow enough that you think you are speaking too slowly, and without fillers like “um,” “uh,” “like,” “you know,” and “okay.”
- If you don’t know an answer, admit it, speculate with the person, or ask what s/he thinks. Be sure to check to see if your listener understands the technical aspects of your explanation and if what you’re saying makes sense.

For a few quick hints, check out this Poster Presentation Seminar slide show from Rachel Dueck, NAU Marketing Creative Coordinator. For additional information, consider the following tips when designing your poster.

- Most students use Microsoft PowerPoint to design posters. Be sure to begin by setting the page size to your final poster size. More sophisticated programs such as Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, or Photoshop are other design options.
- Use large text (your text should be at least 18-24 pt; headings 30-60 pt; title >72pt.)
- Do not use more than 2-3 font styles total
- Use fonts that are easy to read (such as Times New Roman, Garamond, and Arial)
- Avoid jagged edges: left-justify text within text boxes or fully justify blocks of text
- Avoid too much text (800 words max) and undefined technical jargon (depending upon your potential audience)
- Choose colors carefully and pay attention to contrast. If in doubt, dark print on light background is best. Remember – some colorblind people cannot distinguish between red and green.
- Organize and align your content with columns, sections, headings, and blocks of text
- White space is important to increase visual appeal and readability (this is the “empty” space between sections, columns, headings, blocks of text, and graphics).
- Selectively incorporate charts, graphs, photographs, key quotations from primary sources, maps, and other graphics that support the theme of your poster. It is best to avoid using tables of data.
- Avoid fuzzy images; make sure all graphics are high-resolution (at least 300ppi) and easily visible
- Include your university’s logo
- Edit your poster carefully for typographic or grammatical mistakes and image quality before the final print-out (use the print-preview function).

https://nau.edu/undergraduate-research/poster-presentation-tips/