Presenting Like a Pro
DESIGNING *ENGAGING* ACADEMIC POSTERS

Creating an academic or research poster from scratch can seem like a daunting process, especially if you have never made one before. It can be even more overwhelming when you realize that it's not just the content and research story that needs to be clear and succinct, but the layout and design can be equally important when attempting to draw in viewers in a room of 300 other posters. The main point of a poster is to share your research, create or encourage discussion, and to meet others in your field. This quick guide booklet will help you avoid some amateur mistakes, show you some best practices, tools and resources, and hopefully, get you on the road to creating your own poster masterpiece!

(*But remember, good design cannot compensate for poor content.)

AMOUNT OF CONTENT

Contrary to what you might think, creating a poster that could be an entire journal article is an amateur move. Including 'everything' and not taking the time to pare down your content to the most important pieces of your research story can mean the difference between an award-winning poster and one that people just walk past.

Consensus among many conference poster judges is:

300-800 words should be your content goal range!

WHITE/NEGATIVE SPACE

White space, also referred to as negative space, is the space left empty within the poster layout and design. This includes any margins or space between columns and sections. Ideally, there should be **40 % of white space**. Leaving a good amount of white space allows the eye to breathe as it moves around the poster. Doing this also prevents you from filling up every square inch with text and data, basically creating an overwhelming, visually overstimulating poster.

GET TO THE POINT:

Keep it short & simple

As the adage goes, keep it simple Simon. In this age of short attention spans, trim your content to the essentials! This is not a paper, just a visual representation of your abstract.

Make it obvious

Let's be honest, people don't like to read. Enhance you poster experience by making it easy on your audience. **TELL them what they should remember** about your research by making that summary sentence or phrase the largest text on your poster.

QR Codes are a great way to house "extra" info, data, or references without taking up valuable real estate!

Created by Jennifer Stowe, MS | Questions? Contact me at jmstowe@uga.edu.

SELECTING FONTS & USING TEXT

Fonts may seem like a trivial decision, but they can either 'up' your poster game or make you look inexperienced and amateurish. For example, the font **Comic Sans** is infamous among designers and some academics because it looks very elementary and unprofessional, yet you will still see it being used on academic posters. So, Comic Sans and any other cutesy or novelty fonts should be avoided!

Fonts are divided into serif and sans serif categories. Serif fonts have little 'feet' and are commonly used in body text and printed materials like books. The feet create the feel of a line and make reading small type easier. Sans serif fonts don't have the feet and have blunt ends to the letters, seen in the font used here, and are easier to read from a distance.

- Sans serif fonts are good for titles and sub-headers.
- Serif fonts are good for body text
- No more than two typefaces (fonts)

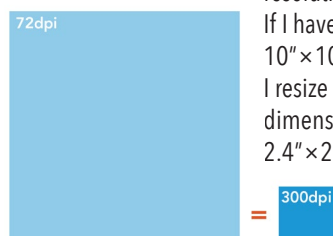A few modern fonts: (all are 10pts; * are free Google fonts)

Sans Serif	Serif
Alegreya Sans*	Alegreya*
Helvetica	Century
Monserrat*	Libre Baskerville
Noto Sans*	Lora*
Open Sans*	Noto Serif*
Raleway*	Palatino
Roboto*	Times
Tahoma	

USING IMAGES

Any images or graphics used in your poster should be of high resolution, meaning that they should be 300 dpi (dots per inch). Screen resolution of your monitor is 72 dpi, so when creating your poster, be sure to zoom in to 100% to get an idea if your graphics will print crisp and clear. Anything less than 300 dpi and you run the risk of the image being pixelated, 'crunchy', or fuzzy.

10dpi   25dpi   72dpi   300dpi
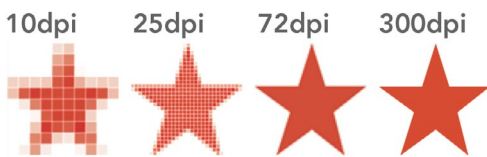
Designer Melissa Tatge explains it best: "When you have a seemingly large image (dimension-wise) that is lower-res, the dimensions decrease greatly when bumping up the resolution. For example: If I have an image that is 10"×10" at 72dpi and I resize it to 300dpi, the dimensions decrease to 2.4"×2.4"."

72dpi

= 300dpi

## Catchy and short title here in a sa

① White Space is OK

Your poster should ideally be 40% empty! Leaving white space (sometimes referred to as negative space) allows the 'eye' to breathe.

More white space = less overwhelming

- Use bullet points to cut down text.
- Adding space between bullet points makes them easier to read.
- Be consistent with punctuation.
- Try to keep bullets short; no paragraph bullet points, please.
- Make your bullet points match your accent color for extra pizazz.

