

Posters for Smart People

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1 Overview

Posters are an interesting new development in many ways that corporations, conferences, and audiences now hear about your current work. In the past, many people resorted to overhead projectors or computer presentations to describe their work. However, with the onslaught of computing power that is available to everyone, posters are becoming a rapidly evolving way to describe your work. They not only are easy to create, but can be set up anywhere and interested parties in your work can have one-on-one time with you during your presentation. They also foster a method for you to connect with your audience where the traditional lecture does not. Consequently, posters are a great way to communicate and present your work within the 21st century.

Although posters are relatively easy to make and produce, information how to make a poster is scarce. Moreover, a poster can be confusing, because most people are familiar with posters as advertisements and not as methods to describe your work. Therefore, some careful planning must go into what to produce in a poster. This document hopes to give readers a generate idea what should be included in a poster and how its layout might help you organize your ideas.

Although posters can be made in many different ways, the best way to create a poster is with Microsoft (MS) PowerPoint. Posters vary in size according to the situation in which you present your poster. However, most posters are usually 48-60 inches wide (side to side) and 36 inches in height (top to bottom). In MS PowerPoint, you can set this in the **Page Properties** section of the presentation, however, it is easiest to start with a poster that has already been setup for you. Fortunately, I have provided a poster template for you to use if you wish.

2 Details

There are really two sections of a Poster:

- Header
- Body

The header has all your particulars related to who worked on a topic, what institution you are at, your address, contact information, and possibly even a logo for your institution. You should put anything in your header that you want audiences to write down as possible ways to either connect with you or to visit your work in detail after the conference. This is because chances are that if you do your poster well, you will have piqued your audience's interest in your work and they may have more questions they want to ask later or even maybe even off your a job or establish a life-long collaboration. Therefore, make sure you place some sort of way to identify yourself and ways that people can contact you later.

The second section is called the Body and it contains the basic parts of the poster and what your work is about. You should view your poster as a condensed lecture, therefore, leaving information out of your poster is a really bad idea. However, being too vague is also a bad idea. Do not expect your audience to understand something unless you can describe it. And, the best way to do this is with a figures and tables. Although figures and tables are excellent they have a tendency to clutter the viewing area especially since posters are usually bigger than normal lectures and most people gratuitously place larger figures in the poster to help explain their ideas. However, a bad figure can ruin a good idea and the general idea of a poster. And, to make matters worse, if your audience hates your idea or gets the wrong idea, they can just turn around and leave. Your goal is to entice the viewer into viewing what you have done and it is important to put effort into this to make your case towards making your work significant.

Most elements of the poster will include facets of lecture slides. That is, you may want to use bulleted text. Although this is a good idea, you want to make sure you make it concise and not have too much wording. A poster with too much wording can leave a bad

impression on your audience. Therefore, use text by placing “text boxes” in your MS Power poster and use them sparingly. You should make a text box of your text, so that its easy for you to move the text around. However, to emphasize your text, it is advisable to segment your text and sections of your posters by rows. That is, put portions of your poster in rows separated by some kind of object that identifies you are moving to the next point.

One good way of doing this is place colored or shaded rectangles around your segment and place them in rows. This way, you can show a progression from thought to thought and not have the reader be distracted by your other parts of your poster. And, its best to progress in the same you way look at a page or document. That is, from the top left of the Body down to the bottom right as if you are reading a book. Because posters are one-on-one with your audience, you want to make sure you do not lose focus with your audience, because, as mentioned before, they may just walk away from you at any point in your presentation. Also, make sure your text is big enough that anyone can read it, because many people may become interested in your poster and approach you to ask about it. This is your main intent of the poster. Get your audience involved!!!! An 18 point font is a good general size font to use. Also, make sure you use good legible fonts - it would be a bad idea to use a calligraphy-based font in a poster even though you may be a fan of it.

The second most elemental part of a poster are images. Images are what attracts an audience and also can really excite your interested party. Therefore, make sure you put some images in your document. Images are best placed into your poster by **Insert/Picture** option in MS PowerPoint. You can also use the copy-paste option if you have another program open that has a clickable figure. Although figures are cool, they are one of the hardest things to create. Some good programs to use are Microsoft Visio and Adobe PhotoShop. However, some figures will look grainy, because you will tend to blow them up to a larger size. Therefore, try to make sure you have your image in a high quality (i.e. greater than 150 dpi or more). Also, it is advisable to use a format that represents your image in a scalable way. Vector-based graphics, such as encapsulated postscript, work well for this and allow your figure to be scaled effortlessly.

