PREPARING A SCIENCE POSTER

A science poster employs the categories of a lab report, but it is designed for a different audience and purpose. Most poster sessions have dozens if not hundreds of posters. Ten minutes is the average time people spend in front of any single science poster. For your poster to command attention and succeed at communicating your scientific knowledge, it needs specialized writing and visual presentation skills.

When developing and editing poster text, pay attention to the purpose and special needs of each section!

Title

purpose: capture your overall message in 1-2 lines
characteristics: highly concise, not a complete sentence but includes both noun and verb
tone: serious or catchy, depending on your audience

Abstract (if required)

purpose: provide a quick, brief, accurate overview of your experiment
characteristics: concise, objective stance, third person
content: omit specific details and stick to the big picture

Methods/Materials

purpose: describe essentials of your experiment
characteristics: past tense, third person, objective stance
content: include statistics, supplement text with figures, drawings, flow charts

Results

purpose: terse summary of your data (what you found)
characteristics: objective stance, employ key words only, use bullets as needed
content: use graphs, charts, tables that make your point (readers' takeaway)

Discussion

purpose: interpret your data for audience
characteristics: analytical/evaluative thinking, less objective than other sections

Conclusion

purpose: assertion of experiment's importance and/or correctness of hypothesis
characteristics: includes bullets on future directions

References

purpose: establish academic integrity, acknowledge indebtedness to sources
characteristics: follow MLA format, unless instructed otherwise

Keys to concise writing

Replace long clauses with short phrases or single words
    wordy: "The fog that was in the sky kept us from seeing the meteor."
    revised: "Fog obscured vision of the meteor."

Replace phrases with single words
    wordy: "The oldest child of the family is usually a natural leader."
    revised: "First-born children are natural leaders."

Avoid opening sentences with "there is" or "there are"
    wordy: "There are many cases of leukemia in people living near Chernobyl."
    revised: "Incidence of leukemia is high near Chernobyl."

Replace intensifiers ("very," "really") with precise words that make your point.
    wordy: "Subjects who were denied sleep at night were really tired the next day."
    revised: "Subjects who were denied sleep at night dozed in class the next day."

Editing tips —— remember effective poster writing is

- concise

- brief

- purpose-driven: uses headings and bullets to focus readers' attention

- constructed to work in tandem with graphics that supplement data and add visual interest

Advice about poster appearance (layout)

Posters are visual documents, not just large-size reports. Text is critical, but layout matters, too. Text and graphics have to work together in a poster. A picture (or drawing, chart, map, etc.) may not be worth 1000 words, but well-chosen graphics can help you reduce the amount of text on a poster without sacrificing content. And a well-designed poster is interesting from afar: it draws people closer and encourages them to learn more about your experiment.

You don't need to be artistic to prepare an attractive poster. Try to make your poster layout

<u>balanced</u>
- distribute graphics and headings across available horizontal and vertical space

<u>easy to navigate</u>
- present sections as visually self-contained
- place headings strategically to guide the audience through the poster sequentially

<u>attractive</u>
- preserve white space around text and graphics
- enclose graphics in a thin dark border
- choose fonts that can be read easily from a short distance

For more detailed information on poster preparation:
www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm

<p align="right">— Thanks to Prof. Jeff Ashley!</p>