# Visual Tips for Research Posters

Sources:

* “Creating Effective Poster Presentations” George Hess, Kathryn Tosney, Leon Liegel <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/index.html>

## Visual Aspects of a Research Poster

* Layout
* Headings
* Graphics
* Text
* Colors
* Software

## Layout

* Use a visual grammar to guide readers to the important parts of your poster.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| DO | DON’T |
|  Use type size proportional to importance. If it's important, make it BIG. |  Use same sized font for just about everything. |
|  Show, don't tell. No need to write down every detail. |  Include every detail as you would for a journal article |
|  Use simple figures and graphs, which should dominate the poster visually. |  Use complex, difficult to understand graphics, which are only a small portion of the poster. |
|  Make all graphic elements large enough to be visible easily from one meter away. |  Use figures that are all small enough to fit on a small portion of a journal page. |

* Use a column format to make your poster easier to read in a crowd. A row-oriented format moves readers past your poster very quickly.
* Use organization cues to guide readers through your poster. A column format will mostly accomplish this on its own. Use headings intelligently to help readers find your main points and key information. You can also use numbers, letters, or arrows to help guide viewers through your poster.
* Use "reader gravity" which pulls the eye of English readers from top to bottom and left to right.
* Balance the placement of text and graphics to create visual appeal. Use symmetry if possible.

## Headings

Headings - including the title, section titles, and figure captions - should ...

* **Summarize**: Use headings as opportunities to summarize your work in large letters. A hurried reader should be able to get the main points from the headings alone.
* **Organize**: Good headings are part of the visual grammar that helps move readers through your poster.
* **Be Hierarchical**: The more important the point, the larger the type.
* **Be Bold**: Make the strongest statements your research allows.

## Text

* Minimize text - use images and graphs instead.
* Keep text elements to 50 words or fewer.
* Avoid jargon (depends somewhat on audience).
* Left-justify text; avoid centering, right-justifying, or full-justifying text.
* Use a serif font (e.g., Times New Roman) for most text - easier to read.
* Sans-serif font (e.g., Helvetica) is okay for titles and headings
* Text should be at least 24 point in text, 36 for headings.
* Pay attention to text size in figures - it must also be large.
* Title should be at least 5cm tall.
* Note: If you print your poster on a standard sheet of paper, you should be able to read all of it – including text in figures – comfortably. If you can’t, your text is too small.

## Graphics

Good graphics - graphs, illustrations, photos - are the centerpiece of your poster.

* Ten simple rules for better figures: <http://journals.plos.org/ploscompbiol/article?id=10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003833>
* Good graphs communicate relationships quickly.
* Graphs should be simple and clean.
* Graphs vs Tables: <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/SideWindows/TableVGraph/>
* Write explanations directly on figures, instead of referencing from elsewhere. Minimize abbreviations and cross-references.
* Use simple 2-dimensional line graphs, bar charts, pie charts.
* Avoid 3-dimensional graphs unless you're displaying 3-dimensional data
* Text on graphs must follow same guidelines as all other text so that it will be visible.
* Use photos that help deliver your message.
* Use spot art - but not too much - to attract attention.
* Be careful with the defaults of your software choice. They might not be the best option for posters.
* Example: <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/SideWindows/GoodGraphs/>

## Colors

* Use a light color background and dark color letters for contrast.
* Avoid dark backgrounds with light letters - very tiring to read.
* Stick to a theme of 2 or 3 colors - much more will overload and confuse viewers.
* If you use multiple colors, use them in a consistent pattern - otherwise viewers will spend their time wondering what the pattern is rather than reading your poster.
* Overly bright colors will attract attention - and then wear out readers' eyes.
* Consider people who have problems differentiating colors, especially when designing graphics - one of the most common is an inability to tell green from red.

## Software

* PowerPoint, LaTeX, OpenOffice
* Adobe Photoshop, GIMP, etc.