General Guidance For

Poster Presentations

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What this workbook covers

This practical workbook will help you to put together a well-designed, academic poster presentation in **Microsoft PowerPoint** or any number of other graphic design software packages. The advice given in this workbook is not software specific – it is simply a number of practical pointers to consider when creating posters.

If you are considering using **Microsoft PowerPoint** to create a poster presentation, consider looking at our two workbooks - **Introduction to PowerPoint: 1. Oral Presentations** and **Introduction to PowerPoint: 2. Poster Presentations**.

By the end of this workbook you should be able to:

- Understand what academic content to include in a poster
- Use an appropriate amount of text
- Correctly format that text
- Prepare and use images, tables and charts
- Design the poster’s layout
- Choose an appropriate colour scheme
Getting Started

At Queen’s University, you may be asked to produce a poster on which you will be assessed. Posters can be a useful way to communicate information in an unambiguous and visually attractive way. Academic posters summarise information on a research topic and act as a way to deliver that information and thereby stimulate discussion.

Poster assessment usually considers two things – the content and structure of the poster and the organisation and presentation of the information.

Examples of Poster Presentations

Posters like the two shown below are typical examples of academic posters. They are large format (usually printed on A1 or A0 paper) and they have other design and presentation conventions associated with them.

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**Elite women and material culture in Ireland, 1760-1840**

Set in the context of international research on domestic material culture and consumption, this project addresses the question of how elite women in Ireland engaged with the world of goods and shapes and experienced their homes. Material culture is taken here to include the buildings they inhabited and the objects they acquired, used, made, bequeathed and gave as gifts.

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Ruth Thorpe – School of History and Anthropology – 2014
Poster Presentations

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Lucas Schaper – School of Mathematics and Physics – 2009

Plasmas in Conducting Liquids: Formation Mechanism and Production of Reactive Species for Biomedical Application

Lucas Schaper (Ischaper91@qub.ac.uk, second year PhD student, supervised by W.G. Graham) Centre for Plasma Physics, School of Mathematics and Physics, EPS

Poster and plasmas are a potential way to be used to change liquid. It is a way to make plasma (or plasma) change liquid and to change the liquid's properties. Plasma can be used in many fields such as medicine, chemistry, and engineering.

What is a plasma?
- ion containing free-moving charged particles (electrons, ions)
- electricity conductor (in a conductive medium)
- temperature or thermal energy (thermal energy)
- radiation (infrared, visible, ultraviolet, X-rays)
- light (emitting light)
- particles (UV, X-rays)

The Setup
- commercial plasma setup
- commercial power supply (100kV)
- magnetic nozzle
- polycarbonate sample
- laser temperature measurement
- laser calorimeter

The Academic Content

The content of a poster could be considered as something akin to a short story about a certain piece of academic work or research. The content should describe a few major points while encouraging the reader to explore the research in greater depth at a later stage.

The Physics I: Pre-plasma environment
- electron 10kV and 100A
- removal of charged ions is observed
- average free ion (100A)
- vaporization at a point in the field heat conductivity and hydrodynamic field
- removal of free ions

The Chemistry
- emission of energy
- emission of energy in dual mode
- different secondary electron emission caused by water and metal

The Biology
- further research involves the application of the characteristics to biological context
- protein folding
- the mechanism of protein folding
- polypeptide folding

References
The Structure of a Poster

When reporting on a piece of work or research within an academic poster, the structure of the poster might resemble that of a report. It should have a clear beginning, middle and end and should group related information together.

A poster could be planned in a similar way to a report. The main sections of the poster could be listed as follows with a few bullet points beneath each section heading outlining the main ideas to be covered –

1. Title
2. Introduction
3. Methods
4. Results
5. Discussion
6. Conclusion
7. References

This kind of structure should help the content of the poster to flow in a logical order.

Audience

The content of a poster will also vary depending on who the audience is likely to be.

