

Designing a Scientific Conference Poster

Many consider the scientific conference poster to be an illustrated abstract: the poster is a visually appealing way to convey the main idea of your research to your audience with helpful graphs and charts.

Include the sections of an IMRD report

- **IMRD:** Think of the scientific poster as an abridged version of your research paper, with parts of all the major sections intact- Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion. You can break these sections into smaller sections as well (for instance, the introduction could be broken into background, motivation and research objective/goal). *See IMRD handout.*
- **Other sections:** Be sure to include contact info., acknowledgments, and references, if applicable.

Make your poster “skimmable”

People should be able to easily navigate sections and quickly identify the most important information.

- **Headings:** Guide your audience with headings and subheadings that reveal the content of your project (for instance, “longer passwords were found to be more secure” instead of just “Finding 1”).
- **Information hierarchy:** Emphasize important information by making it stand out through bigger or bolder text. Note: all your text should be large enough to be readable.
- **Bullet points:** Use bullet points, not complete paragraphs for a “skimmable” poster
- **Order:** Remember that people read top-to-bottom and left-to-right when arranging the order.
- **White space:** White space is any space on your poster that is not taken up by text. If your poster is too busy, no one knows what to look at, so try to include as much white space as possible on your poster. Approximately 40% of your poster should be “white space.”
- **Borders:** adding a border around a graph or filling-in a text box with color signals to your audience that’s where they should be looking.

Visuals

- **Graphs and figures:** Visualized data makes it easy for an audience to “digest” the major trends or patterns in your data. Use visuals to highlight important findings or methodologies.
- **Colors:** Be conservative with the use of your colors. Using 2 to 3 colors should usually be enough to add interest (dark type on light backdrop is easier to read than the reverse).
- **Visuals with purpose:** Since space is limited, avoid purely decorative images.
- **Layout:** Don’t overload your visuals into one column or part of the poster; what you have will seem lopsided and it draws the attention away from everything else.

Presenting a Poster

- **Practice your “elevator pitch” for your poster.** You should anticipate that people will come up to you and ask you to verbalize the gist of, or guide them through, your poster.
- With advanced notice, the GCC can project your poster on our flat screen monitor so you can practice your poster presentation with a realistically sized visual.

Drafting your poster/ material concerns:

- **Size:** Keep in mind the size specifications of your conference and design your poster accordingly
- **Design Software:** Many people use PowerPoint to create their poster. If you have the software available to you, feel free to use InDesign or Adobe Illustrator. The colors will be more true-to-life and, if you have the know-how, you can better play with your section-layout options.
- If you can, print some smaller-sized copies of your poster (like you did for your draft) and hand them out to interested people at the conference.

Sample poster design

