Recommendations for Creating Posters

Millicent Eidson, MA, DVM, DACVPM (Epid.), Office of Public Health Practice, NYSDOH
Associate Professor and Associate Chair for Epidemiology, Department of Epidemiology & Biostatistics,
UAlbany School of Public Health
Past-President, Alpha Gamma Chapter, Delta Omega Honorary Society in Public Health

The presenter have to keep in mind that conference attendees can spend very short time on one poster (usually not more than 3 minutes), and a successful presentation allows efficient (fast) transmission of its main message to a wide public. The most common mistakes in designing scientific posters include:

- **Font not big enough to read** when standing back from the poster
- **Using full sentences** that require the audience to read. Information should be edited and re-edited repeatedly to remove all unnecessary words. Audience must understand the information quickly.
- **Too much information** on the poster. Include only the information that is absolutely necessary. You can’t describe every detail of your study on a poster.
- **Information doesn’t flow** in a logical order. You need to determine whether the audience will be reading left to right or in columns. Separate the information and use visual cues to guide the audience eyes.
- **Information is all text** and is not visually appealing. Replace the text by illustrations as much as possible, and use different colors for fonts and different types of fonts, as long as they work well together and are consistent in their application.
- **Using tables**. Tables of information are o.k. in posters in limited circumstances, when they are providing absolutely essential detailed data and there is no other way to present the information. If using a table, make sure it is big enough, that all column and row headings are clear, and that only the most important data is included, not all the data you have.
- **Figures are preferable to tables**. Figures convey the idea of the results, without providing exact numbers. Figures can be made colorful and if well-designed, are easy to read and understand. Create clear figures specifically for the poster—do not import SAS charts with uninterpretable axis titles and legends.

In preparing the poster one needs to consider layout required by the organization, sometimes logotypes of collaborating institutions. It is a good habit to observe posters presented at conferences and collect hints and ideas used by colleagues, especially if some ways of presenting study results are appealing to us. The following are online references that may provide helpful advice in creating posters:


Purrington, Colin. Advice on designing scientific posters.
http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm

Scientific Poster Production Meta HOWTO. http://web.pdx.edu/~clarks/ poster.html


Design of scientific posters. http://www.writing.engr.psu.edu/posters.html
An effective poster balances figures and texts and is not a page-by-page printout of a journal paper or a slide show. Review and make the following poster preparations before the meeting:

**Planning and Layout**
- Poster dimensions should be set at 34 inches tall by 41 inches wide (this is the maximum size that the paper can accommodate.) Consider organizing illustrations and text using a grid plan. Arrange materials in columns rather than rows - this format is easier for viewers to read. Place the most significant findings at eye level immediately below the title bar; place supporting data and/or text in the lower panels.
- For conventional multi-panel posters, form five columns using poster elements printed on 11"-wide paper (or 29 to 30-cm wide A4 or B5 paper) with suitable spacing or borders. Mount materials on colored poster board. You may want to group logically consistent sections or columns of the poster on backgrounds of the same color. Use muted background colors - shades of gray are also effective.

**Title**
- Prepare a banner for the top of the poster indicating the abstract title, author(s), affiliation(s), and the session number. Use lettering at least one-inch high.

**Illustrations**
- Design figures for viewing from a distance and use clear, visible graphics and large type. Colors are effective if used sparingly; use dark colors on white or pale backgrounds and light colors on dark backgrounds. Figures should illustrate no more than one or two major points. However, simple figures are unnecessary. Make clear main points, but include detail for the aficionado. Indicate illustration sequences with numbers or letters at least one inch high. (Omit "Fig." or "Figure" - this is unnecessary and occupies excess space).

**Text**
- Each figure or table should have a heading of one or two lines in very large type stating the "take-home" message. Provide additional essential information below in a legend set in 16 point or larger type.
- Minimize narrative. Integrate text that would normally appear in the body (Results and Discussion) of a manuscript in figure legends. Concisely describe not only the content of the figure, but also the derived conclusions. Place brief details of methodology at the end of each legend.
- Use large type in short, separated paragraphs with unjustified (ragged right) margins. Numbered or bulleted lists are effective ways to convey a series of points. Do not set entire paragraphs in uppercase (all capitals) or boldface type.

Place an introduction at the upper left and a conclusion at the lower right, both in large type. It is rarely necessary to post a copy of the abstract.

One template recommended for laboratory posters is found at:

http://neocortex.med.cornell.edu/VL-Physio/sfn/Aardvark.html

*Updated 1/31/13*