It may well be that those consuming the information within the poster is just a general audience with no particular attachment to the discipline being explored within the poster. If this is the case, the content of the poster should assume that the audience has only a general knowledge of the topic being covered. This kind of poster should avoid jargon and very subject specific language. It should instead concentrate on basic descriptions only.

Alternatively, the audience may well be specialists in a similar discipline to that being outlined in the poster. If this is the case, the content can dive a little deeper into the topic but, again, very specific language or jargon should be avoided where possible.

Finally, it may well be that the audience are experts in the discipline being discussed. In this case, it’s reasonable to use technical or discipline specific language as the audience is likely to have a high level of knowledge in the subject area.
Using Text

Using an Appropriate Amount of Text

Once the structure of the content of the poster has been planned out and the audience established, it will be important to trim the content down to a reasonable amount.

Posters are designed for visual consumption and often direct the reader to a larger body of work or research that they can digest in their own time.

As such, the text within the poster should be short and succinct enough to hold the reader’s attention while still conveying the main points of the topic.

As a general rule, the amount of text used on a poster should be between 300 and 500 words.

The two examples below show what 300 words and 500 words might look like.

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**A 300 Word Poster**

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisi. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo dolores et ea rebum. Stet claudantium nonumy et eirmod tempor incidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat volutpat.

**Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category 1</th>
<th>Category 2</th>
<th>Category 3</th>
<th>Category 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exerci tation ullamcorper suscipit lobortis nisl ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat. Duis autem vel eum iriure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisi. At vero eos et accusam et justo duo dolores et ea rebum. Stet claudantium nonumy et eirmod tempor incidunt ut labore et dolore magna aliquyam erat volutpat.

**Image**

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Typo non habent clariatem insomiam; est usus legentis in iis qui facit eorum claritatem. Investigationes demonstraverunt lectores legere me lius quod ii legant saepius. Claritas et etiam processus dynamicus, qui sequitur mutationem consuetudium lectorum. Minim est notare quam littera gothica, quam nunc putamus para. Anteposuerunt litterarum formas humanitatis per seacula quarta decima et quinta decima. Eodem modo typi, qui nunc nibis videntur parum clari, flant sollemnis in futurum.
Cutting Down the Amount of Text

If, after consideration, there is too much text on a poster, there are a few points that could be considered in order to trim it down.

1. **The text on a poster should tell a story of what the work or research is about.** If, after a second reading, there are tangents in that story or unnecessary pieces of detail, these could be removed.

2. **A poster should not simply be a large-sized version of the actual work being discussed.** It should point the reader to the more exhaustive body of work without covering every detail of it.

3. **Some posters can be adapted directly from an abstract although, unlike the abstract, it will be supported with graphics and other visual aids.**
Styling Text

Text within a poster should be formatted in such a way that it is visually striking but easy to read. It should also be consistent throughout with identical textual styles used in the same contexts.

Graphic designers recommend that all text that performs the same function should be formatted in exactly the same way – for example, all Headings should look exactly the same.

There are a few guidelines to follow when formatting the different parts of a poster –

- The Title should be big and bold so that people can read it from a distance. For an A1 document, the Title should be at least size 96 pts.
- Main Headings should be adjusted so that they are the second largest text on the poster. This will help readers clearly identify the various sections of the poster. A font size of around 40 pts is usually recommended.
- The text of the Introductory Paragraph can be slightly larger than that of other paragraphs. This highlights the introduction to readers and hopefully draws them in to the poster.
- Most of the text on the poster can be classified as Body text. It should be all the same size and should be readable from two metres away. Body text should be around 24 pts in size.

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The Title is the biggest font size on the poster.

Main Headings are second biggest font sizes.

Text in Introductory Paragraph is bigger than other Body text.

Body text is big enough to be read from two metres away.
When determining which font to use within a poster, it is important to consider that different fonts have different characteristics and different purposes. Some are designed to be quirky and interesting but these fonts are often hard to read from a distance. Others may seem bland but, in reality, they are the easiest to read, especially at a distance.

Typically, the best font to use on a poster would be a Sans-serif font like Arial or Helvetica. A Sans-serif font is one that doesn’t have little embellishing features called serifs at the end of letter strokes. These serif embellishments on the letters within a font can often make text more difficult to read.

Similarly, Script fonts, designed to replicate handwriting styles are often completely illegible, especially at a distance. These should be avoided when designing posters.

Use a maximum of two fonts when creating a poster. Any more than this is confusing for the reader.

As a final, general rule, avoid using italics, underlining and CAPITAL LETTERS in a poster. Bold styling is fine as it can draw attention to important elements.

Grouping Sections of Text

In any poster presentation, text which belongs together should be kept together. To put this another way, it should be perfectly clear which Heading fits with which paragraph and so on.
Depending on how a poster is structured, it can be hard for a reader to pick out how sections in the poster flow from one to another. Grouping **Headings** with the correct blocks of text gives the reader an opportunity to pick up on the organisation of the poster with greater ease.

As a general rule, **Headings** should not have lots of space between them and the paragraph to which they belong. This might be good practice in a word processed document but such a document is much easier to read as it naturally flows from top to bottom. That is not necessarily the case in a poster so spacing should not be left between the **Heading** and the **Body** text.

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**Graphics**

The **Graphics** within a poster are what separates it from something like an abstract. They represent something that would take much longer to describe in words. In addition, a good visual element should be striking and grab the audience’s attention immediately, even from a great distance away.

A **Graphic** within a poster might be an **Image**, a **Chart** or a **Table** but, irrespective of the type, it should only be included if it really supports the content being covered.
Images

Images or Pictures should be carefully considered before being included within a poster presentation. It’s now much easier than ever to find Images to support content, simply by using popular internet search engines. Copyright legislation now allows for the use of any media content found online provided that it is Sufficiently Acknowledged, Fair, Non-Commercial and used as Illustration for Instruction (see Section 32 of the Copyright and Rights in Performances Regulations, 2014).

That said, it’s often not a simple as just copying and pasting an image directly into a poster presentation.

Posters will often be printed out at A1 or A0 size so it is important to consider how the image will look when printed out and stretched out to a much larger size.

This picture looks fine on the screen. It may, however, look more blurry when printed out. It will also look extremely grainy when blown up to A1 or A0 size.

Images on a computer are made up of little coloured squares called Pixels. The image’s quality (also called the Resolution) is determined by how many Pixels actually make up the picture. A factor many consumers consider when buying modern digital cameras is the camera’s Megapixel value. Using a 12 Megapixel camera to take a photograph will produce an image that contains twelve million Pixels. A 12 Megapixel image can be stretch right up to 16 inches by 24 inches without degrading the image.

It’s important to consider these kinds of values when looking for appropriate images to include in a poster. When looking at an image on an internet search engine, there will often be a size value (in Pixels) displayed. The larger the size, the better but, as a general rule, images should probably be at least 1600 Pixels by 1200 Pixels. This usually denotes an image that can be printed out at a size of 4 inches by 6 inches.
Charts

When making Charts for a poster, careful consideration should be given as to how the Charts are formatted. The default formatting for Charts created in Microsoft Office products like Excel and PowerPoint is rarely suitable for use in a poster.

With 3D Chart layouts, it can be difficult to distinguish between the different areas of data. Similarly, backgrounds placed behind the Charts can make the variations in the Chart itself seem less stark and identifiable.

The outlines or axis of a Chart for a poster should typically be made bolder than the default setting. Colours used within the graphic should naturally contrast and be identifiable even from some distance away.

Unsuitable Default Chart Layout and Styling

Background colour makes it difficult to see some of the bars

Bars may look stylish but are harder to distinguish between

No visible axis

Axis labels are hard to read
Poster Layout

A good academic poster will be laid out in sections that form a logical order. The reading of an academic poster should flow naturally from one section to the next rather than appearing to jump randomly between sections.

Often the best way to set out an academic poster is to organise it in columns. These columns can be all the same size (also known as Symmetric) or of different sizes (Asymmetric) but either way the reader will know that they should read down through the columns as they would in a newspaper – from top to bottom within each column and from left to right across each column.
An example of a Symmetric poster and how it flows

Title, authors and contact details

Introduction
Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat. Ut wisi enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

Methods
Duis autem vel eum irure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisi. At vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit accumsan vim ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

Chart
Duis autem vel eum irure dolor in hendrerit in vulputate velit esse molestie consequat, vel illum dolore eu feugiat nulla facilisi. At vero eros et accumsan et iusto odio dignissim qui blandit praesent luptatum zzril delenit accumsan vim ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.

Results
Typo non habent claritatem insitam: est usus legendaris in ils qui facit eorum claritatem. Investigationes demonstravarium lectorum, mirum est notare quam littera gothica, quae nunc putamus parum claram, anteposuerint litterarum formas humanitatis per seacula quarta decima et quinta decima.

Discussion
Claritas este etiam processus dynamicus, qui sequitur mutationem consuetudium lectorum. Mirum est notare quam littera gothica, quae nunc putamus parum claram, anteposuerint litterarum formas humanitatis per seacula quarta decima et quinta decima.

Conclusion
Nam librar tempor cum soluta nobis allefand option congue nihil imperdiet doming id quod maxim placerat facer possim assum.

References
Mirum est notare quam littera gothica, quae nunc putamus parum claram, anteposuerint litterarum formas humanitatis per seacula quarta decima et quinta decima.

A layout like the one shown above clearly conveys the sequence of the poster to the audience because the information has been organised within a design grid.

Tools like Microsoft PowerPoint or Publisher, which are typically used to design posters, will often have a Gridline view available, typically in a View menu. Gridlines allow designers to see that the elements of a poster are being brought together with precision and in such a way that they are conducive to reading.

The examples below show some possible layouts that might be used when designing a poster.
Colour Schemes

When choosing colours for a poster, a maximum of two to three colours will give the best overall result. Using too many colours will make the poster look chaotic while having almost no colour variation will make the whole poster seem bland.

Contrast

The most important rule when considering any colour use is to ensure that maximum **Contrast** is achieved. Dark text on a dark background will simply lead to the poster being unreadable. Text should **Contrast** with background elements so that it can be viewed without any trouble, especially at a distance.

**Little or no use of contrasting colours** -

![The black text on this dark background is almost unreadable.](image1)

**Good use of contrasting colours** -

![Here, the black text is contrasted against a light background making it very easy to read.](image2)
Similar problems can arise when using a textured background or when using an image as a background. Subtle variations throughout a background like this can make some text stand out very well and other pieces completely illegible.

Rather than using textured backgrounds or images, it’s often better to use a plain, pastille coloured background. These lighter colours will provide an optimal background contrast for black text.

Choosing a Colour Scheme

When choosing colour schemes for a poster, consider all of the various elements of the poster and how they come together. If an image has been used in the poster, then the colours within it could be used within the other elements of the poster. If red is an important colour, the headings could be changed so that they also appear in red.

The example below shows how the colours used in an image within a poster might form the basis for a colour scheme to be used throughout the whole poster.
Final Steps

Poster printing can be expensive so all posters should be thoroughly proof-read before they are produced.

- Check all typing including the Title and Heading.
- Check the data being displayed in any Graphics.
- Ensure that all referencing is correct and that any Graphics taken from another source have been properly accredited.

When ready to print, remember that large scale posters can be printed at the Computer Desk in the McClay Library and there is charge for this service depending on the size of the poster. For more information, contact posters@qub.ac.uk.