

## Creating an Academic Poster

The following was developed by the Centre for Academic Communication, University of Victoria. Thank you for sharing.

### Poster basics

- Posters are a great way to communicate your research at a conference and allow you to interact with colleagues 1:1
- Posters look different in different disciplines. Some disciplines ask that posters stand on their own, so the text is denser; for other disciplines, posters should be more aesthetically pleasing and have a balance of information and visuals. The difference is essentially whether your poster is hosted, meaning you will be there to explain it and take colleagues to greater depths of understanding about your research, or if it will be simply tacked up in a room where people wander and read posters on their own. Sometimes, posters serve both duties. If you are unsure what your poster should look like for your discipline, use Google Images to take a look at some samples and decide which one(s) you like best
- Posters take about 3-5 hours to complete. If you take it on a thumb drive to Blink, located in the basement of the Bookstore, Nick can give you feedback and show you your poster on a bigger screen. Because Nick is a graphic designer, he has a really great eye and can better predict how your poster will look when printed

### What to include

- Message: What exactly are you trying to convey? It's worth the time to distill your research and findings into a key message and focus your poster on communicating that. Just like a peer-reviewed article or conference presentation, it's impossible to include all aspects of your project in a poster. Choose carefully what it is you want your colleagues to know.

<http://guides.nyu.edu/posters> suggests you answer these three questions before getting started

1. What is the most important/interesting/astounding finding from my research project?
2. How can I visually share my research with conference attendees? Should I use charts, graphs, photos, images?
3. What kind of information can I convey during my talk that will complement my poster?

- Audience: Determine if your poster will be used at multiple events or at one. For each event, think about who will be seeing your poster. This will help you determine how much background and specialist information to include.
- The usual categories of information are usually:
  - o title (brief and catchy can work well)
  - o introduction or context (but no abstract – the poster is in itself an abstract of your research)
  - o materials/methods/theory
  - o results
  - o conclusions
  - o citations

- acknowledgments, including of awards received for this project, and disclosures of conflict of interest, etc.
- institutional affiliation and contact information

For posters that are communicating research that is less scientific and more Humanities or Arts-focused, play with these elements to see what works best for you. There is no set poster script for these kinds of posters, which means you can use your creativity to convey your message.

- Try to balance, or at least supplement, text with graphs, charts, images, etc.
- (JCURA students can have up to \$100 of the poster printing costs reimbursed by their Department)

### Poster software and templates

- Find out what the size requirements are of the conference you are attending. At UVic, for the JCURA Fair, students can produce a 4' x 4' poster, but other conferences will limit poster space to 4' x 3'
- You have software options for creating your poster. Start and complete the poster on the same system with the same software, to avoid compatibility issues
  - PowerPoint (there are [free poster templates](#))
  - Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop and InDesign: these are not free and have a steeper learning curve
- Information flows from left to right, down columns
- (JCURA students should put in a corner of their poster their name, department, date of poster production, the name of their supervisor, and an acknowledgement of funding received, including the JCURA award)

### How to make it – nuts and bolts

- It should be readable from 6' away, and be concise and attractive. Your title should be readable at a distance of 10'
- Black text on a lighter background is the easiest to read for all people
- Use a serif font (e.g. Times New Roman) instead of a non-serif font (e.g. Helvetica), because your poster will be easier to read. Avoid using multiple fonts and ornate fonts
- Body text should be around 30 or 32 point at a minimum
- Think about what information can be displayed graphically instead of textually
- Provide captions for your graphics
- Avoid taking images from the internet because their quality is usually too low to be printed so large. There's also a copyright issue
- Save as a JPEG to print. It's easiest to print at Blink so you can have Nick's help

### Canadian Copyright Act

- Note that the [Canadian Copyright Act](#) changed in 2012. Now, if you are going to share your poster electronically, e.g. put it on your website or submit it to an online collection, you must ensure that all aspects of your poster follow Copyright Law.
- If you are going to use images from the internet, you should use images that have a Creative Commons license, e.g. Pixabay. Cite where the image comes from and the kind of license it has
- If you use your own images, provide copyright information: the year it was taken or produced, and your name
- For other images, see the Canadian Copyright Act to understand your responsibilities, what is usable, and how to cite certain usable images

