

# PREPARING YOUR POSTER

Posters are visual communications tools that serve as a starting point for in-depth conversations. They are not research papers blown up to poster size, nor are they meant to provide all the details of your work. An effective poster will attract attention, tell a story, and cover significant information concisely.

There is not one perfect way to organize a poster. Everyone's content is different, and your personal style needs to be reflected, albeit in a professional manner that conveys important information without overwhelming your viewers. You have a limited amount of space to get your message across, so ask yourself, what do you really want someone to take away from viewing your poster?

The general tips and guidelines provided here will be applicable to most fields; however, there are variations in the preferred style and format of posters in different fields. We recommend that students consult faculty mentors for specific guidelines and criteria relevant to the discipline.

## GETTING STARTED

- 1. Review the guidelines and instructions.** When your poster is accepted for presentation at a conference or other event, such as Frontiers in Undergraduate Research, you will be given instructions and guidelines outlining key information such as size requirements, restrictions and/or space limitations; pay close attention.
- 2. Consider your audience.** There are three types of audiences: specialists in your discipline, those in related areas or fields, and a general audience. You will need to tailor your poster and presentation for the type of audience attending the poster session. For example, if presenting to a general audience, you will want to simplify your content to avoid overwhelming people with technical jargon. Conversely, if the poster session will be attended by specialists, you may want to include technical details.
- 3. Determine your message.** What key information do you want to get across to those who attend the poster session? Brainstorm what you want to highlight and essential information that needs to be included. Create an outline of the information to include on your poster. If you submitted an abstract as part of an application to present, you can use this to guide the development of your outline.
- 4. Sketch a mock-up.** Sketch a mock-up of your poster to go along with the content outline. Show your outline and mock-up to your faculty mentor and ask for feedback. Plan to do this multiple times during the poster development process.

Plan ahead and give yourself ample time to create an outline and mock-up of your poster, get feedback from your mentor, and edit. Effective posters aren't developed overnight!

## POSTER CONTENT

Start by sharing the problem, topic, or focus of your project. Next, move into what you did to research, explore, study, and analyze this topic, outlining how you went about doing it. State your results or outcomes clearly; explain why your results are interesting, as well as what they mean to your field or discipline. Finish by outlining how your work contributed to the current state of knowledge, and what can be done moving forward with this knowledge. Provide recommendations for next steps or areas in need of further study.

## ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Avoid long paragraphs and blocks of text. These may appear overwhelming to viewers passing by. When it comes to text, less is more.
- Use bullets to break up blocks of text and make it easy for viewers to jump through the project without having to read dense paragraphs.
- If presenting to a general or non-specialist audience, make sure to discuss your work in plain language, avoiding jargon, overly-technical descriptions, and acronyms that general audiences won't understand.
- Clearly interpret your results; don't make your audience work to understand the information on your poster. Use simple language that includes essential information relevant to your message; you can fill in the details when you discuss your project with those in attendance.
- Don't forget to cite your sources in the format used in your field (e.g., APA, MLA). You don't need to provide a full list of all sources you used in your research; focus on sources you're citing on your poster and the primary sources you consulted as part of your work.
- Acknowledge those who have supported or contributed to your work. Include your advisors, faculty mentors, anyone who has assisted you with workspace or resources, and any funding programs that provided financial support. Some funding agencies may require or request that you use their logos on your poster, while others may provide specific text to be used in the acknowledgment of support.

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## Title & Heading

The title is the first thing viewers will see on your poster, and if it is confusing, it may be all they see. Think of your title like a newspaper headline. The goal of a headline is to entice readers to read the article; your title should fill the same role, enticing viewers to learn more about your work.

It's essential to have a title that attracts interest and draws viewers to your poster. Keep it short (1-2 lines) and easy to understand. You may pose a question, define your study or project, or preview findings or key results. You may want to develop a few titles and try them out with various audiences – faculty, advisors, friends and family – to see what attracts attention and draws people in.

Below your title you should list the authors of the work along with their institutional affiliations. Talk with your faculty mentor and/or PI about the proper order in which to list the authors.

## Common Categories

There are many categories you can choose to include on your poster based on the information you want to convey and the best way to organize your content. Below are common categories you will see on posters.

Research Question  
Objectives  
Introduction  
Background  
Methods  
Study Design  
Independent Variables

Materials  
Discussion  
Analysis  
Results  
Findings  
Successes  
Conclusions

Recommendations  
Potential Solutions  
Future Directions  
Next Steps  
Acknowledgments  
References  
Literature Cited

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## POSTER FORMAT

Remember that a poster is a **visual** format; attention to layout and thoughtful use of graphics will help you communicate your project most effectively.

### Poster Templates

The links below will provide you with poster templates you can use to develop your poster. Don't feel limited by the templates; these layouts will not work for everyone and should be adjusted to accommodate your content and categorization. Use your creativity and present your content in a way that represents your work and tells a story.

