Creating Research Posters

http://www.aamc.org/members/facultydev/facultyvitae/winter06/lesson/start.htm

http://www.aamc.org/members/facultydev/facultyvitae/winter06/lesson/tutorials.htm

Create a Compelling Poster with Microsoft PowerPoint

Poster presentations are opportunities for informal discussion about your research. Good poster design looks easy. But it can be challenging to use images, graphics and text to communicate the essentials of your work in a way that transforms casual interest into engaging conversation.

The content of a poster presentation typically focuses on the data and findings of the research, and provides an argument for validity and importance. Photography and charts can be used to illustrate data and text.

A compelling poster effectively brings together a clear and concise description of the work with visual cues that enhance the narrative.

Microsoft PowerPoint has a feature that can create a poster-size (up to 56 inches) display incorporating text, images, and graphics. Learning this design technology along with a few simple guidelines about visual communication potentially can improve the way you tell the story of your work. The "Action Plan" provides suggested design principles for your next poster. The examples were selected from the "Advancing Diversity to Strengthen the Professional Workforce" poster reception held at AAMC's 2005 Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

- Gerald Drake

Planning

- Review and follow the guidelines issues by the meeting or organization that accepted your poster.
- Focus on one essential concept.
- Who is your audience? What story are you trying to depict?

Writing

- Use short sentences and simple words. Avoid using large blocks of text; consider using headings and line breaks.
- Avoid jargon.
- Avoid using the first person (I/me/my).
- Use active voice.
- Proofread multiple times. And have a trusted colleague review your content prior to production.
- Suggested Content for a Scientific Poster:
  - Title
  - Author(s)
  - Authors’ institutional affiliation(s)
  - Introduction/Abstract - 300 word maximum
  - Methods - 300 word maximum, supplemented with graphics
  - Results – 300 word maximum, supplemented with graphics
  - Conclusion(s) - 300 word maximum
  - Acknowledgements - identify grant or contract support
  - References (optional)
Designing Poster Layout

- **Translate information into a visual format.** Where possible, convey information using figures, tables, graphs, drawings, and/or photographs.
- Use a storyboard: Sketch your poster on a smaller sheet of paper, marking a space for all the elements you plan to use.
- Aim for the following balance: 20-40 percent text, **at least 40 percent graphics**, and less than 20 percent in white space.
- Your graphics should be self-explanatory; they should not need captions.
- Label data lines for graphs and charts within the graph or chart where possible.
- Follow a logical sequence of content, such as Introduction --> Methods --> Findings or Abstract --> Results --> Conclusions. Put Introduction in the poster's upper left section and Findings in the lower right.

Choose fonts and colors

**Use no more than two or three fonts.**

- Use simple, bold fonts that are legible from 6 feet.
- Sans serif fonts are easiest to read. Helvetica, Arial, Verdana and Tahoma are examples of sans serif fonts.
- Tip: If you can't read your text when you print using "Scale to fit paper" in PowerPoint, the font size is too small.
- Suggested font sizes:
  - Title: 96 font size in **bold**
  - Author’s name: 84 font size
  - Poster content: 32 or larger

Use color judiciously.

- The restrained use of 2-3 colors provides good emphasis; using more than 2-3 colors distracts from the content.
- Use more intense colors for emphasis or for borders.
- Unify content with the same color as a border or background.
- Muted colors (white and shades of gray) are best for the background. Light backgrounds work well with dark photos/graphics; dark backgrounds work well with light photos/graphics. White background reduces the impact of color photos.
- Fluorescent lighting may intensify colors, making bright colors unpleasant to view.

Creating a Poster Using Microsoft PowerPoint

**Putting it all together**

1. Open PowerPoint or use the template.
2. Choose "Blank Presentation."
3. Choose "Blank" content layout.
4. Consult the size guidelines for your poster and re-format your slide size in scale with those proportions by choosing **File-->Page Setup-->Custom**. In the dialogue box, type in your scaled width and height in inches, accommodating for the maximum 56" limitation in PowerPoint for either dimension. PowerPoint should orient the slide to "Landscape" or "Portrait" based on the dimensions you chose. Select "OK."
5. Use the **Ruler feature to help place text and graphics by selecting View-->Ruler**. Remember that you are creating a scaled version in PowerPoint and that white space may appear much larger in the printed version. Place your elements closer together than you might otherwise and use the ruler feature to gauge the dimensions of the white space.

6. Use **Guides to generate a border of 1 to 2 inches around your poster**. To do this, select View-->Grid and Guides. Drag a Guide to the left and top borders. Create a Guide for the right and bottom borders by putting your cursor on the guide, and selecting "Ctrl" as you drag the new guide.

7. If you have a difficult time gauging the spacing of your elements, consider using the Grid or Ruler features.

8. Input text, import graphics, and create graphs. Note that images with a low resolution may appear grainy when printed in a large format.

9. **To insert Text:** click on "Text Box" and begin typing. Re-configure the box by clicking on it and dragging its handles (the circles on the box’s perimeter). Change the font in the box by clicking on the box (the outline of the box will look like dots) and choosing your font and font size on the menu bar at the top of the screen. Change or eliminate the border around the text box or the Fill (background color) by placing your cursor on the box and right clicking; choose "Format Text Box."

10. **To insert Graphics, Tables, Charts, Diagrams:** Choose Insert and the type of object you wish to insert from the menu bar at the top of the screen.

11. **To align elements** select one element, push "Shift" and select a second element. On the bottom menu bar, select **Draw --> Align or Distribute** and select how you wish to align the elements.

**Resources**

- Templates
- Showcase

**Tutorials**

- Creating Medical Poster Presentations - Microsoft Office Online
- Creating a Poster Using PowerPoint - Allegheny College Computing Services Help Desk
- Building a Poster Using PowerPoint (PDF) - University of New Hampshire Computing and Information Services

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**Information compiled by Janett Forte – VCU Institute for Women’s Health**

In support of researchers submitting posters for Women’s Health Research Day
For more information visit www.womenshealth.vcu.edu

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