

# Poster Presentations

## Guidelines and Resources

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### Summary

We provide some guidelines on preparing a poster presentation for a conference, mainly to help you prepare for the ICTA Spring Symposium 2018, but also as a general guide for presenting at other conferences. We outline some general tips, but there are lots of useful advice out there, so we recommend doing plenty of background reading to get a clearer picture, not of *how* you should do a presentation, but of *what you're trying to achieve with your poster*. We provide a short list of reading resources to get you started.

### Top tips for preparing a poster

1. *Sketch a draft*: Sketch out a first draft (general layout) of your poster on a sheet of paper (even better, on a flip-chart sheet). This will help you start thinking about how to transform the complex idea to a simple story that's accessible to people who come to visit your poster.
2. *Message*: As for any scientific communication, the general advice is to run your idea past someone before you start preparing the poster. So, find a colleague who's not too familiar with your work but who will be honest with you, invite him/her for coffee/tea, and explain your idea for the presentation, with your draft as support. Then ask them to repeat it back to you. This quick exercise will be a good chance to hear how your argument sounds out loud, and how well it's supported by your draft. Does the poster actually *help you* to explain your story? Will it be self explanatory to someone who's not an expert in your research topic, when you're not standing there to explain it? If you're lucky, your colleague will come up with an even better angle for explaining your research than you! Even if you did this exercise when preparing your abstract, it is worth doing it again, as your research may have advanced since then.
3. *Audience*: The success of your poster will depend on whether or not you can capture and retain the audience's attention. To achieve this:
  - a. Find out as much as you can about who the audience is likely to be (web search, ask colleagues, or guess) and adapt the content as much as possible to the audience (e.g. background, jargon, etc.).
  - b. Think about their possible motivations for coming to visit your poster - what do they want to get from it? Write down some questions you think they might ask.
  - c. Remember the [conversion funnel](#): You have **3 seconds** to capture their attention - **30 seconds** to generate interest - **3 minutes** to inspire action.
4. *Story*: Do not to give a comprehensive summary of all your work. Choose one interesting angle/story and focus both your poster and your explanation on

communicating that message. Visitors are more likely to be impressed by a simple story well told, than by a packed poster showing how much work you've done.

5. *Preparation - poster*: Here are 6 design principles from [Pedro Margolles](#) on how to create great posters (but we recommend doing some research for tips that resonate best with you)
  - a. The ideal poster should be brief, non-exhaustive, simple, understandable, graphic, attractive, ordered, motivating, flowing, distinctive, personalised, and have an objective.
  - b. The ideal poster should have a memorable header, most relevant things first, attractive images, matt background, bullet points instead of text, simple visual figures, and a call to action.
  - c. Main elements: Title, Explanatory subtitle, Conclusions, Introduction, Objectives/Hypothesis, Methods, Results, Discussion, Acknowledgements, References, Contact Details [Figures instead of text, wherever possible]
  - d. Proportions: Graphics 50% - Text 25% - White Space 25%
  - e. Typography: Titles and headings, SANS SERIF; Body and Legends, SERIF; Sizes: Title ~80 pts., Authors ~50 pts., Headings ~40 pts., Body text ~25 pts., Footers and legends ~20 pts.
  - f. Colours: Use a palette of harmonic colours, not RGBY.
6. *Preparation - oral delivery*: 7 top tips from [Scientifica](#) on presenting your poster to visitors during the poster session.
  - a. Be welcoming: If you feel self-conscious while standing beside your poster, that's normal. But it can be off-putting to approach a poster where the speaker seems to want the earth to open up and swallow them - so smile and say hello to everyone who walks past and looks at your poster.
  - b. Use the 'elevator pitch': To capture the interest of your potential audience, prepare a very short synopsis with three vital pieces of information: i) What is the problem you're investigating and why is it important?; ii) What have you found?; iii) Why is that important?
  - c. Create a story: Create a story around your research to capture and retain the audience's attention.
  - d. Check the audience's understanding: Before you start explaining your poster to a visitor, don't be afraid to ask them directly, "How familiar are you with <your topic>?". This will help you to pitch your explanation at exactly the right level for them. Then as you proceed, don't ignore blank stares, ask "Have I expressed that clearly enough?"
  - e. Dress appropriately: *Too formal* tells the audience "This is the first time I've done this", while *too casual* says "I'm too cool to be here". *Smart dress* says "I'm taking this seriously, and I want to hear your opinion".
  - f. Answering questions and receiving feedback: Prepare for possible questions in advance, and above all be open and honest: say what really happened in your experiments/analysis, what you've read, and don't be afraid to say you don't know (but get the person's contact so you can send them an answer - could be the start of a new collaboration!). If you receive negative critique, your first

instinct should be to take it, not as a personal attack, but as a gift and an opportunity to improve. No matter what, always say Thanks!

- g. Practice, practice, practice: Don't wait until the poster session to hear your story and field questions for the first time. You will be glad that you spent time perfecting your performance, both alone and face-to-face with others.

## Further reading and resources

1. [Scientific Poster Design and Layout | Fonts, Colors, Contrasts, Screen vs. Print | MakeSigns.com](#)
2. [Alley, M. Scientific Posters - The Craft of Scientific Posters](#)
3. [Better Posters Blog](#)
4. [Designing conference posters - Colin Purrington](#)
5. [Torres, A. Research Guides: How to Create a Research Poster: Poster Basics](#)
6. [Wolcott, T. G. Mortal Sins in Poster Presentations or How to Give the Poster No One Remembers](#)
7. [Poster Perfect | The Scientist Magazine](#)
8. [Tips for presenting your scientific poster at a conference](#)
9. [Anatomía del póster científico perfecto](#)
10. [Scientific Poster Design](#)
11. [Erren, T. C. & Bourne, P. E. Ten simple rules for a good poster presentation. PLoS Comput. Biol. 3, e102 \(2007\)](#)
12. [An Effective Poster | Creating Effective Poster Presentations](#)