

Effective Poster Presentations Information

This information and hints are useful for presenting at the SPUR or other conferences. Where applicable, specific guidelines for the SPUR have been added. These hints have been prepared by Benedict Kolber, Department of Neuroscience.

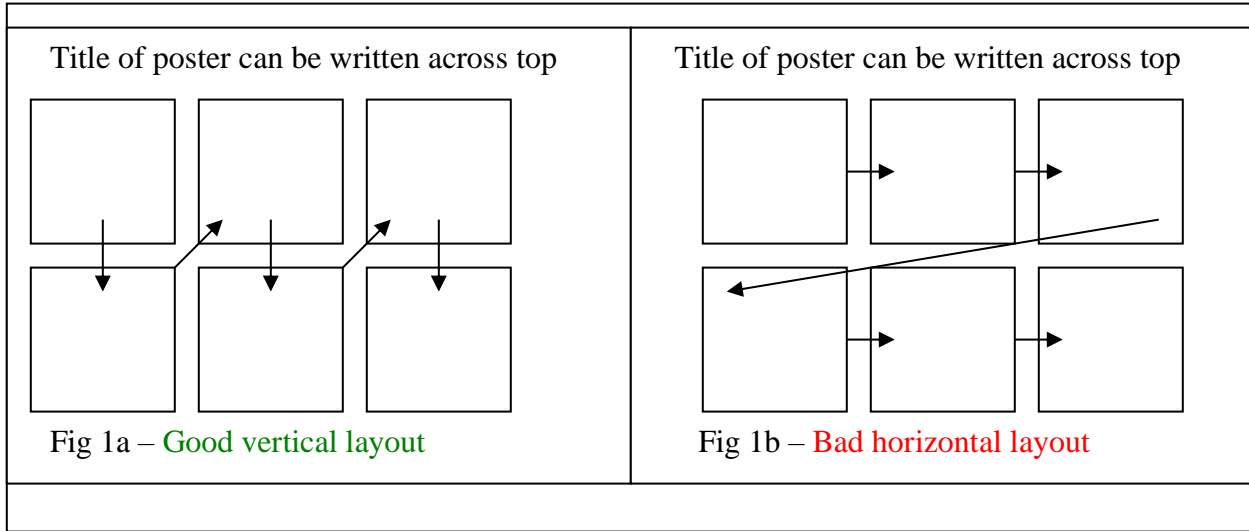
Before you start laying out poster:

- Identify your audience.
- Identify the goal of the presentation.
 - A major goal of a poster is to have a verbal dialogue with your colleagues. This includes talking specifically about your data and more broadly introducing yourself to people in your field.
(hint: the goal is not to show how much work that you have done)
(hint: a poster has a lot less information on it than an article)
- Identify your main take-home point(s).
- Determine whether you are going to be standing in front of the poster the entire time it is up (and open to the public) or whether you will only be there during your assigned time.
 - If you won't be at the poster the whole time it is up, then you may want to consider adding slightly more textual descriptions of the data. Otherwise, you can leave out some details assuming that you will be there to go over those details. If given the option, you should ALWAYS stand by your poster the entire time.

