



Association of Leadership Educators Tips for Designing a Conference Poster

Posters are visual representations of information. Viewers can engage with the poster with or without a presenter. In sum, a poster should be simple, self-explanatory, visually appealing, and communicate your research or practice clearly.

General Tips

- A poster is *not* a paper, so keep your content simple. If viewers wish to know more information about the study or practice being presented, they'll want to talk to the presenter directly. Therefore, do not try to cram too much on to the poster.
- Choose the parts of your research or practice that are most important to share and stick to it. Typically, results/findings or outcomes are the majority of the poster.

Layout

When designing a poster, there is typically a title block, which includes the title of the project, author(s), organizational affiliation(s), and any logos. In addition, posters should have content organized left to right and top to bottom for easy readability. For quick readability, posters typically use bulleted or number lists, and defined headlines.

Sections of the poster are often similar to those included in a conference paper. Blocks for the abstract, introduction/background, description of practice/methods, outcomes/findings, discussion/analysis, and reflections/recommendations, are most often included. In addition, posters often reserve space for acknowledgements.

It is best to organize your content in three to four columns, to avoid long lines of text, which can be difficult to read. Arrange your materials in a logical progression—left to right and top to bottom—beginning with the abstract or introduction of your study or practice, and ending with references and acknowledgements.

Displaying Textual Content

Avoid the use of long, full sentences and paragraphs. Instead, employ bulleted and numbers lists, and convey the relevant information. In addition, a figure or graph may convey the information more efficiently than paragraphs.

To place emphasis on a particular piece of information, use bold or italics instead of underlining, as underlined words can be difficult to read.

Choosing a Font Typeface

Keep the font typeface as simple as possible. Avoid using more than two font types as more than that can distract the viewer. Fonts like **Arial**, **Verdana**, **Times New Roman**, and **Garamond** are popular among conference posters as they allow for easy readability.

Other commonly font types used include: **Helvetica**, **Gills Sans**, **Franklin Gothic**, **Bodoni**, and **Baskerville**.

Choosing a Font Size

The following are suggested font sizes for conference posters (MakeSigns).

For major sections of the poster:

Title: 85 pt
Authors: 56 pt
Headers: 36 pt
Body text: 24 pt
Captions: 18 pt

For legibility from a distance:

To be legible at 6 feet, use 30 pt
To be legible at 10 feet, use 48 pt

Colors & Background

Typically, posters use no more than three (3) colors on the poster, as too many colors can lead the poster to look chaotic and distract from the information you are trying to present. It is important to keep your background and your color pallet simple.

Avoid a busy background; it is recommended that backgrounds be either a solid color or a soft gradient. Do not, for example, use a full color or transparent image as the background, as it will distract from the information and make the textual content difficult to read. When choosing colors for your background, most consider a lighter color to allow for better readability. Not to mention, a darker background color may increase the cost of printing the poster.

Regardless of the background color you choose, be sure to contrast the textual content appropriately. For example, if you have a light background, use a dark color for the content; if you have a dark background, use a light color for the content. In all, the background and textual content should have high contrast.

Figures & Images

Posters are visuals, so present your information in a visual way. Figures, such as tables, graphs, or charts, or models are recommended when presenting data or information.

Ensure that the images you use on your poster are relevant to the study or practice you are presenting. For example, if you are presenting a study on leadership traits among program directors, an image of a volcano is probably not the best image to showcase.

If you decide to use images, ensure they will not appear blurry when printed on a large scale.

Logos of your organizational affiliations are highly encouraged, and should be located in your title block.

Software

When creating a conference poster, the simplest software to use is Microsoft PowerPoint.

Here some easy instructions for setting the proper dimensions for a conference poster in PowerPoint. It is important your dimensions are set appropriately, so the poster will print with correct proportions.

- Start PowerPoint and open “new presentation”
- From the menu bar, select File > Page setup.
- In the box that appears, the first section is “size.”
- Next to the heading “slides sized for,” select “custom” from the pull-down menu
- Enter dimensions (width 48”, height 36”). Click “OK.”
- You will see this prompt: “the current page size exceeds the printable area of the paper in the printer.” It will offer three options: cancel, OK, and fix. Click “OK.”
- Set the slide layout to "blank." This is done differently in different versions of PowerPoint. If you are having difficulty, type "layout" in the PowerPoint help menu, and you will find instructions on how to create or change slide layouts.
- You can look at the poster at different sizes. Using a smaller size (e.g. 25%) will allow you to see the whole poster at once. Using a larger size (e.g. 75%) will allow you to read your text more easily.

It’s not *all* about the poster!

Although the primary component of a poster presentation is, in fact, the poster itself, it is also an opportunity for the author(s) to present their findings. As a poster presenter, your job is to provide a “guided tour” of the poster, and answer any questions about the research or practice; therefore, one should dress to impress, speak clearly, and potentially use analogies to convey the information. Most importantly, as with any type of presentation, practice!

This document was adapted from:

[*Design & Design Principles: Poster Design and Layout*](#), written by staff at MakeSigns.

[*Poster Perfect: How to drive home your science with a visually pleasing poster*](#), by Edyta Zielinska at The Scientist

[*Guide to Designing & Printing a Research Poster*](#) by Dartmouth College's office of Undergraduate Advising and Research.