

How to Make a Scientific Poster – A Tip Sheet

Sarah Slocum, MD, and Jennifer Erickson, DO

On behalf of the ACLP Education Committee and Oral Papers & Posters Subcommittee

There are many ways to organize a scientific poster. Three variations will be presented here. While strong and effective posters can take different forms, they all have common features and they avoid common pitfalls.

The ideal academic poster should be strong in **three areas**. It should be able to:

1. Maximize insight: the poster should disseminate the basic information (the "take home" point) without too much distraction or content that is overly time-consuming to read, interpret, and digest
2. Encourage selective engagement: offer opportunity for deep-dives into the material, based on the interest of the meeting-goer, and for stimulating conversations between poster presenters and meeting-goers
3. Be user-friendly for the poster presenter: the poster is not overly time-consuming to make; poster *facilitates* the presentation, without too many props or memorizing

Regardless of how you organize your poster, follow these **key tips and principles** that are true for all effective posters:

- Ensure you know the poster requirements for the conference! Size, template requirements, upload requirements, when to hang posters
- Do NOT try to write a paper on your poster
 - Visual flow is important
 - Use bullet points as much as possible
 - You, the *poster presenter* – not the poster, itself – should be the source of much of the detailed content. Be able to speak in an informed way about the material that is summarized and referred to, on the poster; the ideal poster has limited content that sparks additional questions from the reader, which the poster presenter can then address
 - If helpful, bring notes or supplemental material to help you fill in the gaps of what is not included on the poster; have a way to offer this additional information to your reader if requested (as print-outs, or a link to material, such as a QR code – see below)
- The text should be legible at a distance
- Use images in place of text when possible
- Keep the background light and neutral
- Use white spaces strategically as place for eye to rest and to minimize a cluttered appearance; can use images for this, too
- Make sure you **edit!**
- Be at your poster during the session, dressed appropriately, and bring business cards if you have them
- **Discuss choice of template with the rest of your team, including any mentors/supervisors before making a final decision** (save yourself some time up front!)

Option 1: Standard Format

- Main sections:
 - title, authors and institution(s)
 - introduction
 - methods (if relevant; for Case Reports, this section may instead include information about the Case)
 - results
 - discussion +/- conclusions (don't waste space with a conclusions section if you are only repeating what you have already written – include if you have formulated a useful summary that adds meaningfully to the communication of the poster)
 - acknowledgements (if relevant)
 - references.
- Overview paper: Singh M K. Preparing and presenting effective abstracts and and posters in psychiatry. *Acad Psychiatry*. 2014 December; 38(6): 709–715.
- Example poster designed by Janna Gordon-Elliott, MD

The poster template is enclosed in a light green border. At the top, there are two blue boxes for logos: 'Logo 1' on the left and 'Logo 2 (if applicable)' on the right. In the center, the title 'Snappy Title of Poster' is displayed in a large, dark green font, with the authors 'Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, Author 4...' listed below it in a smaller, dark green font. The main content area is divided into several sections, each with a light green header box. On the left side, there are two sections: 'Background & significance' and 'Case/Methods', both containing bulleted lists of advice. In the center, there are two large light green boxes: the top one is for 'Visual material' and the bottom one is for 'Other visual material, or other meaningful use of this space'. On the right side, there are two sections: 'Discussion' and 'References', both containing bulleted lists of advice. The text is primarily in black, with some key phrases in bold or italics.

Logo 1

Snappy Title of Poster
Author 1, Author 2, Author 3, Author 4...

Logo 2
(if applicable)

Background & significance

- Bullet point
- Bullet point
- Another bullet point
- And more bullets
- Make sure text is readable!!

Case/Methods

- And more bullet points
- We love bullet points
- Simple language
- Phrases over full sentences
- Include the most important information only
- You can do this!!!

Visual material:
Could be a table, graph, chart, image, or another pictorial way of illustrating the content.

****Don't use unnecessary visuals just for the sake of having them (e.g., don't put a huge image of a brain with a lesion like the one you're describing unless it really helps the point you are making**

Other visual material, or other meaningful use of this space (e.g., large print that succinctly states your CONCLUSIONS).

Discussion

- Yep, more bullet points!
- Don't just copy and paste your abstract...
- Rewrite in very succinct points...
- **ONLY** include what is most important and **SELLS YOUR POINT OF VIEW**
- Really – less is more!
- We promise!!

References

- Reference 1
- Reference 2
- Reference 3
- Maybe a couple more
- Here – and only here – text can be quite small

Option 2: Alternative Format, using *progressive disclosure*

- **Minimalism is the strength!**
- One main, central section which summarizes the results of the poster. This should be **ideally one sentence, in plain language, and be in the biggest font**. A link via QR code* can provide a link to additional information if warranted.
- Side bar(s) on left and/or right displays title, authors, intro, methods, and results concisely.
- See article here: https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/06/11/729314248/to-save-the-science-poster-researchers-want-to-kill-it-and-start-over?fbclid=IwAR35y75vM_caQn5X24ubDEiZHICBApfMgnQLfqZd7pzBShRTztoaRLusKTo
- This method prioritizes what people NEED TO KNOW. Figure this part out first, and include this in your large text box. This is your “take home” message.
- Include what is NICE TO KNOW after that – if it meaningfully supports your “take home” message (this could include a brief summary of data, an important graph, etc.).
- Include easy access to a deeper dive, such as a QR code that links to the paper you have written, or (if no paper) a summary you can write to go into more detail about your project or case.
- Figure by Sarah Slocum, MD

Title

Authors/Affiliations

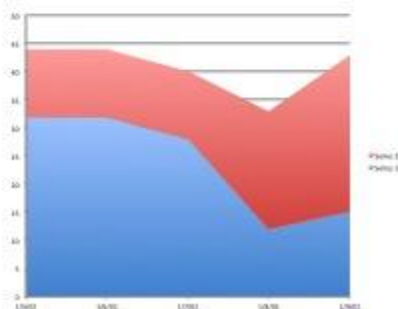
Intro



Methods



Results



Big, important,
single-sentence
with the take-
home message.

QR
Code

*There are various QR Code generators that can be found online. You can link to a cloud-based document through a URL, or to a PDF document. Many programs are free, but those programs that allow links to PDF documents may have subscription fees.

Option 3: Hybrid Format

- While the poster example for the Alternative Format, above, is an extreme version, a reasonable option could be a template that involves the standard poster template on the **left** (i.e., background/significance, methods or case, results, discussion/conclusions, references), “take home” message and a QR code in the **middle**, and tables, figures and any additional data on the **right**.
- While some of the text and graphics may be small (thus, breaking the “principle” of being legible from a distance), the Alternative and Hybrid Formats allow for the attention of meeting-goers to be captured by your “take home” message as they walk by – in its big and bold central location; then, intrigued, they can come closer to look at the details and to ask you for more information, which you can provide.
- Figure designed by Mike Morrison, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/06/24/theres-movement-better-scientific-posters-are-they-really-better>

Title

Authors

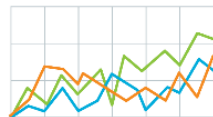
Intro



Methods

1. [Bar]
2. [Bar]
3. [Bar]
4. [Bar]

Results



Discussion

More research is needed, but...



Main finding goes here,
translated into **plain english**.
Emphasize the important
words.



Take a picture to
download the full paper

Extra Tables & Figures

