Visual Communication and Design

Tips for Creating an Effective Poster

A poster can be a very effective format for communication. Much like a PowerPoint slide show, a poster can compliment a research paper and serve as a forum for public presentation. Unlike PowerPoint, a poster presentation facilitates interactive communication. Information is communicated to small groups or individuals who have the opportunity to ask questions. In this regard posters serve more as a conversation format rather than a formal presentation.

Audience:

You need to determine who the audience for your poster is and the best way to grab their attention.

- *3 seconds* to stimulate interest of the audience. The first 3 seconds will determine whether or not your audience will stay to explore the content at the next stage.
- *30 seconds* to convey overall concept.
- *2-5 minutes* to provide enough information for further explanation.

Generally your audience will be made up of at least three separate groups; the general public, academics, and academics within your discipline. You should prepare at least 3 explanations of your poster targeted to the different audiences:

- *Very short* (up to a few seconds) - Come up with very few words that encapsulate what your project/poster is about. Don't just repeat the title!
- *Slightly longer* (~30 seconds) - A couple of sentences that are aimed to sell what it is you are doing and attract further interest and questions.
- *Talk/walk through* (a few minutes) - For someone who is really interested in your work, talk them through the poster, treating it as you would slides in a presentation.

Planning:

There are several things that you need to consider before you begin authoring your poster. You will need to determine the orientation of the poster (portrait or landscape) and how you will layout the information within it. Your information/graphics should have a "visual flow" that carries the viewers eye through the poster and not off the page. You want the audience to absorb the pieces of information you are presenting in the proper order. We have a tendency to read left to right, top to bottom.

You will also need to distill your research and decide which information you would like to present on your poster and what can be left out. You want to provide enough information to the audience to peak thier interest and get them to ask questions but not so much that they are overwhelmed and turned off. Focus on images, graphs, charts, visuals that are often not found in a written paper. When it comes to text, "less is more". The text should touch upon major points of interest just like the bullets in a PowerPoint slide.

Background:

The background of your poster should compliment the information on top of it, not compete with it. If your background is an image or a pattern with bright/bold colors it can be much too distracting for the viewer. It may grab the audience's attention initially, but will not keep it for very long. It is very hard to successfully use an image for the background of a poster. If you do, you need to make sure that the image is not too busy and your text boxes and graphics have a fill color behind them. The best advice for your background is to "keep it simple."
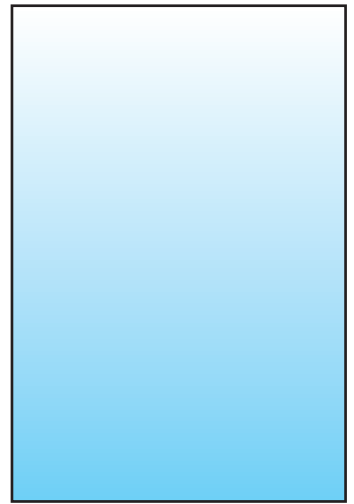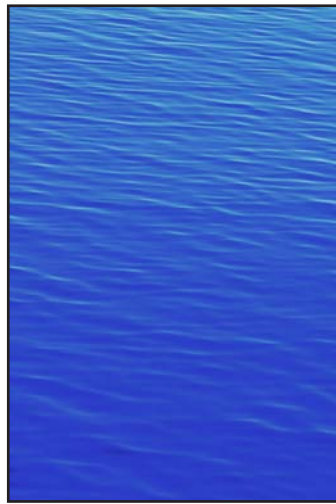
Bad Examples   Good Examples

Color:

Try to restrict the number of colors that you use in designing you poster. Your palette should not be more than 3-4 colors. Too many colors can appear distracting and unprofessional. One suggestion is to choose related colors in the same "family" or colors that compliment each other well. You could also choose a scheme of black, white and grey with one bold color added.

