

The Poster Diva's Seven Rules for Success

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1. HAVE A POINT, AND GET TO IT!

- **Posters are Billboards**—they SHOULD NOT be just “papers” printed at enormous size!
- Know your main point, and emphasize it!

2. SHOW, DON'T TELL!

- The key is **ILLUSTRATION** not discussion
 - **VISUALS** should account for about 2/3 of the total surface area; text should be no more than ~1/3
- Visuals should be **COMPELLING** and **TELL THE STORY**, not just take up space
 - Maps, graphs, photographs, diagrams, flow charts, etc.
 - should be self-explanatory OR clearly captioned
 - avoid tables with more than 12 total cells (text OR numeric)
- Vary sizes of images to emphasize what's most important
 - **BIGGEST** image should be most important point!
- **USE COLOR!**
 - I personally **NEVER** use a white background, and typically use some kind of textured surface or image [but nothing that will distract from the overlying text and images]
 - Be mindful of “color conventions” and use them to your advantage in your text and graphics, e.g.,
 - “RED” means “caution”, “danger”, or “important”
 - “GREEN” means “go”, “good” or “environment”
 - “BLUE” means “calm” or “water”.... etc.

3. REDUCE the amount of text wherever possible!

- Use bullets, sentence fragments
- Limit wrapped text and long text blocks!
 - Good rule: no more than 25 words per in a block
 - Remember to aim for no more than ~1/3 of surface area as text
- Maintain plenty of whitespace (e.g., area with no text) around all text

4. Emphasize RESULTS/ CONCLUSIONS/ FINDINGS

- Literature/ history/ sources less important
- **ILLUSTRATE** methods, don't describe (flow charts/ process diagrams work well)

5. Choose Fonts Mindfully and Wisely!

- Font Size should range from about 100 pt [title] to 40 pt [descriptive text]
 - Avoid using any font smaller than 36 point
 - Acknowledgements / funding sources/ picture captions can be smaller (18-20 pt)
- Try to use no more than 3 different fonts
 - keep a consistent font/ size hierarchy throughout for headings/ subheadings/ text
- Serifed fonts are generally more readable

6. Make the navigation obvious

- Use color, font size, and even arrows to help the reader work through poster in the order that you intend

- Two basic layout types:
 - “newspaper column”–
 - 2 to 3 columns, read from upper left to bottom right
 - Billboard
 - generally read more holistically—one central point (may be in center)

7. KNOW your audience, venue and context

- How many other posters will be “competing” with yours for attention?
 - Is venue a conference hall with 120 posters or a small session with 6 – 10 participants?
- Will it be a dedicated poster session/ poster room that audience members will choose to enter or not, or will it be in a hallway where the audience will likely just be “passing through”? Will some other function such as a reception, meal, or book fair be going on at the same time in the same space?
- Will you be standing next to your poster during the entire time it’s on display?
 - Will the audience expect to talk to EVERY presenter, or one or two?
 - Will the audience expect to talk to you, or must the poster be interpreted on its own?
- How general or specific will the audience be—e.g., can you expect them to be familiar with the jargon and symbology of your subdiscipline?
 - when in doubt, err towards simple over complicated