Creating Large Format Posters with PowerPoint

Poster displays are not manuscripts in scientific paper format simply stuck on a bulletin board. Usually, a brief ABSTRACT or SUMMARY, including an introduction and description of the methods & results is included. The METHODS should be primarily pictures and diagrams with descriptive captions. A picture of the organism you studied is always helpful. The RESULTS are mostly figures and tables with descriptive captions. CONCLUSIONS should be point by point rather than textual format. If a viewer must read lots of prose, they will likely move on before understanding your presentation. Therefore, severely limit your prose!

DISPLAY SPACE

Each display must be contained within a 4 ft high x 4 ft wide space (this may vary depending on where you are presenting). The board will usually take push pins (recommended) or thumb tacks. Sometimes you can use stick-on Velcro strips to attach to felt-covered surfaces. Plan ahead to achieve the most effective arrangement of your display, making sure that your display will fit into the available space.

HEADING

The heading consists of the title of your presentation as printed in the program and the name(s) of the author(s). To make your title readable from a distance, use a minimum of 36 point type for the title in the heading (often printed poster titles are 72 point size font or even larger up to 120 pt font!). In cases where titles are extraordinarily long, abbreviated titles are acceptable.

Arial 36 point bold type

LEGIBILITY & VISUAL IMPACT

Viewers will be standing between one and two meters from your display. How the poster looks and how easy it is to read is very important! The text, captions, and figure legends must be at least 18 pt, preferably 24 pt to be easily readable. Use a consistent font (unlike this handout).

Arial 18 point type Arial 24 point type

Graphs, photographs, and tables need to be large as well. Use of contrasting colors in graphs is effective where appropriate. Laser printers and enlargement photocopying are useful in attaining sufficiently large lettering. Again, the criteria of viewing clearly from a distance of two meters needs to be applied.

SIMPLICITY

Do:
- Limit the complexity of the presentation.
- Include large, clear visuals (make at least half of your poster non-text).
- Limit the text to that absolutely essential to your story line.

Do not:
- Include complex graphs that are difficult to interpret.
- Include extensive tables of numbers.
- Include pages of small print with details of methods or long drawn out discussion.

CONTINUITY & CLARITY

Tell the story of your research in a series of simple statements and supporting illustrations. Utilize the captions of pictures, figures, and tables to help describe the project. By position of the text and figures, or using arrows, indicate the “flow” of your story in the display. Highlight your major points using bullets or some other means in a summary or conclusions paragraph. Use a single text FONT throughout your presentation, remembering that Arial font is easier to read than other fonts for most people.

DISPLAYS ARE NOT MANUSCRIPTS

Displays are not manuscripts or oral presentations, so LIMIT THE PROSE. However, the display should be self explanatory. Thus, when you are present, you will be free to answer questions and discuss your work with some while others are able to study and understand the display.

PREPARATION OF YOUR POSTER

Today, large format color plotters allow the use of PowerPoint or similar graphics programs to create posters that are now standard at scientific meetings. This makes set-up and tear-down very easy. However, at Luther most courses still use small format posters that are grouped together into a coherent poster. Using small “pieces” all materials should be mounted on stiff cardboard using SprayMount™ or a similar type of adhesive. Often colored cardboard is used and a border is left around each item. Use push pins or Velcro to attach your poster to the presentation space.

If making a PowerPoint poster to be printed on the large-format printer, under page set-up set page size to “custom” and specify the size of your poster (paper width on our large format plotter is a maximum of 42”). Do NOT have any figures within 1 ½ inches of the edge of the paper or they won’t print. Use text boxes to insert text, and insert pictures to add graphs and figures. Tables are easiest if created within PowerPoint. Also, to conserve ink (cartridges are over $50 each) do NOT use colored backgrounds except in special circumstances. Proof your poster extensively before printing as we only have one shot at printing these out!

PRESENTING AT THE POSTER SESSION

Always have at least 1 coauthor near the poster to answer possible questions. Let people peruse your poster for 30 seconds to a minute or so before approaching them to ask if you may lead them through it. Be ready to clearly and concisely explain the objectives of your study, your methodology, the results, and your conclusions. Don’t be shy in introducing yourself, since the opportunity to meet people and discuss your work is one of the major advantages of poster sessions.
Creating a Large Format Custom-sized PowerPoint Slide

The easiest way is to create a large format poster is by making a single custom-sized slide in PowerPoint. When you first open PowerPoint, it will open a standard title slide (see Figure 1).

![PowerPoint interface with blank slide](image)

**Figure 1.**

In the “Slides” panel at the top, click the “Layout” pull-down menu and click on “blank” to remove the existing text boxes (Figure 2).

Now you must **set your “slide size” to the actual size of your poster** (this is VERY important!). Choose the “Design” tab at the top, and then on the “Page Setup” panel on the top left, click on the “Page Setup” icon. The “Page Setup” window will now open (Figure 3). Set the “Slides sized for:” to **Custom**. Set your width and height to the size you want your poster. Be sure to set your “orientation” for both “Slides” and “Notes, handouts & outline” to either portrait or landscape depending on the dimensions you’ve chosen (this printer can automatically print the poster sideways to fit on the paper depending on the orientation you’ve chosen so just be consistent and the printer will take care of the rest). The HP DesignJet 500 plotter only has rolls of paper 42” wide, so although either width or height may be greater than 42”, don’t make both dimensions larger than 42”. So you don’t waste paper and have to cut off excess, set one of your dimensions to 42”. One nice size for many posters is 42” wide by 30” or 36” tall. Click “OK” and now start creating your poster!
Figure 2.

Figure 3.
To create your poster, simply “insert” (not “paste”!) pictures and text into “text boxes”, and format them any way you’d like. You can always print a test print for proofing to a local 8½” x 11” printer, simply check the “Scale to fit paper” box when printing. A good rule of thumb is that if you can’t read the text of your poster on an 8½ x 11 sheet of paper, the text will be too small to read during a poster session at large format as well. Please DO NOT use colored backgrounds as these really use up the ink, and printer cartridges for the large format plotter can cost over $50 each and it needs four of them! Also, DO NOT put any objects closer than 1” to the edge of your paper as they may not print.

Possible Problems

Images or Graphs printing in “strips” in inverted order – some types of images (not sure which) do not print properly (even though they appear OK on your screen). Delete the image from your poster, resave the image in an outside graphics program as a jpeg or tiff image and insert it into your poster. This seems to happen with images that are copied from other programs and pasted into the poster slide, rather than using the insert option.

Advice

Text column widths. Except for the poster title that likely will be only 1 or 2 lines, do not create text paragraphs wider than 11-12”. To do so makes it very difficult for the eyes of a reader to find the next line.

Give yourself time so if you do encounter poster creation and printing problems, you have time to deal with it, rather than being rushed and frustrated at the very last minute. Good luck!! 😊

Revised by Kirk Larsen, 1 October 2012.