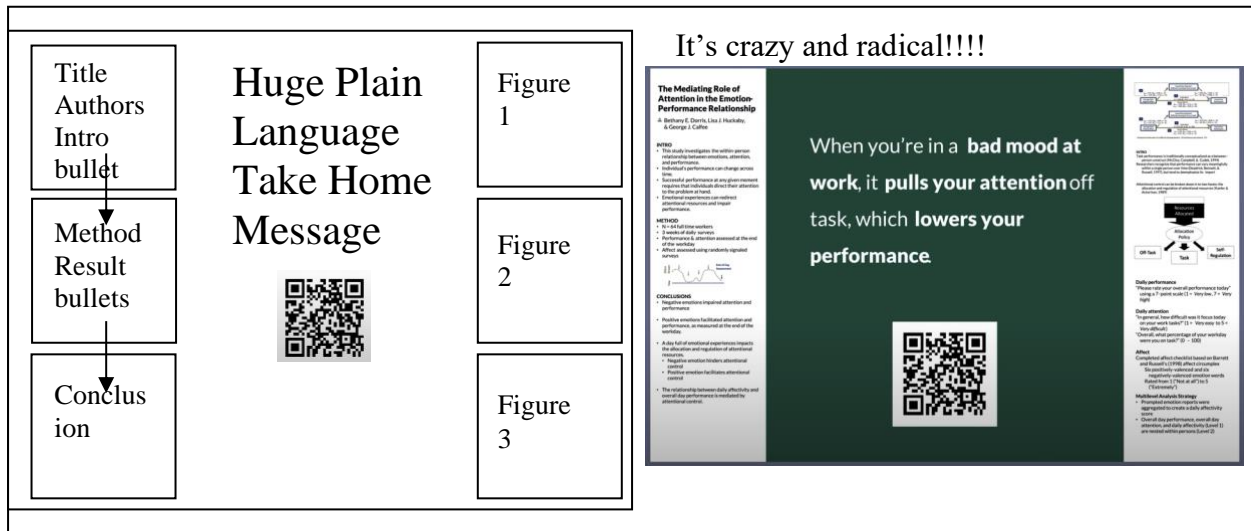
Laying out the poster:

- Find out the poster board size from the hosting organization. Consider subtracting as much as 6 inches from the horizontal dimension (do this so that your poster does not overlap with the adjacent posters and so that you have someplace to stand while the audience is reading). Insert this number in the page setup of your favorite template. Subtract at least 3 inches from the vertical dimension in case there is a border. (Note: For the SPUR, you have 48" of horizontal space for your poster so the max width of the printed poster should be 44" to give some room on either side of the poster).
- Lab templates – Many labs or faculty have a standard template which gives a visual identification linking together the lab's different posters at a conference. It is a form of branding.
- Good programs for laying out a poster (presented in my order of preference):
 - Adobe Illustrator
 - Pro: Vector based graphics mean that any images/text created in illustrator will scale without losing any resolution; Illustrator provides decimal point precision for aligning objects; files can easily be saved as PDF.
 - Con: Illustrator is expensive and you may not have access to it.
 - Adobe In-design
 - Pro: Basically exactly the same as Illustrator. The major difference is that In-design is built to do multiple pages (e.g. if you were printing a newspaper). In-design is also slightly easier to import images into and has better clipping options than illustrator.
 - Con: Same as Illustrator. Expensive.
 - Powerpoint or Keynote

- Pro: Easily available programs that most people know how to use.
 - Con: When scaling a normal powerpoint file (11x8”) to poster size you can often get pixilated text and figures. So, be sure you change the page setup before you start your poster. If you don’t save the file as a PDF there can be major compatibility issues between your copy and the printer’s (e.g. Kinkos) copy. Many versions of these programs have easy alignment functions but they don’t have the accuracy or precision of Illustrator or In-Design.
- Physical layout: Information should be read in vertical columns (see Fig 1a) not in horizontal rows (see Fig 1b)



- Radical Change Idea to Layout (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RwJbhkCA58>)



- Title: Use an interesting title that provides enough information to attract both experts and non-experts. Avoid jargon and acronyms if possible.
 - Authors: Be sure to acknowledge those that helped with the project. In addition, be sure to acknowledge your association with your university/major/department/etc (e.g. I put down University of Texas at Dallas, Department of Neuroscience and Center for Advanced Pain Studies)
 - Note: Authorship on a poster does not guarantee authorship on a paper