- If you have sensitive data on your poster, you will want to ensure that no images are taken of your poster and that it is not shared online

### Speaking to your poster

- Practice speaking to your poster just like you would for other conference presentation styles. Focus on the key message, why your research is important and interesting, and what you see as the next steps.
- Prepare for questions by imagining what you could be asked by experts and non-experts
- Do not use notes when explaining your poster and face your colleagues when speaking about your poster
- If more colleagues arrive when you're halfway through your mini-talk, welcome them and keep going with your talk. You can start at the beginning for the second group once you've finished.
- Think hard about whether you want your poster photographed. Do you have unpublished data? What would happen if your data appeared out of context on the internet? If you don't want to be photographed, or have your poster photographed, attach a "Please do not photograph" note on your poster. This will keep your work from being photographed when you have run to the washroom or to grab a coffee.
- Think about how to use the space in front of your poster, if you have table space (the conference organizer can tell you). Objects attract people and you may find a way to walk them through a portion of your experiment. Or, you may want to offer handouts and candy. Maybe you could put some of your business cards or contact sheets on the table so people can follow up with you and your research
- Thank people for visiting you and your poster

### Some excellent suggestions:

<http://colinpurrington.com/tips/poster-design>

1. Never display two-dimensional data in 3-D. Three-dimensional graphs look adorable but obscure true difference among bar heights. 3-D graphs belong in *Time* magazine and 1st grade. Again, if you know anyone on a software design group that makes 3-D bar graphs the default output, make them suffer. They make the world suffer, so they deserve whatever you can dream up.
2. Make sure that details on graphs and photographs can be comfortably viewed from 6 feet away. A common mistake is to assume that axes labels, figure legends, and numbers on axes are somehow exempt from font-size guidelines. The truth is that the majority of viewers want to read *only* your figures.
3. If you include a photograph, add a thin gray or black border to make it more visually appealing.
4. Give the source for any image that is not yours. And only use an image (illustration, photograph, etc.) that is *fully* public domain. When in doubt, ask the author/photographer/illustrator for permission. Or buy it.
5. If you can't find the perfect illustration or photograph, get one made — you can use it in multiple posters, future talks, and even in that great article you're writing for *National Geographic*. There are lots of illustrators and photographers out there for hiring.
6. Don't clutter the top of your poster with logos. If you are required by your mentor to include logos on your poster, put them on the bottom of the poster and make them small.

7. If your topic is related to an audio subject, attach a sound device that contains your sound (bird calls, engine rattle, etc.). A cheap “sound postcard” will often do the trick. Just fill the picture frame with an illustration of the sound-generating organ or machine, and indicate where on the photograph the viewer should press to activate the sound.
8. If you wish to show a whole bunch of photographs, buy a cheap digital photo frame and attach it with Velcro next to some text that tells viewers how to operate the device, and what the photographs are. Or use an iPod. Or use your iPad. Works for showing movies, too. If you have a critical movie, put it online, too, and print the QR code on the poster site underneath where the iPad will be attached...then you can remove the iPad when you’re not around to police it.
9. If your topic is related to olfaction, make sure that one of your figures is a scratch-n-sniff. FYI, you can even buy printer inks that are laced with common smells (how about fresh cut grass for a poster on grazing effects??). You can also buy “odor bags” (yes, that’s what they’re called) to trap odors for later use...just attach them to your poster with instructions.
10. If your topic is related to a thing or object, attach the darn thing to your poster. Use 3M removable tape (or equivalent) if you want to minimize damage to underlying poster paper. You can also use two magnets, depending on your object and the thickness of your poster board (you attach the second magnet on the back of the poster). Attaching an object will increase visitor traffic by at least 20% (I’m making that up, but I’m sure it’s measurable).
11. Use gentle, removable tape to add a transparency sheet over a graph or photograph if you want to make non-permanent doodles with Dry-Erase markers.