SEVEN SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO MAKE AN AWESOME* POSTER

by Brad R. Conrad, PhD, Directory of Society of Physics Students and Sigma Pi Sigma

SPS MEMBERS PRESENT* their posters at AIP Member Society Meetings. Photos courtesy of AIP.

1. TAILOR YOUR PRESENTATION TO YOUR AUDIENCE!

Experts within the field
- Shorter background
- Identify field significance
- Key results
- Highlight new techniques

Colleagues
- Stress background
- Clear motivation
- Relate to their background
- Answer a clear question

General public
- Strong background
- Clear presentation
- Relate to their background
- Answer a clear question

2. SELECT A GOAL FOR YOUR POSTER

- Your poster is a visual guide to reference while you present.
- The poster should not distract the audience but instead be a tool to transfer information.
- If the poster is meant to hang in a hallway or lab for a long time, it is OK to include more detail.

3. PURPOSE

- Posters are well-suited for presenting a logical argument to a small number of people.
- Conversations often end up being bidirectional and people will be talking to you, not reading the poster very much.
- Posters are fantastic for in-depth, technical discussions.
- Develop a clear, singular message.
- Identify what you want your audience to take away.

4. FIGURES & PHRASES

- Figures should be large, clear, and well labeled.
- People will not read paragraphs of text.
- Use phrases and bullet points.
- Keep text to the essentials.
- Include only just enough information for someone to follow along if you are not there.

5. PROFESSIONALISM

- Don't ignore anyone.
- Let people ask you questions.
- Don't speak over them.
- Dress to impress.
- Never eat while presenting.
- Don't have note cards.
- Thank people for speaking with you.

6. FOCAL POINTS

- Posters are read left to right, top to bottom.
- Three column designs are common (see figure).
- Less is more. Stick to the message.
- Results and conclusion go on the right side of a poster.
- Put references and acknowledgments at the bottom.
- Either make all your own figures (preferred), or cite them appropriately. Avoid plagiarism.
- Favor graphs over tables.

7. DESIGN

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A Generic Poster Template with Tips
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Motivation
A strong motivation is key to keeping your audience’s attention. A sentence or two is often good enough.

Introduction
This section should include background information necessary to understanding any theory or results seen later on.

Poster size:
- Common size: 3’ tall by 4’ wide

Fonts:
- Pick one and stick to it.
- Be consistent with formatting titles, bullet points, and tone.
- Pick an easy to read font.
- Sentences get a period at the end.

General Advice
1. Identify your audience.
2. What is your poster’s goal?
3. A poster is good for two-way communication.
4. Keep text short and figures long.
5. Have a clear message.

Common Poster sections:
- A short title - clear main topic
- List authors with affiliations
- Optional: Contact information
- Motivation – Most important
- Introduction
- Theory, Methods, and Data
- Analysis – Separate from Data
- Results
- Conclusion (not identical to results)
- Acknowledgements/Logos/funding

Equations
Insert equations. Avoid asterisks * for multiplication and carets ^ for powers. Use the equation editor. Example: $P = \alpha a^2$ (1)

Results
- Summarize the results of your data
- Relate to motivation and introduction
- Clearly state the significance to the broader field and the general public
- Report key values and relationships

Play particular attention to your audience.

Analysis
Only keep results that support the main poster message.

Keep it simple and straightforward

Conclusions
- Takes a long time to make a good poster
- Seek revision
- Receive feedback from collaborators
- Be clear, concise, and directed

For more information on preparing an effective presentation, see “Preparing an Effective Presentation” on p. 28.