



## **What are poster sessions?**

Poster sessions are an important part of conferences and meetings that provide opportunities for researchers (at all career stages) to present and discuss their work with colleagues in their field.

These sessions often take place in large rooms where display boards are set-up and numbered for each person to hang a poster illustrating their methods and results. There may also be virtual sessions where posters are presented via an online platform.

## **What makes a good poster?**

A poster is essentially a visual abstract so try to summarise your research as succinctly and as clearly as you can:

### ***A well organised layout •***

Keep the different elements within your poster well spaced and easy to navigate. You don't have to stick to a standard top to bottom, left to right layout, but you must ensure the direction in which the information flows is obvious to the viewer. You can do this by using arrows, coloured/numbered headings or boxed sections or columns.

### ***Readable from a few feet away •***

Key information should be readable at distance - 3 metres approx. Poster sessions can be busy so try to attract passers-by and make it easier for those with restricted views.

### ***Short, thought-provoking titles •***

Try to keep titles and subheadings short but interesting. A clear, catchy and legible title is more likely to attract attention.

### ***Brief but comprehensive text •***

Be concise, aim for a word count of between 300 to 700 words (it takes the average person roughly 5 minutes to read through a 500 word poster). If possible, use bold, succinct headings and keep paragraphs to 1-2 sentences rather than big blocks of text.

### ***Plenty of white space •***

Successful posters always make use of white (or single-colour) space around text and figures. The brain relies on this surrounding space to read text easily. Without it, your poster will be harder to read, even off-putting to some attendees. Include more white space than you think you'll need. Ideally, the text and background should be complimentary coloured so when placed together, create the strongest possible contrast that increases readability, e.g., black on white (or vice versa) is best. You can experiment with shades and tints but remember to keep the contrast high and colours neutral.

*Ask the meeting organiser to confirm the recommended poster size and format first.*

*Take time to plan carefully. It will help to avoid making layout mistakes and will save on production time later.*

*Restrict the amount of content by using essential text and images only. Ask yourself, is this content enhancing the viewers understanding of my research? Unless the answer is a definitive yes, then don't include it.*

*Don't be tempted to decorate your poster with unnecessary graphics or typeface styles. Keep your poster clean, content well spaced and as legible as possible.*

*Include more white space than you think you will need. Legibility improves when more white/blank spacing surrounds the text and images.*





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Author Name and Affiliation

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### BACKGROUND

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### METHOD

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### RESULTS

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### REFERENCES

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## A Short, Thought-Provoking Title

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**Clear, bold summary of your research**  
Use plain language. Attract viewers by making this area legible at distance

Fig 1: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.

### Background

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### Methods - try to keep brief

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### Results

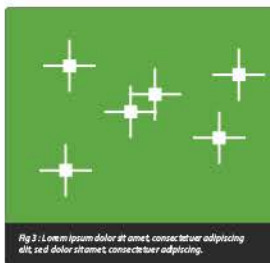
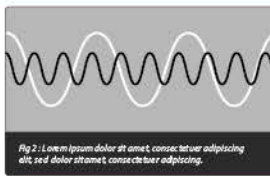
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### Conclusions

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### References

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## Avoid using backgrounds •

Background images compete for the viewers attention and compromise that precious white space we just talked about. Unless you have a really good reason for using one, they are best avoided. It is far better to use a single (contrasting) background tone and add visual interest with (relevant only) informational graphics.

**Refinement: use essential data only and resist the temptation to decorate! •**

Just as you consider the amount of text to include, use visual elements sparingly too. Unless it is directly relevant to your research, don't use it. Instead, utilise any available space to highlight important information.

## Emphasis and overall visual impact •

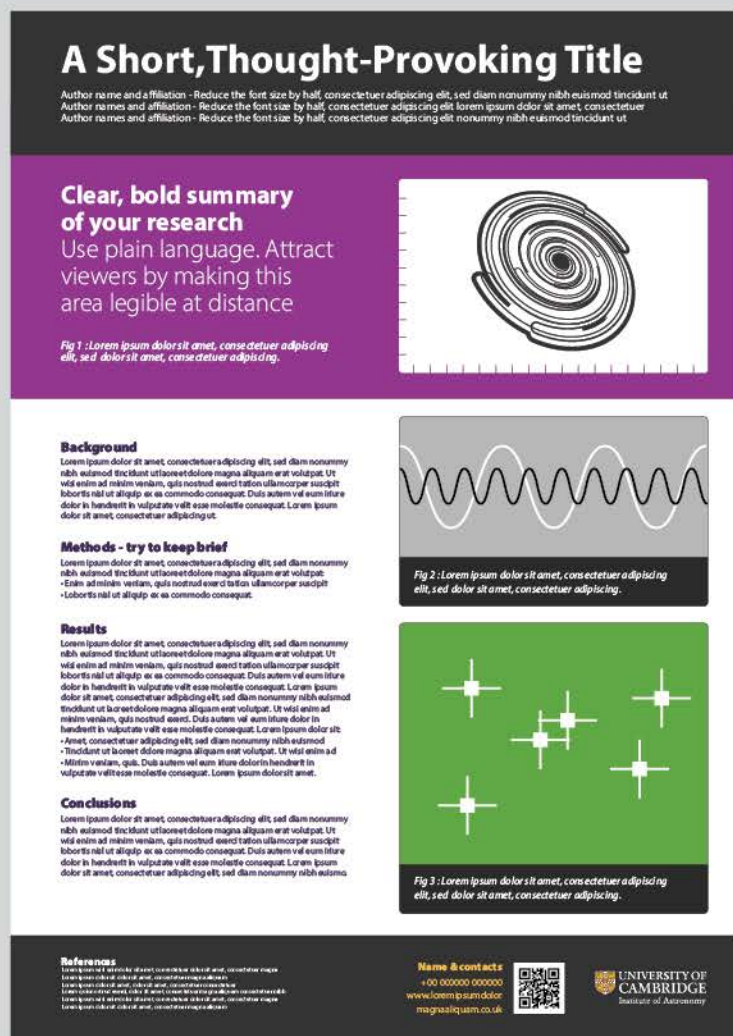
A successful poster is easy to follow and enjoyable to look at. An overly bright clash of colours combined with heavy text elements can dominate a poster and move the emphasis away from where it should be. A subtle hand often makes for a more confident and visually striking poster. Use key graphics to provide the visual interest and limit typeface styles to improve readability.



