

Designing Research Posters

This handout explains how to use effective design strategies to compose research posters.

Research Posters Catch Reader's Attention and Make Key Information Understandable

- Research posters display important information at conferences
- Information usually summarizes key findings of a research or lab project
- Posters should tell the story of the project and provide audience with snapshot of project's key points or features

Poster display boards at exhibits or special events need to be easily readable from a distance. However, the information they provide is usually more detailed—for example, summarizing the key findings of a research or lab project. Project display boards “tell the story” of a project and provide the audience with a snapshot or synopsis of the project's key points or features.

Your local bookstore or art supply store may sell specially designed and foldable project display boards on which you can mount printed images and text. Poster display boards are large, complex documents composed of images and text. In some respects, they function like a large page and thus need to guide the reader's eyes carefully to critical information.

Plan your poster board in such a way that your reader will know how to read in sequence (if sequence matters). Don't be afraid to use numbers or other navigational cues to help people along. Some poster sessions or exhibits may have guidelines for the layout of posters, perhaps in the interest of keeping an audience moving along in a crowded space or in a competition.

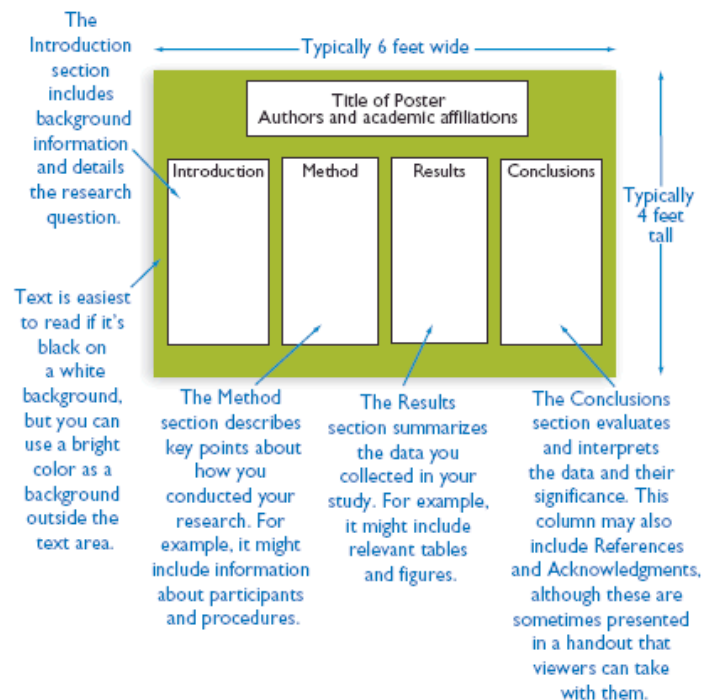


Figure 1. Sample poster display board in APA style.

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Conference posters generally follow the same pattern as research papers formatted in APA style. They are prepared so that they can be read from the top of the left column down, from the top of the next column down, and so on. This example in Figure 1 shows the layout for a 6' x 4' poster, the recommended size in APA style. Another popular size for posters is 4' x 3'. They are designed as trifold display boards using three columns, with the center column measuring 2' and each side panel 1'. Presenters typically place the primary content in the center column and use the outer columns for related information or examples.

Tips for Designing Research Posters

1. Do your research - make sure all factual information is accurate
2. Storyboard - create a mock-up of your poster
3. Grab attention - be assertive with design by using striking (but relevant) visual elements
4. Hold attention - provide useful, precise information legible from a short distance
5. Use graphical design principles:
 - a. Place related information together
 - b. Align your edges
 - c. Use sharp contrasts to add visual interest
 - d. Establish a color scheme that complements content
6. Leave time to revise and edit text, design - ask at least one other person to read your poster
7. Create your poster using durable materials - poster board, paper, and materials to be attached to your display should be able to survive ordinary “bumps and bruises”
 - a. Depending on how you’re traveling to your conference, you may want to print at home and assemble on site
 - b. Try to scout out local print shops near the location of your presentation in case you have last minute changes to your poster

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Practice Designing a Mock Up Research Poster

In groups of three, cut out and use the textual and graphical elements provided with this handout to compose a mock up research poster. Use the blank sheet attached to this handout as your trifold “board.” Refer to the guidelines on this handout and from the presentation to help you.

Visual Content Serves Different Functions

Visual Form	Functions	Production
PHOTOGRAPHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convey information and content May (like illustrations) be touchstones for analysis in the text Help your reader see what you mean Allow you to focus on discussing the meaning and significance of a photograph's contents rather than merely describing it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take photographs yourself that express the information or argument Search for photographs in image archives
ILLUSTRATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Act as visual interpretations of textual content Explain complex tasks, equipment, or objects Clarify concepts or processes Prove a point by showing an example as evidence Add aesthetic appeal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw or paint original art, digitally or by hand Search for illustrations in image archives Use a map to show a route Create a timeline that shows key events graphically
CHARTS AND GRAPHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represent data visually Show trends and relationships among variables Draw attention to the most important conclusions to be drawn from an analysis of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect data through original research or at data repositories Use a spreadsheet program to create charts and graphs
DESIGN AND LAYOUT ELEMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct the reader's eye to the most important information Express hierarchies of value and categories across information Convey tone and mood (professionalism, artistry, playfulness) Express form as visual content (patterns, lines, etc.) Add aesthetic appeal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn design conventions in the particular discipline, as described in style guides Study examples of effective design Use the layout and style features of a word-processing or desktop publishing program

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Visual Content: Purposes, Situations, and Examples

Purpose	Situations and Examples
Provide readers with concise visual evidence of something referred to in the text	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ You explain or analyze a painting, photograph, or other work of visual art in an essay and need to give readers an image so that they can see what you are referring to.■ You observe or participate in an event and need to show your readers what you witnessed or experienced.■ You write a critique of a scene in a film or TV show and want to help readers who may not recall the scene.■ In your archival research on a historical subject, you discover images that may help your readers understand the subject more clearly.■ In a magazine article, you report on a trend or event in the news.
Illustrate complex processes or sequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ In a paper describing a process or series of steps, you want to show readers concisely what the steps look like when performed.■ In a science report, you need to illustrate the relationship between objects or the constitution of an object.■ In an engineering report, you want to provide a diagram of an instrument and how it works.
Summarize, explain, or interpret data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ You have collected data on people's attitudes toward a subject in your field of research and want to show how these attitudes are different now than they were previously.■ You find data on demographic variables at a data repository like the U.S. Census and want to show that they are related.■ You collect data over time indicating that a significant change has occurred, and you want to show this trend in a graph.

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Blank sheet for poster board mock up.