- **UConn Brand Standards:** [brand.uconn.edu/wordmarks-assets/downloads-2/](http://brand.uconn.edu/wordmarks-assets/downloads-2/) (scroll to Print Templates)
- **CAHNR Office of Communications:** [communications.cahnrc.uconn.edu/templates/](http://communications.cahnrc.uconn.edu/templates/)

In addition, the OUR website includes images of posters developed by UConn undergraduates for past Frontiers in Undergraduate Research poster exhibitions. These demonstrate a range of styles and options for presenting information in a poster format.

### Creating a Poster

Common software used to create posters includes PowerPoint, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe InDesign, Corel Draw, and Canvas. Creating your own poster in PowerPoint is easy. Start by creating a new blank presentation. Go to "Page Setup" (usually found in the "Design" tab) and create a custom size. From there you can insert text boxes, images, and graphics to suit your needs. Keep in mind the resolution of images and graphics; if an image is pixellated when you view it at 100%, it will be pixellated when printed.

### Font

Choose easy-to-read and professional fonts. Use no more than two or three complementary fonts, and limit the variation in your use of those fonts (e.g., size, weight, color, italics). By using text styles consistently, you give your audience visual cues that will help them navigate your poster.

- Sans serif fonts such as Arial or Helvetica are commonly used for the title and headings.
- Serif fonts such as Times are commonly used for the text.
- General Font Size Guidelines: 80-90 pt. for the title; 36-48 pt. for the headers; 24-36 pt. for the body text.

Someone standing 4 feet away from your poster should be able to read it easily. To check the font size, print your poster on standard 8 ½ x 11 paper. If you can read all the text without squinting or struggling, and others can do the same, then your font size is fine. If not, time to reconfigure and/or edit to make room for text in a larger font!

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## Layout

Break your content into columns (typically 3-4 columns, depending on space). This makes it easier on your reader and helps with the overall flow of information.

- Make sure columns are aligned properly and formatting is consistent throughout.
- Left-justify your text; avoid centering, with the exception of the title, which can be centered.
- Don't be afraid of empty space! Text-heavy, content-filled posters may look cluttered and overwhelming.

## Color

Color can be used to add visual appeal and attract viewers, but choose your palette wisely and avoid going overboard with too many colors. You don't want to overwhelm your viewers.

- If your background is too dark, or is very bright, your poster can be difficult to read.
- Choose a muted background color that will make your text stand out.
- Stick with black or very dark text, and make sure there is enough contrast between your text and background colors to make it easy to read.

## Graphics

Graphics draw people in and get their attention. There are many different kinds of graphic forms, including tables, graphs, charts, photographs, illustrations, and diagrams. Some forms are better suited to particular kinds of information than others, so you must consider what you are trying to communicate in order to select an appropriate graphic form. Think of graphics as educational tools that help you tell a story at a glance. A good rule of thumb is to have a 50/50 ratio of text to graphics on your poster.

When it comes to graphics, simple is better. You can make it easier for a viewer to interpret your graphic by providing a descriptive title, including a legend, and highlighting how the graphic illustrates a particular point (whether through introductory text or visual features in the graphic itself). If your viewers need to expend effort interpreting the graph or it requires the use of a complicated legend, then it needs to be simplified.

Avoid using distracting backgrounds or too many colors on your graphs. Text on the graphs should have the same orientation as all other text on your poster for ease of reading. For example, avoid using vertically-oriented text on the y-axis so that viewers don't need to turn their heads to read it. Try to incorporate the legend into the area of the graph itself instead of having it too far off to the side. In addition, avoid using 3D graphics for 2D data, as this will only confuse your viewers.

Tables can be an effective way to organize information, but can be overwhelming if filled with too much content. Try to limit the amount of data to only the key information or, if you are seeking to emphasize relationships or trends, consider using a graph instead.

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## PRINTING YOUR POSTER

You can get your poster printed at the [UConn Document Production Center](#), located on Discovery Drive near Parking Services on the Storrs campus. You should plan to speak with them early about poster size and paper options, finishing options (e.g., lamination), and accepted file types.

Set a budget. Research how much it will cost to have your poster printed. Get different quotes based on paper type (matte or glossy), and color versus grayscale. If cost is a limiting factor, consider printing your poster yourself and mounting letter-sized components on cardstock or assembling them on the board where you are presenting.

The Document Production Center will only print posters that comply with UConn's Brand Standards. Your poster can include the oak leaf symbol and university wordmarks, which are available for download at [brand.uconn.edu](http://brand.uconn.edu); it **should not** include the UConn or UConn Health seal or the Husky Dog logo.

USE



**UConn**  
+ other wordmark variations

DO NOT USE



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- <https://go.ncsu.edu/posters>
- [http://writingcenter.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/593/2014/06/How\\_to\\_create\\_an\\_academic\\_poster1.pdf](http://writingcenter.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/593/2014/06/How_to_create_an_academic_poster1.pdf)
- <https://colinpurrington.com/tips/poster-design>