Poster Presentations

<div style="background-color:#cdf5cd">

Visual and Verbal: A Concise Depiction of Research Results

A poster presentation is a *brief* synopsis that visually highlights your research results. It is a very efficient way to receive timely feedback from academic peers. This can range from ideas for further research to useful networking connections. While academically rigorous, poster presentations are a good "stepping stone" into conferences for graduate students.

Done wisely, poster presentations can be a great way to share your work with others (and the presentation ends up being a nice addition to your CV).

</div>

Short and Clear: Content, Medium and Style

A poster presentation allows the presenter and audience to talk. People move through the displays and stop to interact with those presenting research that interests them. *This is not a hostile audience. They are on your side.*

A successful poster conveys a clear message with high-impact, interesting visual information and a *minimum* of text. It must be **informative** but **brief** and **visually attractive.** Think about style as well as content.

Focus on "So What?"

Your presentation presents research results. Give a context for findings and conclusions. Do they reinforce previous work in the field? Do they contradict important research or offer new avenues of discovery? What further research do you suggest?

In all of this, note how your research is relevant to the field and useful to others.

<div style="background-color:#cdf5cd; border:1px solid black">

You don't have to put everything in the poster—just the main things. You can fill in the blanks with what you say.

</div>

Follow Conference Guidelines

Be professional. Follow formatting guidelines carefully. Conferences have different formats but usually follow the structure of a lab report (title, abstract, introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion, acknowledgements and literature cited).

Avoid heavy text: use relevant images, figures and tables to present information visually.

Content

Your poster is not a summary of events or a bibliography. Have a purpose and make a point. Remember, when you write with fewer words and have less to say, you must say it well. It is harder to "write small" than to "write big." Have clear organization. Focus on textual flow and style as this leads to good visual flow and style.

Poster Should (Approximately) Be

20%	Text
40%	White Space
40%	Visual Content (graphs, charts, images)

Bells and Whistles? Think Twice

Presentations vary from fixed poster boards to PowerPoint with streaming video. However, never default to flashy technology for its own sake. Poster presentations are three to five minutes long: get to the point. Graphs, maps, pictures and tables can have more of an impact when presented as an organic whole on a large poster board than when fragmented in PowerPoint and projected onto a small, distant screen.

A simple "old school" poster that gets to the point is more persuasive and has more academic gravitas than fiddling with a laptop to bombard an audience with too much information.

Fonts

The solitary experience you have up close to your poster when creating it is not the experience your audience will have. Use a font size that can be read by a small group of people. **Always leave a lot of white space.** Start with 24 font. Never go smaller than 18 point font. For section headings use 36 point. Use boldface where appropriate.

Stick to simple fonts: Arial, Helvetica, Times New Roman are good. Don't "mix and match" fonts.

Keep things simple, clear and clean.

Think Like a Web Designer

Studies show that people scan rather than read Web pages, and the same is true of a person standing in front of a poster.

Short, bulleted phrases that highlight the salient points and graphics that illustrate the results can be grasped easily; it is unlikely that people will stand in front of a poster and read every word. Keep that in mind throughout poster development.

Colour

A coloured background unifies your poster.

Muted colours or shades of grey are best.

You can also use two or three related background colours for sections of the poster.

Borders are for emphasis. You can use more intense colours, but be conservative as you don't want colour to distract from content.

Remember – colours are intensified by fluorescent lighting; bright colours may become unpleasant.

When in doubt, delete text. You can expand upon what is in the poster when talking to people about it.

Crafting the Poster

Cautious old-fashioned cutting and pasting is a cost efficient way to make a poster, but using software can assure a more professional look. Print the poster out on a single, large computer-generated sheet. This can be done at most copy and print shops. Regardless of how you make your poster, have it laminated so that it is easily rolled up and transportable. Get a strong cardboard tube for shipping.

From Text To Poster

To turn your presentation into a poster, think about how your information may be presented visually: in text, graphics, chart, time line, etc. Will pictures be appropriate?

Think about colour, arrangement, size etc. and make a sketch using 4 by 6 cards or pieces of paper, arranging different elements in a sequence that is easy to follow. Left to right columns can work well

Text supports graphic material: use tables, figures and other images wherever possible to support the flow of information. Default to images instead of text wherever possible. Use a maximum of 1000 words. A person should be able to read the poster in less than 10 minutes.

Editing: The Heart of the Process

Get people to view your rough non-pasted draft (preferably when you are not present to explain it). Ask them for comments on length, word count, clarity of written and graphic sections, flow, clarity of poster as a whole, font size, spelling etc.

When you are satisfied, put it together.

- Try to avoid blocks of text longer than 10 sentences
- Whenever possible, use bulleted lists over blocks of sentences
- Use *italics* rather than underlining
- Make sure that details in your visuals can be viewed clearly from about six feet away

Make sure you have a bibliography. If your research is on something new, show sources related to your research. If relevant, consider suggested further reading.

Your audience may have little background about your exact topic. The poster and presentation should work together in a way that makes things clear to people who are outside of your exact field of research (and at the same time the information should be compelling and clear for those in this field of research). To do this, strive and edit for clarity, relevance and concision.

Checklist

Is your argument and analysis clear?

Is it too wordy?

Can an image take the place of any words? If so, replace them.

Is there too much content? Too little?

Are bullet point lists too long?

Is it clear how your findings relate to other research (do they expand on or compete with other findings)?

Is there ample white space? Avoid clutter!

Are images, graphs and charts clearly labeled?

Are units included?

Is there anything that is purely decorative? If so, eliminate it.

Do colour and graphics enhance understanding or distract the viewer?

Are minute or irrelevant details left out?

http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/NewSite/examples/Flounder/ is an example of a good poster.

At the Conference

Talk to people informally before your presentation. You will feel more at ease.

Don't wander away from your poster. Your job is to be available for discussion and to answer questions

Keep a black pen and correcting fluid handy for any typos

Wear a name tag so the viewers know that you and the poster go together.

Look at your viewers as you explain; don't keep your eyes glued on the poster.

Do not use notes when explaining your poster. You should know it very well.

Try to be active, not passive. Initiate discussion as much as possible

Don't chew gum (or anything else).

Point to specific parts of your poster as you explain

Thank your viewers for stopping and listening

Beyond Science Fairs of Yesteryear

Think of what you want from a presentation: you want the most important points delivered in a clear and confident manner. Let this be the litmus test of your presentation.

Remember, less is more.

For personal support with your poster presentation, please make an appointment at the Academic Skills Centre. An appointment can address any stage of the process from brainstorming, creating, and editing a poster to de-briefing after a conference.

The Academic Skills Centre, Trent University
www.trentu.ca/academicskills
acdskills@trentu.ca
705-748-1720