Designing Effective Posters

Higher Education Academy Psychology Network

Uses

Posters are visual representations of information used to disseminate research, generate discussion, advertise your work and help audience members absorb a lot of information quickly.

Preparation

Your audience should determine the language used in your poster. Are they specialists, in related fields, unrelated fields or all three (Woolsey, 1989)? Determine your budget, format, tools and assembly. Large boards can mean transportation difficulties. Consider tube friendly rollable posters or several small components that can be pieced together. Consider carefully what software to use to create your poster.

PowerPoint	Easy to/most commonly used. Readily available. Limited features. Could have problems printing.
InDesign and QuarkXpress	Not readily available or as easy to use but powerful features.
Corel Draw and Illustrator	Not readily available or as easy to use but good features.
Publisher and Word	Very limited features. Fraught with problems.

Design

Your content may be great, but you have to get people to want to read your poster. You have only seconds to capture their attention with effective use of text, white space and graphs and images.

Text should be formatted as follows for **ease of reading** and to limit distractions...

- Choose common instead of uncommon fonts which might not be available on printers.
- Limit **to** one or two font faces and four or five font sizes.
- Using Sans Serif for titles draws attention. Serif is typical for text.
- Ensure text is legible from 1.5 to 2 metres; title from 4 meters. Titles > 36, Subtitles >30, Text >24 point size.
- Use **bold**, underline, *italic,* and colour sparingly for emphasis.
- Use mixed UPPER and lower case and bullets and subheadings strategically.
- Use less than 50 words for blocks of text.
- Justify text or align left.
- Eliminate excess words and simplify text. Instead of 'appears to be' use 'seems'; 'was found to be' use 'was'; 'in the event that ' use 'if'; and 'at the present time' use 'now'.

Graphs should be formatted as simply as possible for ease of reading for all, including those 10% of viewers who are colour-blind.
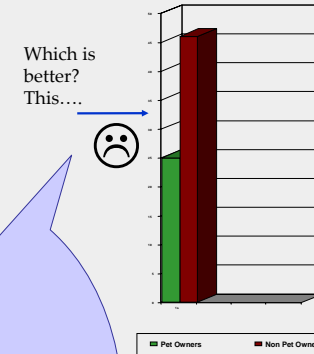
- Use **colours strategically** to **emphasise**, **differentiate** or **add interest**. Note that colours often print differently than on the screen and garish colours distract.
- Label directly on the graph to avoid legends.
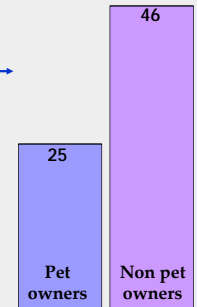- Eliminate excess grid lines and text.

Image quality is a common poster problem. To improve quality…

- Choose larger images.
- Save images and use image manipulation software like Adobe Photoshop or GIMP to resize.
- Set resolution >= 300 dots per inch (dpi), determine exact size of image and adjust pixels appropriately.
- Ascertain final quality by printing test version on a laser printer. If it is not good, do not use it.

Rate Per Year of Visits to the Hospital for Those That Own Pets Versus Those That Do Not Own Pets

Which is better? This…. or this…

Pet Owners   Non Pet Owners

Visits to hospital per year

	Pet owners	Non pet owners
	25	46

20% Text whether used in narrative or graphs and charts, the rules are the same.

40% Graphs and images including logos, photos, clip art, charts and diagrams should make up most of your content but be sure they enhance the message.

Radel, 2006

40% White Space is not occupied by text, images, etc. 'Active' white space is well planned whilst 'passive' is often a result of default settings and looks awkward. Consider the spacing of these bullets…

Active
- These
- bullets
- are well
- spaced

or

Passive
- These
- bullets
- are not well
- spaced

Final Tips

Arrange section headings in vertical columns similar to newspapers for easier reading. Add arrows, if necessary. Write succinctly in active voice: Instead of 'A measure was developed and labelled the *ambivalent sexism inventory*. Items included in this inventory were to assess two dimensions of sexism which were labelled benevolent sexism and hostile sexism'. Try: 'Glick developed the *ambivalent sexism inventory* which included items for assessing benevolence and hostile sexism'. Have others give you feedback on your poster before you finalise it.

Presentation

Be ready to talk visitors through your poster and have A4 copies for them to take away. Be friendly and available for questions.

References and further reading

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