Poster Design Guide

Format settings for the posters of the Ecofruit Conference 2023

DIN Format	size in mm	size in inches
DIN A0	841 x 1189	33.1 x 46.8

What is a poster?

A poster is a visual communications tool. It is very different from a paper or a talk, and so different techniques need to be used in its preparation. In particular, a poster is not a conference paper, and simply pinning a paper to a poster board usually makes a very poor poster. The purpose of a poster is to outline a piece of work in a form that is easily assimilated and stimulates interest and discussion.

Where to Begin?

- Start by **writing down** everything you would like to have on your poster, keeping in mind who your target audience is.
- **Draw** your poster on a piece of paper, adding all the different sections and headings you would like to cover in your poster, as well as the text. Example for headings are:

- title (the audience will view this first);
- introduction
- problem statement
- target
- methodology
- results
- recommendations
- conclusion
- sources
- authors

Your drawing might look something like this:

Fig. 1: Poster headings
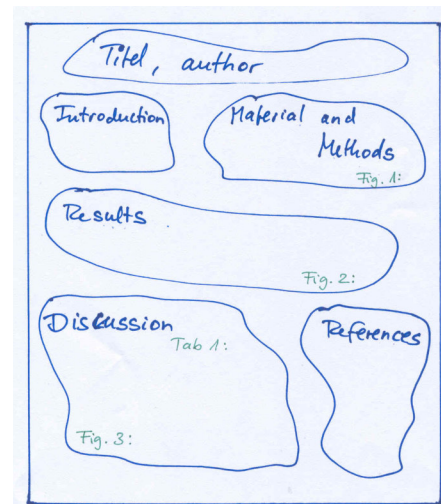
- **Eliminate any poster "noise"**. Poster noise happens when you add irrelevant or unnecessary information to your poster, e.g. information your audience might already know, etc. - this will depend on your target audience (colleagues, other specialists in this field, general public, etc.).

- Have some **attention grabbers** on your poster. Seeing that you don't have a lot of time to get the attention of your audience you need to make a quick impact, e.g. an eye-catching and interesting statement, photographs, graphics, colours, layout, etc. - all of these play a role in attracting your audience.

- The title: (Keep it short and sweet and make this your title! Use the active voice (i.e., avoid "ing" on the ends of verbs) and avoid the verb "to be" whenever possible.)

Poster Layout

1. Showcasing the "NEWS" in your Topic

The poster design process moves quickly when you take time to make some early decisions:

- What's the NEWS? What did you find out that you want to share with others?
- How can the overall arrangement of the poster signal the news?
- What will make the reader stop and look?

To select the content for your poster, you must cull the most essential information from the wealth of knowledge you've gained. You can **not** use everything. You can organize the information into three categories:

- **MUST know** (necessary to understand the poster topic)
- **Good to know** (equipment, size, volume, etc)
- **Nice to know** (perhaps historical or social context, cost, unexpected effects)

You should include the MUST, add some "Good to know" elements, and save "Nice to know" details for discussing with your audience or for a handout you'll give them.

## 2. Visualizing the "NEWS" in the Design Space

Use your answers to the questions above to relate the NEWS to a spatial layout that leads the audience's eyes through your NEWS. Some of your choices are:

- left-to-right flow in vertical columns
- two fields in contrast
- left-to-right flow in horizontal rows
- a centered image with explanations

This is the most challenging part of design: matching the physical pattern of the layout with the intellectual pattern of your NEWS. Group the poster content into appropriate areas. For example, if you have three main points, you'll need three main areas plus the areas for the title, summary and the acknowledgments.

3. Creating Coherence

Constructing a coherent poster means that it's easy for your audience to move from one topic discussed on your poster to another and to see the relationships between them. Create coherence by carefully planning the arrangement of information by relying on what we know about how readers read. Since English-speaking readers read text from left to right and top to bottom, use this pattern to inform the arrangement of information in your poster. While the poster title is conventionally centered across the top of the poster, it can be placed to the left or to the right, but the area it occupies should command the rest of the space, perhaps by using a coloured area behind it, as shown below.
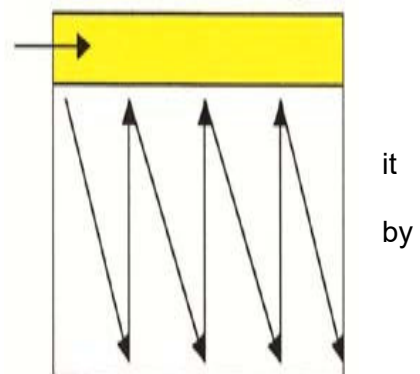
Pattern eyes follow in reading a four-column poster:


Fig. 2: Poster pattern

Other useful strategies for guiding the reader's attention and showing the relative importance of each part of your poster's content include attending to **blank space, graphic hierarchies, indenting, visuals, and colour.**

- **Blank space** defines relationships among objects. Marginal space around the sides and bottom creates an inclusive frame for the content of your poster. Don't run text completely to the edge of the poster. Leave some framing blank space. Separate columns with blank space, too (although these areas may be coloured) so that the viewers' eyes can quickly pick out the pattern or arrangement of content.

- **Graphic Hierarchies** help viewers determine quickly which sections are of equal importance and which are of lesser or subordinate importance. Graphic hierarchies can consist of point sizes, colour areas, line widths, and so on. The rule of thumb is: **BIG = IMPORTANT small = subordinate**

- **Indenting** information helps to create white space around the information that will emphasize it and makes the information easy to scan with the eyes. You can indent information by generating bulleted or numbered lists or by creating more white space around paragraphs or other chunks of related visual or textual information.