Embolden your title - this sans serif is called Myriad.  
Aim for a font size of between 40 to 60 pts.  
(Important: limit your font use to a single family)

Experiment with your chosen font family. A slight change in style can make a big overall difference; helping to lead the eye and visually balance the layout. At A4, the optimal size when choosing a font is 10 - 12 pts. If space allows, aim for 20 pts for the main body of your text.

All headings, main text, captions, etc, should be kept consistent. Maintain styles and sizing throughout.



Coloured sections are a great way of highlighting important information. Use sparingly though!

Official logo of the Institute, used in the correct way. Allow a university shields width of space around the logo.

**Poster sizes, portrait or landscape?**  
Format is crucial. Don't waste time making a beautiful portrait format poster only to find that the conference display boards are landscape - it takes more time that you think to reformat from one layout to the other. Always get confirmation from the meeting organiser first, but as a rule of thumb, A0 (841 x 1189 mm or 33.1 x 46.8 inches) is a good standard size. Bear in mind that when you design posters, it's safer to downsize than to up size. Up sizing a digital image based on a pixel grid will likely cause a loss of resolution.

**Choose poster fonts carefully**  
When you have finalised the content and layout, and made sure your key message is coming across clearly, focus on the styling. Colour-coding sections can help the viewer to navigate from one topic to the next and provides emphasis. Use italics instead of underlining as underlined text can dominate. Simple fonts are clearer and won't make your poster look busy. In general, sans serifs are easier to read.

**Guide to font sizes at A0**  
Title - aim for between 40 to 60 pts  
Subheadings - 20 to 40 pts  
Main body of text - 20 to 30 pts  
Figure captions - 15 to 30 pts  
References - 15 to 30 pts  
Contact info - 15 to 30 pts

Fonts, university and departmental logos are all available to download from:  
<https://intranet.ast.private.cam.ac.uk/graphics/logos-templates>



## Final Thoughts & Tips

### Software •

**Microsoft PowerPoint** - is widely available and free to use within the university. There is lots of online support, in-programme styles and templates to choose from.

**Google Slides** - Similar to PowerPoint, this is becoming very popular software among young scientists for creating presentations. Free to use.

### Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator -

Photoshop allows you to create and edit pixel-based images. Illustrator on the other hand, is for vector-based graphic design. Both are excellent but do come with expensive subscriptions.

*Note: when using **Photoshop**, make sure you set your document resolution to 300 dpi (a high enough measure of resolution for printing). For digital presentations only, 72 dpi will be absolutely fine.*

**LaTeX** - LaTeX is a document preparation system that is often used for scientific publications and presentations. It offers advanced features for typesetting equations and mathematical symbols.

- Before you start designing, get poster size & format confirmation from the meeting organisers.
- Avoid mistakes by planning carefully.
- Use colour, visuals and white space strategically.
- Avoid background images.
- Keep your word count between 300 - 700 words, if possible.
- Quality over quantity.
- Acknowledgements, author names & affiliations clearly displayed.
- Keep titles short, in plain language and interesting.
- Limit fonts to a single family.
- Call on the IoA graphics officer for help, advice and file checking!

*Lots more information on the IoA Graphics intranet pages •*

<https://intranet.ast.private.cam.ac.uk/graphics>

*Templates, logos & Myriad font •*

<https://intranet.ast.private.cam.ac.uk/graphics/logos-templates>

### Printing •

The IoA Graphics office can print full colour, up to and including A0 (84.1 x 118.9 cm) onto photo quality paper. Please email ahead of time to arrange this. Likewise, get in touch if you need a larger or travel-friendly, folding print. We can arrange specialist printing for you via **AVMG** reprographics -

<https://www.pdn.cam.ac.uk/other-pages/avmg>

*How to get in touch:*

Amanda Smith, Graphics Officer  
Observatory, Room 3  
[ajs@ast.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ajs@ast.cam.ac.uk)  
01223 (3)37545  
Monday to Friday 9 -5.30