Academic Poster Presentations

A poster is a visual communication tool. An effective poster will help you engage colleagues in conversation and get your main points across to many people at once.

An effective poster is:

- a source of information
- a conversation starter
- a summary of your work
- an advertisement of your work

Tips for effective poster presentations

- Get your message across with effective visual displays of data and small blocks of supporting text. Think of your poster as an illustrated abstract.

- Tell readers why your work matters, what you did, what you found, and what you recommend.

- Avoid excessive focus on methods: it's results and implications that count!

Overall appearance

- Your poster should be neat and uncluttered.

- Use a pleasing arrangement of graphics, text, colours.

- Use white space to help organise sections.

- Balance the placement of text and figures.

Organisation

- Use headings to help readers find what they're looking for: objective, results, conclusions, etc.

- Minimise text – use graphics.

- Keep text in blocks of no more than 50 to 75 words – don't create large blocks of prose.

- A columnar format helps traffic flow in a crowded poster session.

Text size

- All text should be large enough to read from 1 to 2 metres, including the text in figures.

- Title should be larger, to attract attention from far away.

- Don't fight 'reader gravity', which pulls the eyes from top to bottom (first), and left to right.

Colour

- Use colour cautiously. Dark letters on light background are easiest to read.

- Stick to a theme of 2 to 3 colours.

- Avoid overly bright colours. They attract attention but wear out readers' eyes.

Contact details

Include full contact information. You want to be found – the reader should not have to look up anything to find you.

Presentation

Prepare a 3 to 5 minute verbal explanation of your work. Some people will ask you to "walk me through your poster." When making a presentation, don't read the poster. Instead:

- give the big picture,

- explain why the problem is important, and

- use the graphics on your poster to illustrate and support your findings and recommendations.

Handouts

A summary handout is something else you can refer to when talking to people about your work. Prepare a handout that provides a written record for readers. You want people to remember your work. You can include:

- a miniature version of your poster
- more detailed graphics, tables, and prose
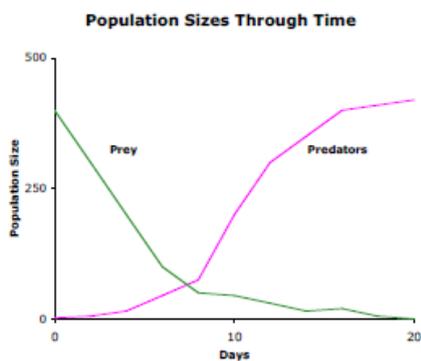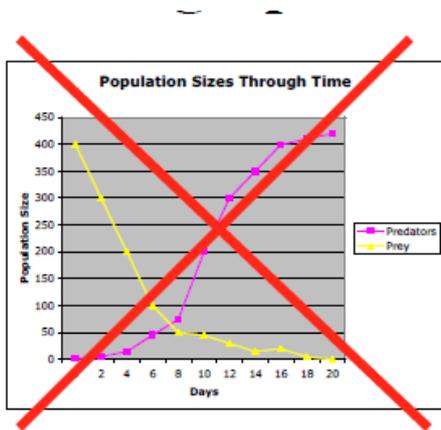- complete contact information

Illustrations

- Clean graphs show data clearly!

- Focus on relationships – exact values are not usually important.

- Eliminate 'chart junk' to keep focus on data (Tufte 1983).

- Grid lines, detailed ticks on axes, data markers, and grey background are not needed.

- Label data directly, when possible. Legends force the reader to look back and forth to decode the graph.

Example

Desired message: Prey decreased as predators increased.

Message is now loud and clear!