② G

Ac
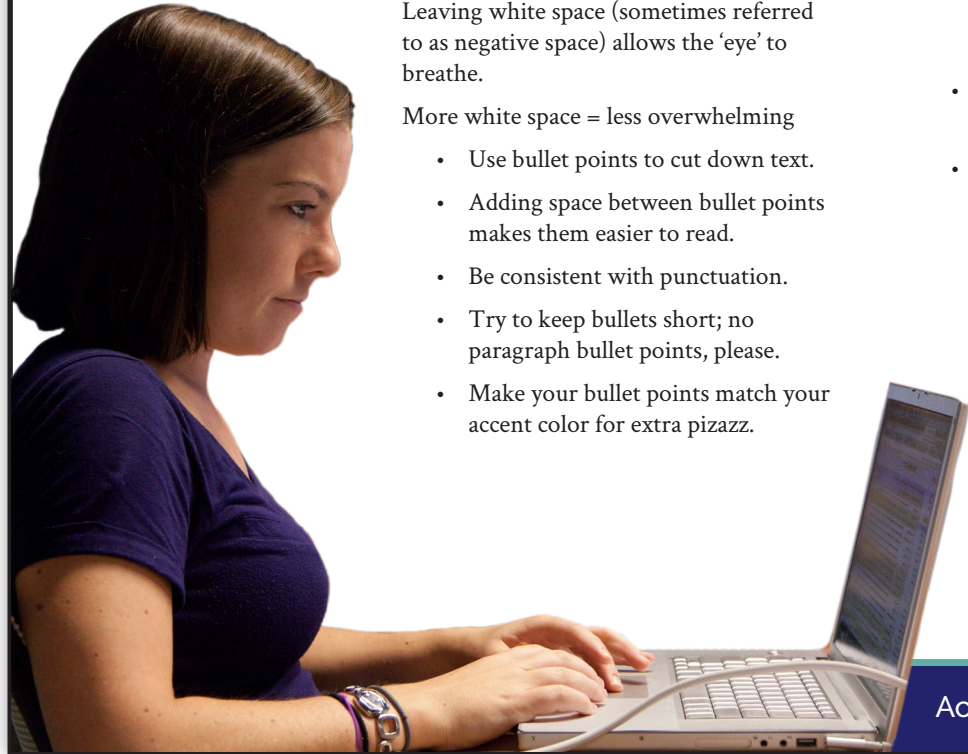
CHOOSING COLORS

Colors serve many purposes beyond just looking pretty. For posters, your color choices can draw viewers in, highlight important features or data, and/or make the poster 'pop' from across a room. The colors you choose can change the mood or feeling your poster radiates. Or, they can simply bring your whole research story together by making all the parts look cohesive.

Most good posters feature 2-3 colors beyond white and black. A small color palette is best to keep your poster from looking too busy or haphazard. If you have difficulty in choosing, look to a photo (next page, bottom left) or logo (below) to help you decide. In the poster sample above, here the purple/blue color from the student's shirt as the main color. Teal was chosen as the accent color.
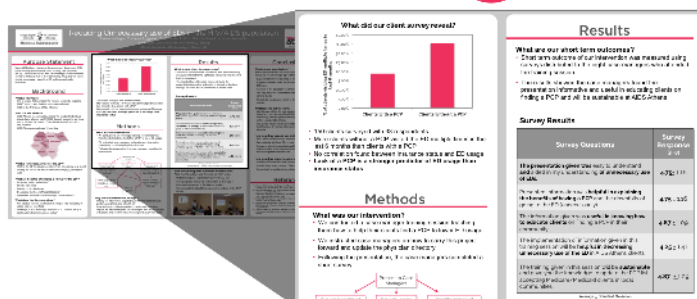
A truly professional poster will incorporate their color palette into all of their graphics, charts, tables, etc. to create unified design.

Color Theory Basics:

Warm colors 'pop' forward (yellows, oranges, and reds).

Cool colors recede (blues, greens, and purples).

ns serif font

Your name and any co-authors here
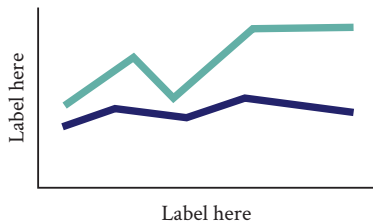Institutional affiliations written out beneath authors' names

Graphs & Charts

Only use relevant graphs, charts, and tables. If the data doesn't help the research story, leave it out.

Use bold lines and eliminate extraneous data.

Label everything as close to the line, bar, etc to avoid keys or legends that slow the 'eye' down.

Fig. 1 Label your graphs & tables and include a short caption explaining its importance

Label here (y-axis)

Label here (x-axis)

③ Color Palette Use

Use other elements of your poster to help influence your color choices (like photos or logos)

Color.adobe.com is a great website where you can search for color palettes based off of key words, like "clinical" for example.

