

Guidelines for Poster Presentations

- **The contents**

Posters should be designed to be read comfortably by someone standing in front of them: this means larger print and consequently less information than you would put in a paper or report.

- *Focus on the main points*

As in a talk, identify the points you really want to put across to the audience, and concentrate on those.

- *Provide background/motivation*

Make sure the reader is told *why* you did this work and what its significance is: remember that in general nobody *has* to read a poster, so it's up to you to make sure that they read yours. They won't do that if they don't see the point of the project.

- *Tell a coherent story*

Reading a poster is harder for the audience than reading a paper, because there isn't a built-in sequence (the poster presents everything at once). So you need a strong structure to help your readers to get a clear picture (see *Navigation* below).

- *Use graphics*

Pictures are visually striking and, if well designed, can convey a great deal of information in a small space. But they have to earn their keep (lots of photos of the apparatus may look pretty, but what do they tell the reader?). Make sure that graphs are both readable (thick lines, large axis scales) and comprehensible (not too complicated; clear caption with key to symbols). Remember several people may be reading your poster at any given time, but you can only talk to one of them!

- **The layout**

A poster has first to catch and hold the attention of potential readers, and then to ensure that those readers go away with the information that you wanted them to have.

- *Have a good headline*

It should be large, catchy and informative.

- *Make effective use of colour*

Dark backgrounds are particularly effective (but be warned that they may not print well on inkjet printers, because the paper gets very wet). Be sure that the text stands out from the background: avoid over-fussy patterned backgrounds, and be aware that colour combinations that look good on a computer screen may not print well.

- *Make the poster easy to navigate*

Posters can be difficult to find your way around! Avoid very complicated, fussy layouts with lots of small pieces of text (generally these don't look good either); remember that readers of English will normally start at the top left-hand corner (so don't put your introductory panel on the right!); consider using arrows as navigational aids if the information flow is complicated (e.g. if there were three possible ways to tackle the problem, and you tried all three).

- **The examples**

It's hard to describe a good poster, but you know one when you see one! Walk round the department and look at the posters (by staff and students) displayed on the walls. Try to analyse what makes the ones you like successful, and conversely what's wrong with the ones you don't like.