- The poster should tell a story:
 - Should you include the abstract? NO (it is too much text for a poster; at most meetings the abstract is published elsewhere; Exception – Abstract is sometimes required to be on poster)
 - Introduction: Introduce topic, hypothesis and overall rationale in the “Introduction” paragraph.
 - Consider using shortened sentences and/or bullet points (font should be bigger than 30 pt. Arial)
 - You don’t have to review the entire relevant literature. Summarize main points and reduce the amount of text as much as possible.
 - Avoid, if possible, complicated jargon, equations, lists and tables.
 - If people have additional questions, they can ask you.
 - Results
 - Think about 1 or 2 key take-home messages that you want to get across. Think of the figures that will take you to this message (think about using 3-6 figures max).
 - Each figure should be as least complicated as possible (ie few words, optimally laid out, easy to see colors).
 - Include a title for each figure that describes experiment (<10 words).
 - Include a smaller take-home message below the figure that describes results of figure (<10 words).
 - You can also include a smaller font paragraph that provides additional descriptions (# of subjects, specific methods, etc).
 - Conclusion
 - Again, utilize bullet points to get across your main points.
 - Use a large font.
 - Acknowledgements (they’re free!!!)
 - Definitely put on poster.
 - Be sure to include contributors (not listed as authors) and any funding agencies (the NSF/NIH/DoD and foundations like to see grant numbers).
 - Be sure to include your lab website (I include the Kolber lab website “www.kolberlab.com” and sometimes my QR code for the website).
 - References
 - Be sure to include if you discuss specific results in the introduction.
 - Use a small font for reference (15-20 pt Arial).

Before printing your poster:

- Carefully copy edit the poster. It is very easy to miss small spelling and grammatical spaces.
- Use a “Select All” function in the software that you used to design the poster. This will help you find stray items that were accidentally added. Some of these (like a “period”) might be too small to really see until the poster is printed at size.
- Have all of the authors review the poster prior to printing.

Oral presentation of the poster:

- You should have a 30” pitch, 2’ pitch, a 5’ pitch and a 10’ pitch prepared and practiced. (note: the audience will likely stop you for questions so even a 2’ pitch might take 3’ or more)

- You can actually ask the person what they want to hear! Don't assume that they want to spend the next 60 minutes with you.

The day of the presentation:

- Dress appropriately and professionally (You are representing yourself, your fellow authors and your university).
- Put your poster up on time.
- Be on time to present your poster. If you can't be at your poster during your assigned time, try to get a co-author to help out.
- Have a piece of paper to write down who comes by your poster. This is a good way to identify future reviewers, competitors, and employers.
- Don't be too pushy. Let the audience read. You can say something like "Hello, let me know if you have any questions or would like me to take you through the poster."
- If the person wants you to explain the poster, ask them if they want the 30", 2', 5' or 10' explanation. Next ask them if they are in the field and whether they are familiar with the subject (you should be prepared to talk to a novice and an expert).
(note: It's always a good idea if someone wants a further explanation to introduce yourself with a handshake.)

Other items to think about:

- Should you have 8.5x11" printouts of the poster with you? (if you do have printouts, be sure to write your contact info on them (e-mail etc))
 - Pro: Demonstrates your willingness to share your data with the public; Allows a visitor to digest your data in more detail at a later time.
 - Con: Allows competing researchers to have a copy of all of your data and methods.
 - Alternative: Have a sign-up sheet at the poster for people who want a copy. This way you can have a record of who gets a copy (in case there is a copyright issue in the future). Another alternative is to have business cards and ask people to e-mail you for a copy.
 - Always check with your faculty mentor before giving handouts.
- Should you have a C.V. or resume on hand?
 - Yes, especially if you are looking for a summer position, graduate school position, technician, post-doc or faculty position. You never know who you might run into and it never hurts to be prepared with a C.V. Plus this will encourage you to keep your C.V. updated throughout your scientific career.
- Should you have a business card?
 - Yes, it's never too early to start acting like a professional.
 - Business cards save you the trouble of trying to copy down your name in someone's notebook if someone wants to contact you. Just hand them a card.
 - Go to www.vistaprint.com to get discounted business cards!!!
 - You can also literally print your own cards by purchasing template paper at an office supply store.
 - Tips for business cards: Some cultures take business cards very seriously. It is always a good default to (1) give a business card if someone offers you their card (2) Take 10-15" to "study" the card prior to putting it in your pocket or a folder. If you want someone's card, it is a good idea to start by offering your card and then politely asking if they have a card.