

What is a conference poster and how do I make one?

There is lots of advice on what makes an effective poster presentation available on the Internet.

Here is one example, but feel free to look for alternatives.

How to Prepare a Poster

(Adapted from an article by Sven Hammarling and Nicholas J. Higham)

What Is a Poster?

A poster is very different from a paper or a talk, and so different techniques need to be used in its preparation. In particular, a poster is not a conference paper, and simply pinning a paper to a poster board usually makes a very poor poster. Poster boards are normally approximately 4 feet high and 3 feet wide, raised from the floor to be visible. A poster itself is a visual presentation comprising whatever the contributor wishes to display on the poster board. Usually, a poster is made up entirely of a single sheet of paper. This is pinned or attached with velcro strips to the board. The pins or velcro are provided with the board by the conference. The purpose of a poster is to outline a piece of work in a form that is easily assimilated and stimulates interest and discussion. The ultimate aim is a fruitful exchange of ideas between the presenters and the people reading the poster, but you should not be disappointed if readers do not stop to chat—a properly prepared poster will at least have given useful information and food for thought.

A Poster Tells a Story

In preparing a poster, simplicity is the key. A typical reader may spend only a few minutes looking at the poster, so there should be a minimum of clutter and a maximum of pithy, informative statements and attractive, enlightening graphics. A poster should tell a story. As always in an academic presentation, the broad outline includes a statement of the problem, a description of the method of attack, a presentation of results, and a summary of the work. But within that format, there is much scope for ingenuity. A question-and-answer format, for example, may be appropriate for part of the poster.

A poster should not contain a lot of details—the presenter can always communicate the fine points to interested participants. Keep in mind that the poster will be one of many in the exhibition area: you need to make sure that it will capture and hold the reader's attention. The poster should begin with a definition of the problem, together with a concise statement of the motivation for the work. It is not necessary always to write in complete sentences; sentence fragments may be easier to comprehend. Bulleted lists are effective. An alternative is to break the text into chunks—small units that are not necessarily paragraphs in the usual sense. Graphs and figures are sometimes effective, and images which are eye catching and relevant are essential. Legends should be minimal. A brief description of the implications of a graphic, placed just above or below it, is helpful.

Designing Your Poster

Suggestions on the physical design of a poster range from the obvious to the not so obvious. First, as we mentioned earlier, it is definitely unacceptable to post a copy of a paper! Microsoft Publisher 2010 is available on all university computers, but feel free to use other software if you wish.

The typeface chosen should be considerably larger than standard. Because not all readers will have perfect eyesight, and because the crowd of readers around a popular poster may be several people deep, the type should be easily readable by a person standing a few feet away. In particular, the title of the poster and the authors' names should be large and prominent. Good use can be made of colour, both to provide a more interesting image and for colour coding of the text, but do take care when choosing colour combinations. For added interest, try including appropriate cartoons, photographs, or quotations. There is plenty of scope for creativity.

For the final product, please use A1 sheets of paper (remember that for your poster exhibition, you need to have as many A1 sheets of paper as there are members in your group). However, during the preparatory stages, you can use an A3 sheet which the Print Unit can convert to A1 size. You might consider subdividing each poster into blocks of information and argument. If such information is arranged as a matrix, two layouts are possible: horizontal (reading across the rows) and vertical (reading down the columns). While the horizontal ordering is perhaps more natural, it has the potential disadvantage of requiring the reader to move to and fro along the poster; if there are many readers, congestion can result. A vertical ordering might be preferable, although other possibilities should be considered as well. If you are comparing three methodological approaches, for example, you could display them in parallel form, in three rows or columns, perhaps as a 'display within a display'. Consider the possibility of arranging the poster to represent some feature of the problem. If there is any doubt about the order in which the 'blocks' or sheets should be read, guide the reader by numbering them clearly or linking them with arrows.

Do remember that your poster exhibition is the work of your group. So, it is worth your while to co-ordinate the visual presentation of material.

In preparing your poster, please note the following points:

- A1 size posters: height 841 mm (33.1 inches), width 394 mm (23.4 inches). Please ensure that your display will fit within these parameters.
- (Examples of a poster competition held in Durham, and based on A1 can be found here: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/graduate.school/poster.competition/>).
- You are free to choose landscape or portrait orientation.
- Title should be in bold. Authors' names and e-mail addresses should be included.
- Text: a poster should be easily readable from a distance of 1 – 2 metres, and 1.5 or 2 lines of spaces should be used between each line.

It is advised that authors should also pay attention to the following points:

- Headings should be 25% larger than normal text. Bold or other colours may be used.
- The amount of text should be kept to a minimum, and each block of text should include no more than a few sentences.

- Visual impact is important and you are encouraged to include high quality colour images (a minimum of 300 dpi – please do not just copy images from the Internet) and background.
- Printing: once you have produced the final draft of your poster in A3, please either print a copy off/convert it into a pdf and take/email it to the Print Unit. It is advisable to make an appointment with the staff there beforehand. They will either approve it and print it for you or suggest alterations then approve it and print it for you.
- While you can print off as many A3 draft copies as you/the lecturer/the Print Unit consider necessary, you will only get one chance at printing off the A1 final copy.
- Whatever comes out of the printer is your conference poster and will be marked accordingly.