Writing for an Effective Poster

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A scientific research poster is a visual report of a research project.

Like a journal article, a poster must tell a complete story.

Unlike a journal article, a poster must do so in an abbreviated form.
What Drives Poster Design?

- A journal article is driven by its *textual* appeal (the writing)
- A poster is driven by its *visual* appeal (the graphics, photos, tables, etc.). The writing becomes a visual element on the poster.
The 30/90 Rule states that a poster should **capture** the viewer’s attention in 30 seconds and **hold** it for 90 seconds.

- Capturing the viewer’s attention is accomplished by creating an attractive design (visual appeal).
- Holding the viewer’s attention is accomplished by making the text concise, easy to read, and “snappy” (textual appeal).
Textual and visual elements are brought together effectively by creating the following:

- Informative writing (power)
- Precise composition (punch)
- A well-planned layout (pizzazz)
The standard and most informative format for poster text mirrors that of a journal article

- Abstract (~200 words)
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion/Conclusions
- References (if any)
The basic format for a research article is called IMRAD:

- Abstract (~200 words)
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results [and]
- Discussion/Conclusions
- References (if any)
What Should You Include in Each IMRAD Section?

Introduction

• Provides relevant background information
• Identifies the gap in knowledge (the unknown thing or unmet need that led to your study or intervention)
• Explicitly states your hypothesis or purpose
What Should You Include in Each IMRAD Section?

Methods

• Identifies the materials (cells, patients, animals, etc.) you used
• Describes the experiments you conducted or the procedures you performed
What Should You Include in Each IMRAD Section?

Results

- Presents your results or outcomes
- Displays information in graphic format — most photos, tables, and graphs will be related to the results
What Should You Include in Each IMRAD Section?

Discussion/Conclusion

• States what you conclude based on the data (that is, tells the viewer whether you believe the hypothesis was supported or the purpose achieved)
• Explains what the findings mean
• Explains how the findings can be used
• Identifies any next steps or new research questions
The Punch that Comes from Precise Composition

Your text will have punch when:

- The grammar, punctuation, and spelling are correct
- The message is clear
Writing for Clarity on Posters

• Minimize text
• Use a table, figure, chart, or photograph instead of text when possible
• Use bulleted or numbered lists instead of large blocks of text
• Avoid jargon and limit the use of acronyms
Writing for Clarity on Posters

• Use active rather than passive voice
• Write in first person rather than third person
• Choose a legible font size and style
• Avoid ALL CAPS. For emphasis, use *italics*, **boldface**, or *underlining* (and possibly even *color*)
Well-Planned Layouts Have Pizzazz

• The layout is the arrangement of text, visuals, and graphics

• Adopt a design that guides the viewer to read the poster in a natural left-to-right, top-to-bottom order
Well-Planned Layouts Have Pizzazz

- Balance the size of elements and their physical location to each other
- Place graphics alongside the text where they are discussed
Well-Planned Layouts Have Pizzazz

• Use a multi-column format
• Use headings liberally and make them descriptive (for instance, instead of writing “Methods,” label the section “How We Assessed the Intervention”)
• Use white space as a graphic element
• Organize the information (visual and textual) logically
What Makes the Writing on a Poster Effective?

- **Power** because it is informative
- **Punch** because it is precise
- **Pizzazz** because the layout is well-planned
Resources

- Department of Scientific Publications
  X 2-3305
  6th floor, Pickens Academic Tower
  scientificpublications@mdanderson.org


Graphic Resources for Your Scientific Poster

Kathleen Wagner
Associate Director
Medical Graphics & Photography
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- publish the work,
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- Individually identifiable health information
  - That identifies the individual; or
  - There is a reasonable basis to believe the information can be used to identify the individual
Assigning Attribution

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• Recommended format for assigning publication attributions:
  – Author(s), Official abbreviation of journal title, volume(issue):number of first page Year
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  – Steve Haydon
    AVP & Deputy Chief Legal Officer
    Legal Services
    713-745-6049

• PHI
  – Krista Barnes
    Senior Legal Officer
    Institutional Compliance
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Stock Photography

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Creating an Effective Scientific Poster

Jeff Flasik
Manager
Medical Graphics & Photography
Scientific Posters & Slide Presentations

We have created several templates in the new branding standard utilizing Microsoft PowerPoint and Adobe Illustrator. It is our hope that these templates will aid you in laying out your scientific poster presentations as well as your PowerPoint slide show presentations.

Each of the templates are available for PC and Mac compatible computers. Within each file, the templates are available in several different sizes and column layouts. All files are ZIP files. PC users can unzip the files within windows or using an unzip utility such as Winzip. Mac user can double click on the ZIP file and it will automatically unzip.

For further instructions on utilizing the templates please click on the following link: Scientific Poster Template

**Scientific Poster Templates:**
- Adobe Illustrator.zip
- PowerPoint.zip

**Slide Presentation Templates:**
- PowerPoint 2007 and newer: Branding_PowerPoint_pub.zip
- PowerPoint 2003: Branding_PowerPoint_pot.zip

Other useful links:
- Tip Sheets for Template Use and Content Development for Scientific Posters
Resources

- Medical Graphics & Photography
  X 2-6737
  6th floor, Pickens Academic Tower
  http://inside.mdanderson.org/departments/medical-graphics/