- **Visual Aids**. Arguably the most critical design elements of any poster display include the use of visuals, font style/size, and colour. The effective use of these features helps to make your poster both aesthetically pleasing and easy for the viewers' eyes to scan.

Plan your layout carefully. Layout includes:
- Headings and subheadings.
- Organising the information into sections.
- There should be balance and simplicity.
- Deciding where you want to add graphics, photographs, graphs, etc.
- Do not try to present too much detail. Less is more.
- Leaving enough white space - don't clutter the poster, it should have a clean and simple layout.
- Provide your name and contact details for people that might want to discuss it with you.

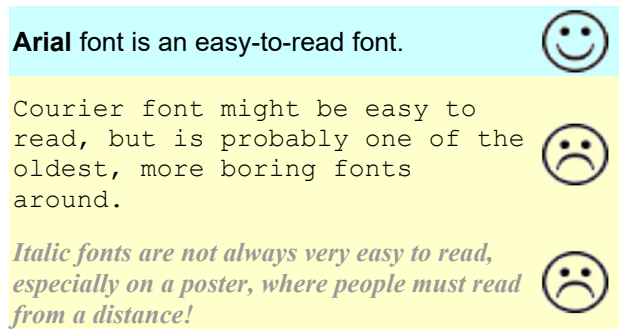Information should flow (viewing sequence) by column or by row, as in the following examples:
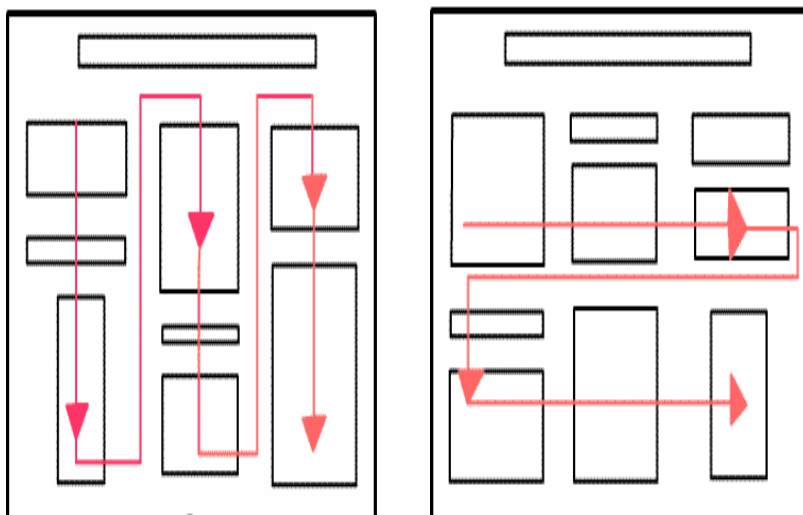
Fig. 3: Different patterns: by column – by row

Hint: A numbering system in your poster will help your audience to follow the flow of the information easily.

4. Font choice

Text size & font type are a very important aspects when designing a poster. They will determine whether your audience will be able to read your poster with ease.

- Choose a font type that is easy to read, as in the following examples:

> **Arial** font is an easy-to-read font. ☺
>
> Courier font might be easy to read, but is probably one of the oldest, more boring fonts around. ☹
>
> *Italic fonts are not always very easy to read, especially on a poster, where people must read from a distance!* ☹

- It is not easy to read words that are in capital letters, e.g. **COMMUNICATION STYLES vs Communication styles**
- To attract your audience, they must be able to read your poster from a distance (1 - 3m), therefore font size is extremely important. These are recommended font sizes to use:

	Format A0	Format A4
Main title	100 pt	22 - 26 pt
Subheadings	50 pt	11 - 13 pt
Body text	25 pt	6 – 7 pt

Headings of the same level of importance should be in the same size and type of font. All labels should be legible from at least 1 meter away.

5. Colour
Colour plays a very important role in posters. Choose colours that complement each other. Certain colours, like certain yellows, etc., are difficult to see and read. Text and background colours should complement each other. Make sure your foreground colour (text) is clear and soft on the eyes when combined with the background colour.
For example, if you use a background colour for two different areas of the poster, those areas should be related in some way. Use colour

- to show relationships among different areas of the poster.
- to create coherence and guide your audience through the sections of the poster.
- sparingly and purposefully. "Less is more!"

A good poster is ...

readable,
Readability is a measure of how easily the ideas flow from one item to the next. Text that has lots of grammatical problems, complex or passive sentence structure, and misspellings is "hard to read".

legible,
If a text is legible, it can be deciphered. For example, an old book may not be legible if the paper has corroded or the lettering has faded. A common error in poster presentations is use of fonts that are too small to be read from 1-3 meters away, a typical distance for reading a poster.

well organized, and

Spatial organization makes the difference between reaching 95% rather than just 5% of your audience: time spent hunting for the next idea or piece of data is time taken away from thinking about the science.

succinct.

Studies show that you have only 11 seconds to grab and retain your audience's attention so make the punchline prominent and brief. Most of your audience is going to absorb only the punchline. Those who are directly involved in related research will seek you out anyway and chat with you at length so you can afford to leave out all the details and tell those who are really interested the "nitty gritty" later.

Sources

This text is a revised composition based on the following sources:

Sven Hammarling, University of Tennessee: *How to Prepare a Poster*.
http://www.siam.org/siamnews/general/poster.htm

George R. Hess, C State University: *Creating Effective Poster Presentations*.
http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/PPTinstructions.html

George R. Hess, C State University: *60-Second Poster Evaluation*
http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/60second.html

Dina F. Mandoli, University of Washington, Department of Botany: *How to make a great Poster*.
http://www.aspb.org/education/poster.cfm