

How to plan for an *effective* Academic Conference Poster

Paul Shepherd –
Based on a Presentation by Dr Antony Darby

Objectives

1. Plan the content of your poster for the audience
2. Choose an appropriate layout
3. Be able to produce poster in a suitable format
4. Assess the effectiveness of your poster
5. Prepare for presentation day

Purpose of a poster

1. A summary of your work
2. A way of engaging with others in the field
3. Getting your point across to as many people as possible
4. An advertisement for you and your organisation
5. A source of information

Your audience

1. People in your specialised area of research
2. People in fields related to yours
3. People in unrelated fields

Design for all three

1. Make your poster accessible to a wide audience so you gain new insights and ideas
2. Explain context and why your work is important
3. Explain clearly without jargon and acronyms
4. Interpret findings in terms of the 'big picture'

Be concise

1. Define a single 'take home' message
2. Let graphs and images tell the story
3. All visuals and text should relate to the message
4. Organise your poster in a logical manner
5. Simplify
6. Edit edit edit

A poster is *not* simply a research paper stuck on a board

A poster doesn't tell, it *shows*

You should be able to remove all main text and the poster still make sense.

An abstract will serve as an outline for your poster:

1. **Context** – why are you doing this work?
2. **Objective(s)** – what are you adding to current knowledge?
3. **Method** – how are you doing the research?
4. **Results** – This is what people want to know, tell them *what* you have found
5. **Conclusions** – explain the *significance* of what you have found

You do not need to include an abstract in your poster:

Your poster is effectively an illustrated abstract

What to include in the poster

1. Title
2. Author details
3. Introduction – set the context
4. Methodology – keep this short
5. Results and findings – this should be the bulk of the poster
6. Conclusions – the ‘take home’ message
7. Acknowledgements – (logos of sponsors?)
8. Further contact details

Title

The title should:

- be eye-catching
- summarise your work
- hint at the underlying issue or question
- not be too long

So, for example:



An investigation into the use of carbon fibre to strengthen reinforced concrete columns

This may well be the title of your research project but it doesn't express the key message or grab the reader.

Can carbon fibre strengthen columns?

Better – This states your research hypothesis. The question draws in the reader to find out the answer.



Can carbon fibre prevent structural collapse?

Better still – This states your research hypothesis and indicates the potential importance of the work.

Carbon fibre increases the strength of columns

Also good – This is your ‘take home’ message. Even if the reader reads nothing else they know what you have discovered.

Pier Pressure: Increasing strength of columns and piers using carbon fibre

Colonised title – Eye catching main title (use humour or play on words) followed by a subtitle which actually explains your work.

Particularly good if your real title is really boring

Author details

Include:

- Your name
- Your supervisors names
- Your Department and organisation(s) name
- That's all...

Other contact details can be added to the end of the poster.

Introduction

- Get the reader interested in the issue or using the minimum of background information.
- Place your issue in the context of existing work.
- Explain your novel hypothesis.
- Unlike a paper, the introduction of a poster is a great place to put a picture that communicates some aspect of your research question.

Methodology

- *Very briefly* describe your methodology
- Explain how the methodology allows the hypothesis to be investigated
- Use figures to illustrate experimental design
- Use a diagrammatic flow chart of the methodological process (using pictures and text, not a decision type flow-chart)

Results

- This should be the largest section
- *Briefly* describe your results, qualitatively
- Only present data which supports your hypothesis and take home message
- Use graphs and bar charts in preference to tables
- Ensure titles and legends are clear
- Use images where appropriate

Conclusions

- Remind the reader of the main result(s)
- State whether this supports your hypothesis
- State why the results are important

Further information

Hopefully people will want to find out more about your work

Provide:

- Email address
- Website address
- Link to download file of your poster and other relevant publications

Planning your poster

Information in three layers:

3 seconds

30 seconds

3 minutes

Planning your poster

3 second grab – most people spend less than this looking at a poster.

Capture their interest by:

- Your intriguing title
- Some sort of amazing image

Planning your poster

30 second synopsis – once grabbed need to get the gist of what you have done in 30 seconds

- Title has already set out the hypothesis
- Some sort of self explanatory figure summarises your results
- Conclusions – explains your main message

Planning your poster

3 minutes – This is about the maximum time anyone will spend on looking at a poster. Should be capable of making sense of the importance of the work.

