The Basics of Poster Presentations

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What is a poster presentation?

Technical poster:
A large visual communications tool

Poster session:
Informal, visual, interactive forum
Advantages of a poster presentation

• Personal interaction
  ▪ Poster = conversation starter
  ▪ One-on-one or small group discussions

• Customized dissemination
  ▪ Viewer can go forwards and backwards through the poster
  ▪ Poster attracts audience that is really interested in your work

• Broader reach
  ▪ Viewing period is longer than that of a scheduled talk
  ▪ Your main point(s) can be conveyed to many people
The first steps

• Read the instructions
  ▪ Usually supplied by the session organizers

• Define your message
  ▪ Determine the essential idea/concept/message
  ▪ Stay focused on message
  ▪ Eliminate extraneous details

• Know your audience
  ▪ Provide context for the work
  ▪ Avoid acronyms and jargon (use plain English)
  ▪ Interpret your work (explain significance)
An effective poster is…

• **Not** a standard research paper or design report stuck to a board

• A poster uses a different, visual grammar.

  It shows, not tells.
Poster layout

- Organize content so that the reader can easily navigate

- Use an easy-to-follow sequence for clarity
  - Organize material into sections
  - Determine a logical sequence
  - Use numbers to help order the sections

- Use headings to orient readers and convey major points
Layout: balance and space

Horizontal Symmetry

Horizontal & Vertical Symmetry

Diagonal Symmetry

Asymmetry
(text-heavy on left, image-heavy on right)
Poster layout and design: graphics

• Reasons to use illustrations, photographs, charts, graphs:
  ▪ Increase audience interest
  ▪ Increase understanding
  ▪ Enhance retention
  ▪ Increase efficiency

• Before using graphics, ask these questions:
  ▪ Is it relevant?
  ▪ Does it add information?
  ▪ Is it clear and easy to understand?
Poster layout and design: color

• Stick to a theme of 2 or 3 colors
  - much more will overload and confuse viewers

• Use a light background and dark letters for contrast
  - dark backgrounds with light letters are very tiring to read

• Avoid overly bright colors
  - they will attract attention - and then wear out readers' eyes

• Consider people who have problems differentiating colors
  - common problem: inability to distinguish between green and red
Poster text

Title:
• Limit to one or two lines
• Use "sentence case" – do not capitalize every word

Section headings:
• Format headings with larger font size than main text
• Do not "bullet" or otherwise punctuate

Supporting text:
• Use left-justification
• Use short sentences, simple words, and/or bullets
• **Sans serif** fonts are easiest to read
  - Arial, Calibri, Verdana, *Comic Sans MS*, Century Gothic

• Use one font throughout the poster
  - Use **bold**, underlining or **color** for emphasis
  - *Italicized text is difficult to read*

• Example fonts and sizes for 3' x 5' poster
  - Title – Arial, Boldface, 80 point
  - Headings - Arial, Boldface, 48 point
  - Supporting text (main points, figure captions, etc.) - Arial, 24 point
An effective poster...

• Avoids visual chaos (distracts the viewer)
  ▪ No jagged edges
  ▪ No major variations in sizes of boxes, columns, etc.

• Guides the viewer by using a visual logic
  ▪ Structure emphasizes the main points

• Has all elements visible from several feet away

• Displays the essential content in the title, the most prominent text, and graphics
Presenting your poster

• Be prepared to give…
  ▪ a concise, informative 5- to 10-minute "tour" to the most interested viewers
  ▪ a brief overview (no more than a few minutes) to the casual viewer

• Don’t read!
  ▪ Use the poster as a visual aid
  ▪ Point to particularly interesting features

• Answer questions
  ▪ Take advantage of the interactive format
Engaging your viewers

- Allow a few moments (read/process information)

- Give an **Invitation**
  - Offer to guide them through the poster

- **vs. a Dead-end**
  - Even if interested in your project, viewers might not have had time to come up with questions… so **do not** ask:

  “Hello. Thanks for stopping to view my poster. Would you like a guided tour of my research/design project?”

  “Uhhh… Do you have any questions?”
References and credits

• UW Writing Center
  http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/presentations_poster.html
  http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/NewSite/ [Accessed October 2008.]
• K. Tosney, “How to create a poster that graphically communicates your message” [Online]. Available: