Guidelines for Making Great Posters

At a poster conference, you (the presenter) are the main attraction, since you know the details about your research. The posters are merely visual aids that allow passers-by to get a general idea about your work, so they can decide if they would like to invest time in further discussion with you. In this sense, the posters should only focus on the main points of your research, and support these through visual and, secondarily, textual means. Posters are neat and organized. Less is more. Once you have your text, see if you can cut one-third! Here are some general guidelines that will help you in creating yours.

Layout
Divide the contents of your poster by section, for instance:

- The Research Question and Its Importance
- Hypothesis/Hypotheses
- Variables/Cases/Data Sources/Methods
- Research Findings
- Conclusions and Implications for Theory and/or Policy

Each section should have its own separate section and be spread neatly throughout the poster. Avoid clutter – the goal should not be to fill all available space. This will overwhelm your audience. Do not use more than 1-3 colors for the entire poster. Remember you are going for a "clean" look. Short lines of text are easier to read. Don't hide your conclusions on the floor: Put in top right corner.

You may create your entire presentation on PowerPoint, and print and mount each slide separately on the poster board. A former student suggested using PowerPoint and Publisher. His process: Work on the text in Word, and then copy and paste it into a text box. Then enlarge the slide to be the size of the poster. To print, you must copy each text box and picture into a poster document on Publisher, which you can also adjust to desired size. If you need to edit, use PPT and copy to Publisher because PPT has more editing options. You will print 16 pieces of paper from Publisher and then use glue or tape to tile pieces and lay out on your posterboard.

Font
Use a simple, dark font that is easy to read. Minimize the number of fonts used (i.e. do not use one font for the title, one for the text, one for the graph labels, etc.). You do not want the audience to be distracted from the most essential piece of information – your research. If hand-lettering is required at any time, use a black felt-tip pen (Sharpie). Avoid overuse of capitals, italics and underlining. The lettering should be at least 1 INCH HIGH.

Suggested font sizes:
- Title: 80-120 (bold and capitalized). It should be legible to someone standing 20 FEET away.
- Sub-title (i.e. your name): 60-80 (bold)
- Headings: 50-70 (bold, can be capitalized). These should be legible to someone standing at least 5 FEET away.
- Text: 24-36; References: 18-28. It should be legible to someone standing 3 FEET away.

Content
Be concise and clear in the text that you include on the poster. Display only the main points of each section. Bullet points are acceptable.

Tip
Have a notepad handy to write suggestions for improving your research, as well as names and emails of people who are interested in your work. You may meet someone worth staying in touch with!

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Graphics
Use lots of pictures, graphs, charts and/or tables (in color if possible) to illustrate your points. The idea is to make the poster as visually interesting as possible for your audience, so that it will "stand out" in the crowd. However, your graphics should be just as easy to read as your text. For example:

DON'T DO
This graph is essentially unreadable. It drowns the reader in minute details, and while it does make use of both colors and line lengths to simultaneously report two variables at once, the lines (and headings) are too small to be readable.

Source: Global Nonfuel Mineral Resources and Sustainability

IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION
This graph uses just two colors, and features a clear scale on the Y-axis so that your readers immediately know what is being measured (number of appearances per party, per network). Blue and red are also an effective color choice because they match the traditional colors of these two parties. However, the graph is still falls short in terms of getting its meaning across. Quickly: which network, between CNBC and MSNBC, was more favorable to Republicans? If it took you longer to figure this out than it would take to read the same figures off a table, your graph's not doing its job.


ANOTHER STEP, EVEN BETTER
This graph uses the same colors from the previous data, but has chosen a better format for answering questions about favoritism: the pie chart. It's now far easier to get a sense of which networks favored which party; and as a bonus, the size of the pie charts themselves can be allowed to vary to distinguish between the channel with the most overall appearances by politicians of either party (MSNBC) and the channel with the least (CNN). This graph serves your data: it doesn't just reproduce it in graphical form. This makes it a far more useful tool in terms of quickly conveying information to a viewer.