

Design posters for maximum impact

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Do you want your research or program evidence to effect changes to policy and practice? How can you use posters to communicate your key messages to those who matter? How can you maximise the impact of your poster and/or poster presentation? An effective poster is **Focused, Graphic, and Ordered**¹.

Designing the poster

Focus

Focus on 1 or 2 main messages and do NOT overcrowd the poster. Keep it simple. What are the main messages you want to convey? A poster is not the medium to convey everything about your project or program.

Use a brief title: because “persuading delegates to stop and read the poster is the first step towards interaction”².

The title needs to accurately reflect the content of the poster. Be creative and capture viewer’s imaginations! A TITLE ALL IN CAPITAL CASE IS DIFFICULT TO READ. A Title Using Title Case or A title using sentence case will be easier to read.

A great poster catches your eye, and is:

- clear and simple
- easy to read
- organised with a logical flow
- relevant to viewers in its content
- taking advantage of the visual medium
- providing viewers with 1 or 2 main messages

Sub-headings should be descriptive

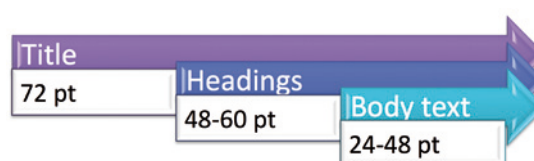
Headings are navigational tools: they help viewers to scan and identify what each section of the poster is about.

Use succinct text in ‘bite size chunks’: delegates prefer posters with less text

Keep all text (headings and body text) to a minimum. Posters are often viewed during conference breaks or during busy sessions so viewers don’t have time to read a lot. Organise text into digestible-bites using small paragraphs, bullet lists, or text boxes. Bullet lists do not always need the ‘and’s’ and ‘the’s’.

Font size? Bigger is best!

Ensure fonts are large and easy to read. The words need to be legible from 1.5 metres away. Recommended sizes: Title: 72 pt; Headings: 48-60 pt; Body text: 24-48 pt. Sans-serif fonts (without the bits on the ends) are clearer to read from a distance. Can you still read the text if you are reproducing the poster on an A4 handout?

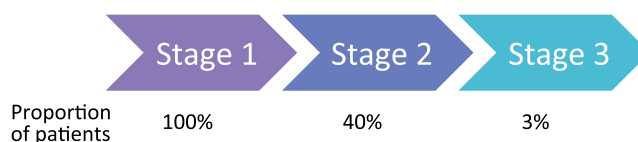


Graphic

Graphics convey your message quickly

Posters are a visual medium and should include graphics.

Graphics not only catch people’s eye and draw viewers in for a closer look... they are understood more quickly than text so are valuable tools for communication of your main messages. Use photos, cartoons, figures, tables, diagrams. Label them if necessary. Graphs and pictures are preferred to tables.



Colour also helps viewers quickly understand

	Researchers	Practitioners	Policy Advisors
Always	0%	100%	20%
Sometimes	5%	0%	15%
Rarely	5%	0%	58%
Never	90%	0%	7%

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Order

The sequence should be well-ordered and obvious. Use frames to separate figures and text.

Compulsory content

- Author's name/s
- Author's organisation/s
- Organisation's logo/s
- Contact details (website, email, phone, postal)
- Poster publication date
- Acknowledgements

Producing your poster

Make sure you follow the poster guidelines of the conference where you are presenting, acceptable poster size may vary for different conferences. You may be able to use the services of a graphic designer. Allow plenty of time for discussions about your content, the design, and agree on timelines. If not, posters can be prepared using Microsoft software such as PowerPoint or Publisher. Proofread and obtain approval from all authors before final printing. Ask someone else to proof read for you... after all your hard work, you may be 'blind' to errors.

Travelling with your poster

Carrying a poster in a poster tube may cause hassles especially on planes. Make sure your poster tube is well labelled in case of loss. New foldable fabric posters are now becoming available and can be carried in your luggage.

Take with you

- Materials to hang your poster (if required): pins, velcro dots, tape.
- A4 handouts of your poster.
- A plastic sleeve to hang your handouts up with your poster.
- Business cards to hand out.
- An electronic copy of the poster. Some conferences display the winning poster on a screen or upload an electronic copy on their website.

Conference convenors can help by:

- Grouping posters based on similar themes.
- Displaying the posters where delegates will be gathering and in well lit areas.
- Displaying posters for the duration of the conference.
- Allowing delegates enough time to view the posters.
- Planning and promoting designated times for poster viewing when authors stand by their poster.
- Awarding a prize for best poster.

Other tips to help you maximise your impact:

- If a poster prize is offered, nominate yourself (if nominations are required!).
- Display your poster at your workplace.
- The poster can travel with you to workshops etc.
- Send an electronic copy of your poster to others.
- Display your poster on your organisation's website.

Resources

Lowcay B & McIntyre E. (2005). Research posters—the way to display. *BMJ Careers* 331:S251.

Lowcay B & McIntyre E. (2006). Research posters—the way to display (2). *BMJ Careers* 332:S29.

Miller JE. (2007). Preparing and presenting effective research posters. *Health Serv Res.* Feb;42(1 Pt 1):311-28.

PHCRIS Getting Started Guides: How to... Design posters for maximum impact http://www.phcris.org.au/guides/poster_presentations.php

Rowe N, Ilic D. (2009). What impact do posters have on academic knowledge transfer? A pilot survey on author attitudes and experiences. *BMC Med Educ.* Dec 8;9:71.

References

- 1 Hess GR, Tosney K, and Liegel L. (2013) Creating Effective Poster Presentations. <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters> visited 15.01.2014 (see also videos on presenting)
- 2 Goodhand Jr, Giles CL, Wahed M, Irving PM, Langmead L, Rampton DS. (2011) Poster presentations at medical conferences: an effective way of disseminating research? *Clin Med.* Apr;11(2): 138-41.



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