④ Number Sections

- Numbering your sections can aid your viewer in knowing where to look next.

- Helpful if using a non-traditional layout. Also another opportunity to use your accent color.

References

1. List your references and keep them as short as possible
2. This section can use a much smaller font
3. If you have tons of references, consider having them in handout form tacked next to your poster.

knowledgments here in small type

Your picture(s) & contact info

AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL PARTNERSHIP
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

AUTHOR PHOTO(S)

Adding a headshot of yourself to you poster can be very advantageous, especially at large conferences. It allows people to put a face with a name if you happen to be away from your poster. It can also serve as one more tool to passively network.

SOFTWARE TOOLS

Microsoft PowerPoint® is the most commonly used software when it comes to creating posters. Most people already have it on their computers and have some, even if only a little, experience with it. The maximum size it will allow is 56" in either direction, where Publisher® is 240".

Microsoft Publisher® is another program that some use due to the large maximum size it can handle. Publisher® is a PC only program.

Some prefer the **Adobe** suite of software:

Photoshop®, Illustrator®, and InDesign®. This is feature-rich professional software that can have a steep learning curve. These programs are great for posters that feature lots of high resolution photos. Adobe software is now subscription-only and can be costly.

Some FREE software available:

OpenOffice™ is almost exactly like PowerPoint®

Inkscape is like Illustrator or Corel Draw and they offer a lot of tutorials on their website.

GIMP is basically Photoshop, but free. They also feature lots of tutorials on their website.

BACKGROUNDS

In general, using photos as backgrounds is frowned upon, but, in some rare circumstances it works! (below)

The main thing that your background and text needs to have is **contrast**. Black text on a white background is the easiest to read. Whatever color combo you decide on, keep in mind that your content needs to be legible from ~5 feet away.

A dark background with semi-dark text is straining on the eyes and no one will want to take the time to read what you have to say.

PRINTING RESOURCES

If your poster is being printed with Medical Partnership funds, it's more than likely coming from UGA's Bulldog Print for only $2/ft^2. They require 5 business days for turnaround time, so plan accordingly.
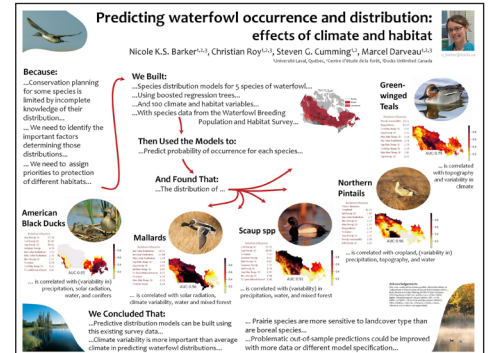
Other local options are Athens Printing Company, FedEx/Kinkos, and Office Depot/Max, or other UGA departments.

If you've got time, ordering online might be a good option. Some popular companies are Vistaprint, Poster Burner, Make Signs, and Spoonflower (for fabric posters–you select the fabric type). Fabric posters are loved by those who would rather not deal with a poster tube. They fold up nicely and fit in your luggage and can be ironed or hung up to let any wrinkles fall out.

Some conferences, especially international ones, will offer on-site or printing options in the city where the conference is taking place. This could be a better logistical option instead of flying with your conference poster.

"Did you remember to...?" Poster Checklist

☐ 300-800 words Keep it concise.

☐ Leave 40% white space.

☐ Make your most important point or takeaway message the largest thing on your poster.

☐ Use two fonts: one sans serif for titles & headers and one serif font for body text.

☐ Use high resolution images or graphics (300 dpi).

☐ Use 2-3 colors that unify your poster.

☐ Tie your color palette choices into your graphs, charts, and/or tables.

☐ Use high contrast between your text and background.

☐ Have a succinct research story.

☐ Label your graphs and figures so their significance is clear.

☐ Utilize bullet points throughout to avoid blocks of text.

☐ Make sure your text is legible from about 5 feet away.
no tiny, unreadable type

☐ Decide on a catchy and short poster title.

☐ Add institutional logos, if required.

☐ PROOF READ EVERYTHING twice.

☐ Use columns or a grid to keep content neat and tidy.

☐ Utilize a 'hook' image or graphic to draw in viewers. (like the large photo of the student)

☐ Avoid Comic Sans font or any cutesy or unprofessional font.

☐ Include a personal headshot.

☐ PROOF READ EVERYTHING twice. (it's that important)

Have 20 minutes and want more poster inspiration?

Check out the awesome poster design animations by Mike Morrison, PhD

◄ https://bit.ly/3I5NXCG

His most recent follow-up animation and info:
https://bit.ly/3f6QJ6F ►

Have questions? Contact me (Jennifer Stowe, MS) at jmstowe@uga.edu.