

Posters – a Graphical Research Connection

Of all methods of research dissemination, posters are probably the least understood. So, before you start copying and pasting, realize that posters are about networking, feedback and sharing ideas as a way of starting conversations. They're *not* purely about data, prose and references. That's what published papers are for. So if you want an audience to engage; attract them and make them curious.

Start by reducing your core message into *one sentence*. The average length of time that a reader spends on a poster is reported to be about two minutes. That's an awfully short time to read the "entire thesis on one sheet" you'll see regularly at conferences. Rather than try to whittle your work down, build *up* the draft content from one point.

Next, ask how graphical your research is. Can you *show* your work (in which case your total limit is about 400 words) or is it essentially discursive and text-based? If so, be careful, the poster is *still* essentially a graphical medium; limit yourself to no more than 750 words.

Once you've considered your purpose and disciplinary constraints, now think about the audience. As an audience member, I want you to do four key things.

Captivate Me

Get my attention; both graphically and intellectually. Why is your specialty interesting and why is it vital *now*? Captivate me and I'll read for longer. (Also, remember that I'll make a commitment decision from some distance. Do your efforts look attractive? Is your title large enough font, not too long and jargon free? Can you state it as a question?)

Tell Me a Simple Story

Briefly *show* me your story. You don't need an abstract, full methods or extensive references. (Why not give a URL, or QR code to access your methodology / references in full?) Think about the story you are telling. In the sciences, the majority of posters are sub-titled 'Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Conclusion' (and are often ignored by a non-captive audience on a lunch-break). There's nothing wrong with this essential scaffold, but it doesn't make anyone curious. What questions does your work deal with? Place these questions, as subtitles, in a logical order, ask them and then provide a concise answer.

Just Show Me the Essentials

Don't show me every result, just the vital ones. Use colour to highlight and *show* key findings. I've just spent three hours concentrating on presentations – don't make me work too hard.

Help Me to Connect With You

Finally, consider that a poster should also be about possibilities instead of finite conclusions. What's the interesting future question or approach that's going to pique stimulating conversations with the audience? Take the pressure off, and hand them some possibilities to discuss with you.

Design these four elements into an attractive story that you can show concisely to someone who doesn't have your jargon shortcuts. Finally, give the audience an A4 version (with a business card attached) to take away.

If you graphically captivate them with the simple essentials of your work and ensure conversations, then maybe your connection will last for *more* than two minutes.

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The full publication can be found at:
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