Color In Motion - web site on the psychology of color.
http://www.mariaclaudiacortes.com/#
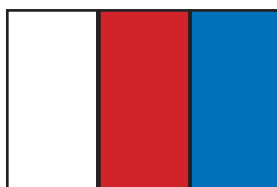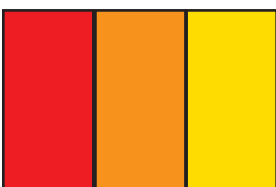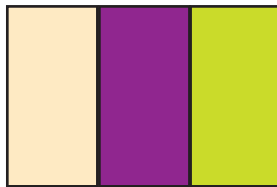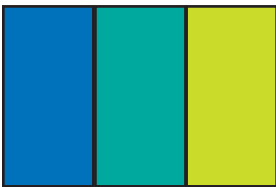
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Text:

You should not use more than 2 different fonts on your poster. Often one font is used for the title and headings and another for the body text. The title of your poster can be as big as you need it to be. You will want the title to stand out to grab the attention of the audience. The body text needs to be large enough to read standing 3 feet from the poster - no less than 24pt. The font should be attractive and easy to read. Choose from serif or sans serif fonts and stay away from ornamental fonts. Serif fonts have a more traditional look. Sans serif fonts have cleaner lines and are more modern looking. Try to avoid using WordArt. It can take away from your poster and make it look unprofessional.

Serif -	**Sans Serif -**	**Ornamentals -**
Baskerville	Arial	MESQUITE
Courier	Futura	ROSEWOOD
Georgia	Gill Sans	
Minion	Helvetica	
Times	Verdana	

**Yellow text on a white background is difficult to read.**

But, if you put a darker color behind it, you can read it.

**Bright colors with little contrast don't read well either.**

Text reads better when the background color is high in contrast.
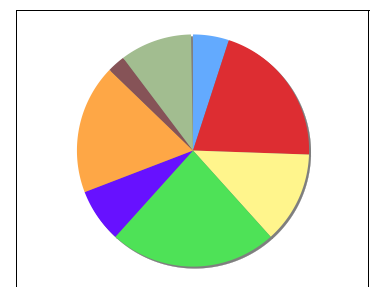
Graphs:

It is important to choose the appropriate type of graph to explain the data you have collected. There are 3 commons types of graphs; bar, line, and pie. A bar graph is used to compare values across categories. A line graph is used to display trends over time. A pie graph displays the contributions of each value to a total.
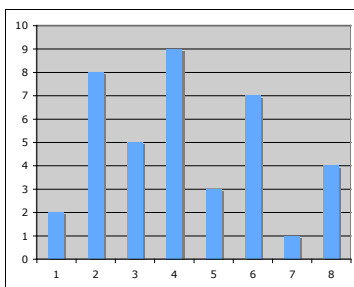
Bar Graph
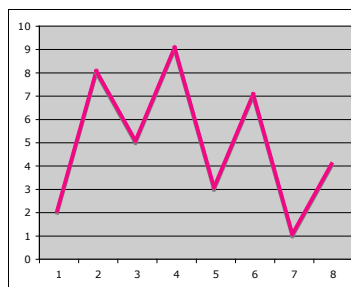
Line Graph

Pie Graph

Images:

The quality and sources of your images are very important when creating your poster. If the resolution of an image is too low, the image will appear pixilated or blurring in your poster. We recommend that the resolution of an image is at least **300dpi at 100%** of it's final size. You will not be able to just grab an image off the internet. Internet images are usually on 72dpi and very small in size. If you try to insert an image like that into your poster and enlarge it, the quality of the image will be terrible. You will most likely need to scan an image or find one from a special database.

Low Resolution

High Resolution

Along with the resolution, you also want to make sure that your images are clear and color correct. You may also wish to crop your images so there isn't excess information and you can focus on the point of interest in the image.

Original Image

Cropped & Color Corrected

Quick Tips:
- Your information should be laid out to carry the viewers eye through the poster and not off the page.
- "Less is More" - Provide enough information to the audience to peak their interest and get them to ask questions but not so much that they are overwhelmed and turned off.
- Choose a background that compliments the information on top of it and doesn't compete with it.
- Restrict your palette to 3-4 colors.
- You should not use more than 2 different fonts on your poster. Be mindful of color contrasts of text on the background.
- The quality of images are very important. The resolution of an image is at least **300dpi at 100%** of it's final size.
- Make sure images are properly aligned & distributed in the frame of the poster.

Try to Avoid:
- Too much text.
- Bright/Busy backgrounds.
- Too many colors.
- A title that is not prominent enough or text that is not contrasted enough with the background.
- Hard to read fonts and WordArt.
- Low resolution images and ClipArt.

Additional Information:
Color in Motion
http://www.mariaclaudiacortes.com/#

Stanford University
http://www.stanford.edu/dept/undergrad/urp/SURP/posterT.html

University College Cork
http://www.ucc.ie/research/stars/poster.html