Elements for Good Design of a Scientific Poster for Presentation at Conferences

A graphic artist's guide for making a good poster presentation, revised by E.D. Guillot 072612
(This article has been based on an article by Kendall Powel, Nature 483:113-115 2012.)

Write your abstract concisely: conference attendees will identify the posters they want to visit from the abstract book.

Choose landscape (horizontal) over portrait (vertical) orientations. Portrait is hard to read at the bottom of the page. If you have to use portrait, try to make any figures at the bottom large images without a lot of text.

Follow the instructions the conference posts on the website. Make sure you allow for white space and large fonts and images. White space is your friend.

> *The eye needs a place to rest while the brain processes the info it has received before going on to the next item on your poster.*

Make the title the punch line of the research and make the font bold. Images from your research or school logos are appropriate as are QR codes with embedded v-card info. If you must have some color, use the space behind the title block as a place to put color.

KISS: (keep it simple stupid) Use photographs, cartoons or illustrations to explain concepts. Limit the word count to what is necessary to make your point. Less is more in a poster. Ideally you want people to be able to "read" the illustration. If you have graphs choose a bar color that will stand out and is compatible with the color scheme you have chosen, no shadows and no lines across the entire graph, at least 18 points for the type, again white space is your friend.

The world speaks in Sans-Serif fonts: Titles (72 points) *Names* (58 points) and *Institutions* (36 points) and *Figure Headings* (36 points) should be in a sans-serif font, such as **Helvetica**, **Ariel**, **Century Gothic** or **Calibri** (this document), and *Body Copy* should be at least 18-24 points. Sans-Serif fonts are much easier to read from a distance, that is why they are used for highway signs. You will notice that there are big differences in the fonts. Calibri takes up the least amount of space at 11 points whereas the other three in bold above take up quite a bit of space but they are easier to read especially Century Gothic. If you must use more than one font, choose from the same style, i.e. Sans-serif and don't use more than 2. For symbols, use symbol font. Use upper and lower case as this is proven to be much easier to read.

Use black text on a white background. Colored text can be used to draw attention to specific points, but avoid light pastels and yellows, which are hard to read even when bolder and at a larger point size.

We read by contrast, not by color.

If you use a light color, make the text dark and vice versa. Do not use a busy background. This isn't fine art, it is communication. A good designer doesn't muck up the communication.

Place figures in an obvious order using a number or letter system. Figures should have a large headline (36 pts.) with the main finding. Figure titles should be short declarative sentences. For example, *"Aspirin Prevents Pain by Blocking the COX-2 Receptor"*. If you want color, use the same family as you used for the space behind your title. Be consistent. *See page 2 for a sample layout (includes greeking).*

I personally don't like things boxed in. This interferes with the flow of white space. If you must box, use hairlines (1/2-.75 pt.) and not heavy lines.

Use color photographs whenever possible. Some of the micrograph images I see here at LSU are absolutely beautiful and at a large size will draw the eye in. Put the conclusion of your argument as the last figure and that will bring you into the conclusions section of your poster.

Use short bullet points for methods and conclusions. Use a compatible color for the bullets to make them stand out. Don't forget the *References* and *Acknowledgments* sections. These should be the last two headings in your poster.

Run spell-check and grammar check, fix the errors then have someone else proofread all the text again. Check it one more time before you print it out or have it printed.

Our minds make it right when we are reading. It is second nature so most of us are unaware of it. The best graphic designer in the world has had a job run with a misprint and had to redo the job. You can't check spelling and grammar too much before going to print. Use Microsoft Word to type in your text as the software has a pretty good engine for spelling and grammar.

Check the poster on a computer screen at 100%, then step back 36 inches from the screen. Is your text legible? Most people will stand 24 to 36 inches away from the poster when you are presenting it. (Americans like 36 inches, Europeans stand a bit closer.)

Bring a fine marker and some white correction tape with you in case something is missed and the fix is an easy one.

Enjoy yourself and be relaxed, allow viewers to ask questions and be polite when answering, always ask for business cards and have yours with you to give out. Taking small printed versions of your poster with your contact info on it is another great way to network.

QR code v-card

Title

Names
Institutions

Abstract

body copy
skjdhflskdjfhalsdkjflasfjladfjkaslkjflasfj
dkjfsaldkfjsdfa sdofsadjkfhlasldkjkjflasff
kfhlaskdjfhlasdfhsladkjfhasldkkjflasff
ha'faksdfkljasdhflkjasdffasaagdskjflasfjdf
saksdfkljasdhflkjasdffasaagdskjflasfjdf
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ruy czgfdasrsb adadfgsdfgsdfhkjflasfj

Methods

body copy
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ha'faksdfkljasdhflkjasdffasaagdskjflasfj
saksdfkljasdhflkjasdffasaagdskjflasfjdf
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ruy czgfdasrsb adadfgsdfgsdfhkjflasfj

Results

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ha'faksdfkljasdhflkjasdffasaagdskjflasfj
saksdfkljasdhflkjasdffasaagdskjflasfjdf
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ruy czgfdasrsb adadfgsdfgsdfhkjflasfj

Fig 1 Title

body copy
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Fig 2 Title

Fig 3 Title

body copy
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ffasaagdkjflasfjsaksdfkljasdhflkjasdffasaagdskjflasfjdfrgfsddfgshtyut
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body copy
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Fig 4 Title

Fig 5 Title

body copy
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Fig 6 Title

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Fig 7 Title

body copy
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Conculsions

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- ffasaagdkjflasfjsaksdfkljasdhflkjasd

- tyjfghnvsdhetrukjflasfjdfruy czgfda

References

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Acknowledgments