

Guidelines for making poster presentations

Many people (including epidemiologists) consider posters to be less important than an oral presentation. However, the poster medium affords certain strong advantages in communicating the results of your research or investigation:

- Posters can be viewed during at least several hours
- Data and graphics on posters are available as long as an individual wishes
- The viewer can go forwards and backwards through the poster
- The poster allows you to more personally interact with the people who are interested in your research
- A poster attracts audience that is really interested in your work

Poster presentations are organised in **poster sessions**, and poster sessions belonging thematically to the same overall topic are organised in separate **poster areas**.

Poster papers minimise clashes caused by many parallel sessions and there is more time reserved for the presentation and for the viewing of poster papers than for oral ones. During the EPIET scientific seminar, over 50% of all presentations were poster presentations.

In general, for each poster a **poster board** is reserved with a clear dimension listed in the instruction for authors. The number of each poster paper and of its corresponding poster board is given in the appropriate session programme.

The **display time** is the time for the actual display of all posters of a poster session or of a group of sessions and displayed in the conference programme. Authors are asked to put up their posters as soon and to take them down as late as possible, in order to enable the conference participants to view their posters any time within this time allocation.

The **authors in attendance time** is the time when the respective authors of a poster session must be present at their display for presentation.

Preparing a poster

The standard format of a poster follows that of an oral scientific presentation and includes Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusions; Recommendations. A poster, like an oral presentation, cannot (and should not) contain all information you have on the topic. Scientific posters should stimulate interest rather than provide a detailed presentation. If all text is kept to a minimum (1000 words), a person should fully read your poster in less than 10 minutes. Since there will be many other posters, you must make sure your poster is interesting and visually slick if you hope to attract viewers.

- **First, read the instructions** supplied by the meeting organisers! Having an idea about these details before you begin will make the whole process much easier.
- Re-read your **abstract** once again - are the statements still accurate? The presentation must cover the same material as the abstract. Do not include an abstract on a poster!
- **General guidelines:**
 - Artistry does not substitute for content. The relevance of the poster to field epidemiology should be apparent to viewers.

- Think of the raw layout of your poster beforehand. Place the title at the top. Start with the Introduction at the upper left, finish with the recommendations at the lower right, with methods and results filling the central space.
 - Use short sentences, simple words, and bullets to illustrate your points.
 - Text should be broken up by including graphics or photos.
 - Self-explanatory graphics should dominate the poster. The success of a poster directly relates to the clarity of your illustrations and tables!
 - Avoid using jargon, acronyms, or unusual abbreviations.
 - Use a non-serif font (e.g., Arial) for the poster.
 - The poster (text and graphics) should be easily readable from a distance of about 2 metres. As a thumb rule, the text should be readable if the poster is printed out on an A4 sheet (e.g. Arial >24 points).
- **Title:** Title should be in large fonts (e.g. Arial >80 points) and attract potential viewers. If possible, institute logos or affiliations should be minimised in size and put in the lower corner of the poster, or, alternatively, next to the title.
 - **Introduction:** Get your viewer interested about the issue or question while using the absolute minimum of background information and definitions. Put the objectives of your study at the end of your introduction.
 - **Methods:** Be short, but precise. State what study design you used and define your study population. Provide a case definition, if applicable. Mention statistical, laboratory and other methods that were used.
 - **Results:** Briefly provide descriptive results (response rate, age and sex distribution). Present data that more specifically addresses the hypothesis and refer to supporting charts or images. Tables and graphs should stand on their own.
 - A minimal amount of text materials should supplement the graphic materials.
 - Use regions of empty space between poster elements to differentiate and accentuate these elements.
 - Graphic materials should be readable at a distance of 1.5-2.0 metres. The font size should be at least 1 cm high. Lines in illustrations should be larger than normal.
 - Use colours for emphasis, but do not overuse (2-3 colours are usually enough). Avoid using patterns or open bars in histograms.
 - Remove all non-essential information from graphs and tables (data curves not discussed by the poster; excess grid lines in tables).
 - Graphics and tables should have a complete title and legend.
 - **Conclusion and recommendations:** Comment on main results and discuss why they are conclusive and interesting. Discuss potential biases. What are your recommendations?
 - **Acknowledgments/further information:** Thank individuals for specific contributions to project; mention who has provided funding. Provide your e-mail address for further information.