- Average reader can read about 200 words per minute
- This means that your poster should be no more than 600 words long!
- **BE RUTHLESS** – what does the reader **NEED** to know?

Poster Layout

- It must be obvious how to navigate your way around the poster
- It must be easy to read
- It must be well balanced with images and text
- It must be easy to identify the important parts of your poster

Organisational cues

- Reading columns of text (like a newspaper) is easiest (reader gravity)
- Can be organised in rows, but not as easy if there is a crowd
- Should be presented in a logical order
- May help to number headings
- Use white space to help define boundaries
- Resorting to arrows to guide the reader probably means you have failed!

Font type

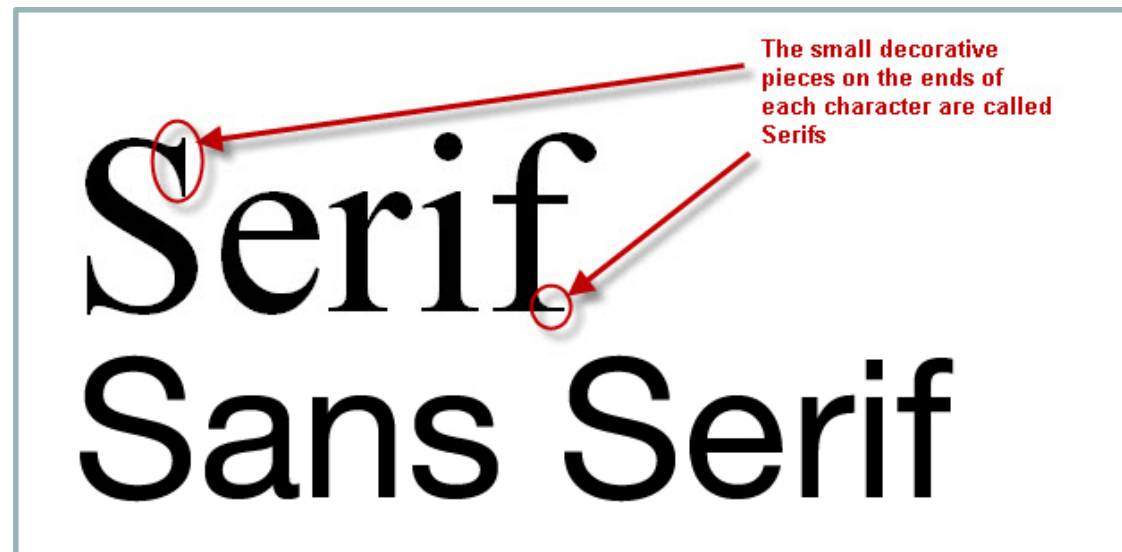
Recommend use of a sans serif text for all text, e.g.

Arial

Verdana

Tahoma

Lucida Sans



Avoid Times New Roman and **Comic Sans**

Title Font

- Should be the largest text in the poster
- Should be easily read from 4m away
- Should be no more than two lines of text, preferably one
- Title block should be at least 5cm deep
- Should be formatted in sentence case
(i.e. not title case nor capitalised)

Font size

Title 72 - 100 pt

Section headings 44 – 60 pt

Sub headings 32- 40 pt

Body text 24 - 32 pt

(Should still be readable when printed A4 size)

Text grouping

- Width of text blocks should be about 40 characters (11 words)
- Keep text elements to around 5 or 6 lines
- Text should be left justified
- Avoid overdoing bullet points – there needs to be a structure and narrative (bullet points good for conclusions)

Colour

- Keep backgrounds very light
- If you use a picture or pattern in the background make sure it doesn't dominate visually
- Dark backgrounds with light text/diagrams are generally a bad idea
- **Avoid overly bright colours**
- Ensure sufficient contrast when using colours

Colour

If you use a
picture or pattern
in the background
make sure it
doesn't dominate
visually

Colour

Dark background
with light text and
diagrams is
generally a bad
idea

Colour blindness

Affects about 1 in 12 males and 1 in 200 females. Makes distinguishing between red and green difficult (sometimes yellow and blue)

Use www.vischeck.com to see what your poster would look like to someone who is colour blind

My need to use 'redundancy' in graphs (different colours AND different line types)

Summary

1. Define your message
2. Focus on the story
3. Show, don't tell
4. Ensure easy navigation
5. Edit edit edit
6. Proof read
7. Use the 60 Second Poster Evaluation
8. Prepare for presentation