Results are key and critical to most work, regardless of what level they are being presented at. Therefore, it is a good to key your readers into your results. One way to do this is with a table. Tables are great for presenting your final work, but make sure you

make them large enough so everyone can read them. That is, use a large enough font and table border. Also, make sure you reference other work that may have been presented in previous work. A table is an excellent place to put this information. Although tables are great, they are not good if you have too many tables. Therefore, try to keep the number of tables down to a minimum.

3 Presentation

Once you create your poster and print it out, you have to present it. This is the least-known part of the poster, because posters are generally not common in most presentation avenues. However, they are becoming more popular, so finding a poster in which you can emulate may be more common in the future. Until that happens, here are some tips to take into consideration during the presentation of your poster:

- Look polished - do not come dressed to your presentation in ragged jeans and a t-shirt. Look nice, so that others may approach you without having to worry about whether you will fall asleep on them. Be attentive and ready to show your work - this is what you been working on all semester or for a couple of weeks. Its time to show them the money!
- Watch for attentive readers of your poster, and ask them, “Do you want me to tell you about my work?” Do not be afraid of asking people about hearing about your work. Most people get turned-off from some posters, because some posters are empty. Even if you have a good poster, people have a tendency of not listening to something they are not interested in. And, a poster is different than a lecture where you have your audience captive. You have to capture your audience, so snag them by asking if they want to hear what you have done?
- It is a good idea to use the text to help you describe what you are trying to talk about. That is, use bulleted texts to help remind you what you have to say at each section of the poster. Even though posters are informal, I sometimes get nervous waiting to talk about my poster and get all fidgety when someone wants to know what my poster is about. That way, you can just read off what you are doing at that particular place in the poster by reading the text. Then, you can just expound upon the topic, because the text reminded you what you had to say at that point in the poster.

- Demonstrations or show-and-tell, where appropriate, of your work are cool for enticing people to see what you have done. If you have an integrated circuit already fabricated, why don't you tape one to your poster. Show people you can put your money where your mouth is by showing them that you can take something from start to finish. If you have something you can show as a demo, set up a table next to your poster, so you can demonstrate your ideas, such as a hardware MP3 decoder. This way, people who don't want to listen to your poster can look at the real thing.
- Use your finger or a presentation pointer to take your reader along the journey of your research. That is, start at the upper left hand side of your Body, as mentioned previously, but use your finger to say, "Here we start with the basic background of what we are trying to do...". Do not be afraid of giving your reader background information and taking them on a journey. Chances are, they never heard of what you were doing before. So, make it real and make it direct by showing them part by part of your poster by pointing to sections on the poster and illustrating where things happen.
- Try to make eye contact with your audience. There is a good chance you will be demonstrating your poster to one person and others may be listening in. So, make sure you make eye contact with the main person you are talking to, however, glance over from time to time at other people who may be listening in on your presentation.
- Do not be afraid to have copies of your poster in miniature or your previously presented paper printed out. This is a good way to get people who might be more interested in your project later and can contact you if they forget your contact information. Even if you do not have copies of your presentation available, perhaps, a note that has your contact information on it may be good including a web site to where you have more information available for those that may be interested.
- Some posters are expensive to print out, because they put a glossy film over your poster to preserve it. This expensive element is useful if you want to keep your poster for more time or hang it up later in your room, so it can motivate you in the morning. Most people just get the cheap version of their poster which is just a simple printing of the document. If you print out the cheaper

version, it is worth the investment of a poster tube to hold your poster until you want to display it. I normally pay for the disposable printer tubes which cost be about \$3 at Staples. There are more durable expensive poster tubes, but I lose my poster tubes after I present my poster, so the extra expense is not worth it.

4 What One Should be looking for in a Poster

Although I have presented the basic information about what a poster is and how to present one, I have not described what one should be interested in for any posters that they are interested in. This section gives a general idea of how one might be critical of a poster and what they should be looking for in a poster. Here is a short synopsis of what one would be looking for:

1. Is the presenter of the poster available to describe their work at their poster? Printing the poster out and not being available at a certain time to describe their work is not acceptable.
2. Did the presenter of the poster interact with any of the audience that was interested in their poster? Did they answer questions from all interested attendees.
3. Did the poster provide ample background of the work? This is very important, because one should not be totally confused about what the work in the poster is all about.
4. Can the presenter of the poster describe what was done in the poster? Can one tell what was designed in their work from viewing the poster? If one cannot figure this out from the poster, the poster presenters are probably in trouble.
5. Did they have a demo? If so, how did it look? Did the demo work or did it look nice?
6. Do they have any results? If they do not have any results, this is probably a bad indication of the state of the poster. Having results clearly defined is an excellent way to help a poster be a success.
7. Can one view the text and tables/pictures from about 5 feet away from the poster?
8. Is the contact information available on the poster?