

Poster Guidelines

Guidelines prepared by Dr Michael Thomas

Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, Hampstead, London, NW3 2QG

Introduction

Posters are widely used at a scientific conference as a means of disseminating information to a wide audience. The aim of the poster is to present information in a clear and concise way; its content should be succinct and to the point and should aim to stimulate interest rather than present complex data.

Many people will be supported in the production of their poster by local medical illustration or media resource departments. However even when the expert advice and support of medical artists is available the ideas and content must originate from your own work.

Facilities such as word processors, computer graphics packages and desk top publishing have all made the production of posters a much less daunting task.

Posters should

- be visually attractive
- stimulate interest from their readers
- be displayed in favourable lighting and surroundings
- be legible from a distance of one metre (more for the title)
- be logically laid out with a format which is easy to follow
- convey their message in a concise way

Structure

There is no "standard" structure for a poster. However in my opinion, the best posters, generally follow the guidelines of a published paper with sections like introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion/Conclusion/Significance - but the information needs to be presented in much less space than you would get in a journal.

Where you decide to use subheadings they should take the reader through the text of the different sections following a logical progression and using eye-catching words. Body text itself should be kept to a minimum and presented in an easy-to-read active voice ("We added 2mL" rather than "2 mL was added"). Wherever possible information should be presented visually to show only the essential facts.

Remember that one thing which will be missing from your poster will be the abstract that you submitted to get it accepted for the conference! This should appear in the meeting handbook only.

Size

The display boards to be used in are 2m high (from the floor) and 1m wide – but remember that you cannot use all the height, and that 1m is the maximum permissible width – 96cm will allow you the space to display it more comfortably. The poster board will contain your poster number in the top left hand corner as a panel 21 cm wide and 15 cm deep – you should allow for this in designing your poster layout. The board will NOT contain a pre-printed poster title, and you should ensure that your poster includes a title.

Posters are normally read at a distance of about 1 metre and all general text and diagram captions and symbols should be visible at that distance. Character height for this will then be between 6 and 8 millimetres, whilst that for a sub-heading will be 10 to 16 millimetres. Headings need to be readable from further away, maybe up to 5 metres, requiring a text height of at least 4 centimetres.

The letter style, or font, and size should be consistent throughout the poster. Body text is easier to read using a serif font type such as Times Roman or Palatino. However often the Title and Headings are set in a sans serif font such as Helvetica or Arial. This differentiation can help the reader distinguish between your body text and heading, legends etc.

Blocks of text should be kept to the same width. Captions on diagrams, graphics and illustrations should be written horizontally to ease reading. Format your title in "Sentence case" (like this) rather than using "Title Case" or "ALL CAPS" even if some of the CAPS ARE SMALL.

Layout

The older "arts and crafts" method of producing posters by cutting and pasting blocks of text and figures onto panels of coloured matte board when properly executed can still make an impact. However the time taken to produce posters in this style is considerable and requires significant artistic talent. These days posters are more usually produced using appropriate computer based packages such as PowerPoint or Adobe PageMaker and printed through specialist production facilities using a continuous feed printer. Media Resource departments may be available in bigger institutions and can provide detailed help in the production and planning of your poster, albeit at some cost.

Some Tips

Colour on posters is useful for attracting peoples attention. But it needs to be used logically and with discretion. Since some delegates will be red/green colour blind you should avoid combining these colours in any figure. It is best to stick with a white background since colour will dramatically diminish the value of any colour that is used in your drawings, charts and photographs.

Accenting your text using an emboldened font can be useful for emphasis and the use of italics is better than underlined text. Using a bulleted list can also be a distraction. It should also be unnecessary to use boxes around text sections and figures or to give them coloured backgrounds. Vertical separators between columns are pointless and detract from the white space that allows your readers eye to flow through the poster in a logical manner.

Poster Discussion

By definition poster presentations have a restriction on space which limits the detail that can be presented. Therefore authors should expect to engage with conference delegates in discussing their findings. It is useful with this in mind to have ready a short oral presentation of the findings of your work, which avoids you reading the poster aloud but instead gives the bigger picture, explains why the problem is important and uses the poster graphics to illustrate and support the key points you make.

Of course many of the decisions you make on how to display your work on a poster will be subjective and personal to you. For that reason always give yourself enough time to prepare your poster well in advance of the meeting and to have it critiqued by at least two colleagues before you display it formally.

Good luck, and we look forward to seeing your work at Focus.

Further Reading

Displaying your findings: a practical guide for creating figures, posters and presentations
Adelheid A M Nichol and Penny M Pexman
2003, American Psychological Association
ISBN 1-55798-978-8

Scientist's guide to poster presentations
Peter J Gosling
1999, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers
ISBN 0-306-46076-9