Making the poster

- Preparing a poster takes time. Plan for a minimum of one week.
- Usually a presentation software such as PowerPoint will be used. Format your PowerPoint slide on the size you'll like to have it printed (ex 90x130 cm) by using the menu data -> format page. You can insert your text and graphics directly on that slide or copy-paste it from a Word document or a PowerPoint slide.
- Print the poster in an A4 format to check for layout, colours, font size and spelling errors before printing it in large size.
- After the poster is printed in large format, changes are no longer possible.
- It is often useful to make a handout of your poster for distribution during the poster session.

Usually, all the material necessary for attaching the poster to the poster board is available in the respective poster area. Still, you may want to bring some pins or thumbtacks, just in case.

An example of a poster (FETP India, source Dr. Yvan Hutin) can be seen here:

A poster should disclose key messages at first sight

First Author¹, Second Author², Third author³
Version 3 - 9 April 2007 - Comments and suggestions welcome! Contact FETP India, WHO India country office

1. FETP trainee, Somewhere Pradesh, India
2. Supervisor, Training Institution
3. Senior author, Ministry of Health

Background: Poster preparation is a challenging task

Getting started can be hard

- The motivation may be lower than for an oral
- Fewer classical rules are available
- Technical aspects may appear intimidating
- Computer file handling
- Printing

Be focused and short

- Don't overfill the space available
- People stop in front of posters for a short time only
- Headings and graphs must summarize contents

The technique is not too difficult

- Prepare slides as for a normal presentation
- Get comments and suggestions
- Cut and paste text and graphs into the template
- The file can be printed anywhere
- Even at conference site

Methods: Use the space available to stretch out imagination and creativity

Display harmoniously

- The poster should look easy to read (Make it breathe)
- Get out of the usual frames. This is not a set of slides!
- Colours and graphics serve your message and are not an end in themselves
- Prefer a light background (White takes less ink)
- Blend graphics into background
- Use same colour (or white)

Step back for big picture vision

- Arrange the poster like the first page of a newspaper
- Key points come across in a wink, in depth reading provides details
- Use the preview function to see the whole document
- Ensure that headings are readable
- Fine tune vertical alignment of text boxes
- Format: "Text box", "Position"

Results: Descriptive and analytical data can be shown at two different levels

Descriptive epidemiology is at the top (vertical posters)

• Titles summarize the take home message

• The middle of the poster - at eye level - draws attention to the results

• The lay out suggests a top to bottom and left to right reading sequence

Use of posters by scientists was clustered in few areas of the city

Rate of poster use by scientists increased with a seasonal variation in 2003-6

Adults used posters more

Characteristics	Use	Population	Attack rate
Age			
0-4	3	210	1.0
5-14	23	464	5.0
15-19	20	479	4.2
20-24	22	450	4.9
25-29	16	272	5.9
30-34	16	181	7.7
35-39	11	167	7.0
40+	9	108	8.4
Sex			
Male	27	1,024	2.7
Female	26	1,024	2.7
Total	10	1,052	2.7

Analytical epidemiology is at the bottom (vertical posters)

- Short message - but not flashy graphics - was associated with acquisition of the message in a cohort study among the participants of the conference

Rate of acquisition of the message

	Among exposed	Among unexposed	Estimate	95% CI
Short message	88%	14%	5.7	1.4-23
Flashy graphic	76%	6%	0.65	0.78-0.97

Well in which bed posters were discarded

Here you can show the picture of who ever could your outbreak!

Limitation: Displaying everything is not possible

- A poster is not a paper: Packing all the findings is neither possible nor desirable
- Use the poster as a communication strategy: generate a desire to stop by and ask questions
- Prepare graphics: Business cards, reprints (e.g., poster, article), data tables
- Change dimensions and layout ("File" > "Page setup") if the meeting asks for different dimensions or for a horizontal design

Conclusion: A poster is a multi-layered communication method

- Multiple reading levels allow obtaining the information quickly with as much details as desired
- The poster is a large space that allows breathing

Recommendation: Lay out to get across different levels of details

- Stratify the amount of details in the message by headings and sub-headings
- Display the information with harmony as if arranging pieces of furniture in a room