- Guidelines for Poster Design -

Making Posters

Standard poster dimensions are 48 inches by 36 inches, either landscape or portrait layout. Typically an academic poster is designed for dimensions of 36” x 48”. Once you've designed your poster, you may submit it to ITS for printing. It typically takes two to three days to print posters.

General considerations

The information below contains suggestions for organizing your poster content and designing an effective poster. ITS recommends using MS PowerPoint to design your poster as a single PowerPoint slide setup with the dimensions you want your poster printed in (ex. 36” high by 48” wide).

The purpose of a poster is to convey information. The most important goal in poster design is to present information in a way that it is accessible and understandable. Every element on the poster—whether text or graphic, should be chosen and arranged to further that goal.

Posters are different from books or articles in the way they convey information. People view a poster from both far away, and close up. Your design, title and subheadings, which will be noticed from a distance, need to be eye-catching. Your detailed text needs to keep the audience reading when they move close. Poster space is very limited. Make sure that every element counts—nothing should be extraneous. Text should be as concise as possible.

Know your audience. Will they be other scholars in your field, or people with no expertise in that area? Write to your audience. Think carefully about the language you use and the assumptions you make about the viewers' knowledge. Don't use technical jargon unless you're sure it will be familiar to your audience. An indication of how
familiar you are with your subject is evidenced by how well you can convey it. Don’t use three words when one will do; don’t use a three-syllable word when a one-syllable word will work as well. Keep in mind also that your poster will be competing with others for attention.

Design Steps

There are two elements in a poster: text and graphics. Text includes titles, subheadings, captions, labels and “body text”—the narrative. Graphics can include maps, charts, diagrams, illustrations or photographs.

**STEP 1:** Think about what size you’d like your poster to be, and actually look at a piece of paper at that size. You may need to modify the size after you work out your content. Also think about whether you want it in landscape or portrait format.

**STEP 2:** Outline your content. Think through the types of text: title, subheadings, captions, etc. An effective presentation includes:

- Problem statement: what are you investigating
- Problem context/literature review (optional depending on space available)
- Methodology: how did you go about doing your research
- Discussion of data
- Conclusion
- Directions for further research

Generally, you will not have room to devote more than one or two paragraphs to each of the above. You may also want to include acknowledgements and perhaps information on sources.

A slightly different way to organize your information would be to follow the problem statement with the conclusion.
**STEP 3:** Draft the text you will use—500 and 1500 words, depending on the poster size you plan to use.

**STEP 4:** Decide on appropriate accompanying graphics.

**STEP 5:** If you have time, ask others to review your draft and ideas for graphics asking for feedback about any places that the information being conveyed isn’t clear.

**STEP 6:** Design your poster. If you are using PowerPoint, be sure to adjust the page setup to reflect the dimensions of the poster you want to print. Think of the “slide” that will become your poster as groups of text and related graphics that are presented in an ordered form.

**STEP 7:** Proofread on the screen carefully. Print a draft copy on 8.5 x 11 (letter) paper. Proofread again carefully. Submit the final copy for large format printing.

**Design Guidelines**

As you design your poster, consider the following:

- Think hierarchically and reflect that hierarchy in your design. The most obvious way to do this is by varying size. Categorize your text: title, secondary headings, tertiary headings, captions, body text, graph labels, source, and acknowledgements. Assign each category a level of importance and assign each category a style consisting of text size, color, style, etc. Stay consistent. For example, the headings “problem statement” and “methodology” would probably both be secondary headings. Make them look the same. Make the differences in importance obvious.

- When you read a page in a book (in English), you begin at the upper left, and move your eyes from left to right and from up to down. A poster may work somewhat differently. It presents a lot of information to view at once. Use devices—arrows, numbers, letters—to help the reader know where to start your story and what order to read it in. For an English-reading audience, it’s good to stay fairly close to the left/right,
up/down reading pattern.

- Use the titles as a way to state the conclusion. For example, instead of saying “A Study of Automobile Emissions Generated at Drive Up Windows” say: “5% of Air Pollution Derives from Cars Idling at Drive Up Windows” or “Drivers Spend an Average of 7.2 Minutes Idling at Drive Up Windows”—phrase in such a way as to get the reader’s attention.

- Proximity indicates that items are related or should be viewed together.

- Where possible, express points as bullets rather than paragraphed text.

- Don’t use more than a couple of fonts. Vary them according to size, boldness, angle (italics or not) to differentiate meaning; avoid ornate fonts.

- Italics are standard for use as captions.

- Keep narrative text at about 18 points or larger.

- Make your title not less than 1” in height—bigger if possible.

- Title and subheadings should be readable from 5 feet away.

- Make the space between your lines of text about 133% of the text size. For example, if your text is 18 points high, your leading should be about 1.33 x 18 or 24 points.

- Lines of text in a text block should usually contain about 7-8 words on average.

- Changing text size or block width can help you make adjustments.

- Keep your capitalization consistent.
• Place blocks of text on white or a very pale background. Make sure contrast between background and text is strong and visible from a distance.

• If you choose to use a color for a font or poster area make sure that you use it consistently to convey the same meaning each time it is invoked.

• Every graphic should have a caption.

• Graphs and charts should have a title, with fully labeled x and y axes. Unless there is a wide variation in the sizes of graphs, make their component parts consistent in size and coloring. If your using a 14 point x axis label in one graph, do the same in all. If your type is blue in one graph, make it blue in all graphs.

Design Don’ts

• Don’t use all capital letters in a heading

• Don’t feel compelled to cram too much into the space available—leave some white space
• Don’t center any portion of text except possibly the title. In general, left-justify text. Captions may be an exception depending on how they’re positioned next to the graphic.

• Don’t use multicolor gradients

• Don’t use boxes with rounded corners

• Don’t add meaningless graphics—every graphic should have a purpose

• Don’t justify blocks of text on both sides