PREPARING A SCIENCE POSTER

A science poster employs the categories of a lab report, but it is designed for a different audience and purpose. Most poster sessions have dozens if not hundreds of posters. Ten minutes is the average time people spend in front of any single science poster. For your poster to command attention and succeed at communicating your scientific knowledge, it needs specialized writing and visual presentation skills.

When developing and editing poster text, pay attention to the purpose and special needs of each section!

**Title**

- purpose: capture your overall message in 1-2 lines
- characteristics: highly concise, not a complete sentence but includes both noun and verb
- tone: serious or catchy, depending on your audience

**Abstract** (if required)

- purpose: provide a quick, brief, accurate overview of your experiment
- characteristics: concise, objective stance, third person
- content: omit specific details and stick to the big picture

**Methods/Materials**

- purpose: describe essentials of your experiment
- characteristics: past tense, third person, objective stance
- content: include statistics, supplement text with figures, drawings, flow charts

**Results**

- purpose: terse summary of your data (what you found)
- characteristics: objective stance, employ key words only, use bullets as needed
- content: use graphs, charts, tables that make your point (readers’ takeaway)

**Discussion**

- purpose: interpret your data for audience
- characteristics: analytical/evaluative thinking, less objective than other sections

**Conclusion**

- purpose: assertion of experiment’s importance and/or correctness of hypothesis
- characteristics: includes bullets on future directions

**References**

- purpose: establish academic integrity, acknowledge indebtedness to sources
- characteristics: follow MLA format, unless instructed otherwise

for more about science poster editing and layout, turn the page
Keys to concise writing

Replace long clauses with short phrases or single words
wordy: “The fog that was in the sky kept us from seeing the meteor.”
revised: “Fog obscured vision of the meteor.”

Replace phrases with single words
wordy: “The oldest child of the family is usually a natural leader.”
revised: “First-born children are natural leaders.”

Avoid opening sentences with “there is” or “there are”
wordy: “There are many cases of leukemia in people living near Chernobyl.”
revised: “Incidence of leukemia is high near Chernobyl.”

Replace intensifiers (“very,” “really”) with precise words that make your point.
wordy: “Subjects who were denied sleep at night were really tired the next day.”
revised: “Subjects who were denied sleep at night dozed in class the next day.”

Editing tips — remember effective poster writing is

• concise
• brief
  • purpose-driven: uses headings and bullets to focus readers’ attention
  • constructed to work in tandem with graphics that supplement data and add visual interest

Advice about poster appearance (layout)

Posters are visual documents, not just large-size reports. Text is critical, but layout matters, too. Text and graphics have to work together in a poster. A picture (or drawing, chart, map, etc.) may not be worth 1000 words, but well-chosen graphics can help you reduce the amount of text on a poster without sacrificing content. And a well-designed poster is interesting from afar: it draws people closer and encourages them to learn more about your experiment.

You don’t need to be artistic to prepare an attractive poster. Try to make your poster layout balanced
• distribute graphics and headings across available horizontal and vertical space

easy to navigate
• present sections as visually self-contained
• place headings strategically to guide the audience through the poster sequentially

attractive
• preserve white space around text and graphics
• enclose graphics in a thin dark border
• choose fonts that can be read easily from a short distance

For more detailed information on poster preparation:
www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm

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