# Hints and tips for making a great poster

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*A conference poster session – you really need to spend some time on poster design and be creative to make your work 'pop' when there are 100s (or 1000s) of posters.*
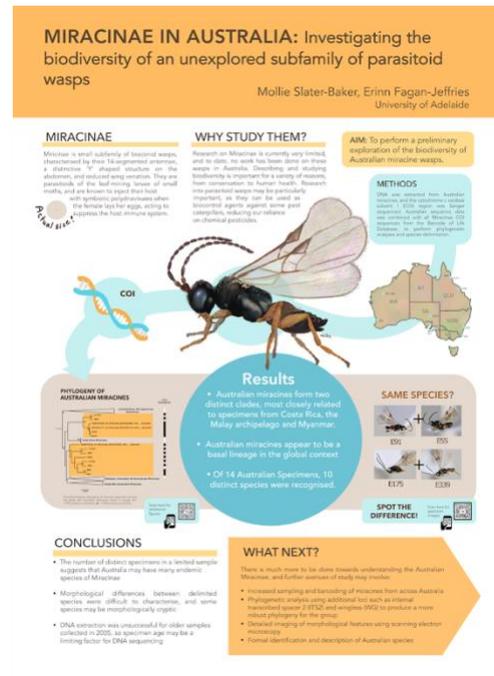
## Getting started

The easiest way to make a poster is with Microsoft Powerpoint (this is not the best way however, Adobe Illustrator or similar page layout programs are better if you have them and know how to use them). Check the instructions you have received about the size your poster should be (for conferences etc., you almost always are told exactly how big they should be!). On 'page setup' choose 'custom' and plug in the dimensions. Choose 'landscape' or 'portrait'. It will be too big for you to make much sense of it as a whole on your pc screen, but you can focus on specific areas – change the 'percentage' box on the screen header to focus in – and you can look at the whole thing (click on 'fit' in the 'percentage' box) in miniature to get an impression of how the whole thing looks.

## The colour scheme

This is a HIGHLY VISUAL way of presenting information. The reader is going to choose to read your poster (rather than the other 250 at the conference!) because of how it looks superficially and from a distance. Think about the colour scheme carefully. It should be eye catching but not an eyesore! A dark background (black, dark blue, dark green etc) works well with light coloured (white, yellow, light blue, pink) writing. Or a light background with dark writing. A *subtly* patterned background – you can use your own image or look at 'fill colour / fill effects / texture' in Powerpoint – can look good. Keep the colour scheme simple – no more than three or four colours. It is sometimes helpful to start with your illustrations / figures and decide what colour scheme will show them to their best advantage. Don't make it too garish or too fancy or too busy.



*Use images and colours to make your poster visually appealing. Follow this link for an excellent poster-making tutorial from Dr. Tullio Rossi*

https://www.animateyour.science/post/how-to-choose-the-best-layout-for-your-scientific-poster

## Font size & style

Think about the font size and style. You want the writing to be big enough that someone (even someone with poor eyesight – there are going to be lots of aging professors looking at this!) can read it effortlessly about a metre away. As a rough guide, the title / heading probably should be about 50-60 point. The text should be about 20-30 point (depending on what font style you use). Choose a font style that's easy on the eye. I like 'Comic sans'. 'Times new Roman' and 'Ariel' are also good. Avoid anything too fancy.

## General layout

There are no hard and fast rules, but you want it to <u>tell a story</u> – so it needs to have a clear and logical progression that the reader will easily follow. A common way of doing this is to think of it like a paper (but simpler) with an introduction, materials & methods, results, discussion. A very clear, short 'aims' and 'conclusion' section – possibly bullet pointed – are helpful. As are brief, to the point 'summary' or 'linking' statements. Keep in mind, however, that these sections need not go by those titles. Be creative, rather than 'Results', why not, 'What have we learned about (topic X)?'.

Use subheadings and your colour scheme to guide the reader through the story. For example, you might highlight important points in a particular colour. You might have, for example, the introduction in blue, the methods in green etc. Arrows also sometimes work well (like a flow diagram).

## Keep it simple. Less is more!

You want the reader to be able to take in all the important information in one quick (2 minute) read / glance. <u>Keep text to an absolute minimum</u>. Use illustrations to the max. Make sure that everything is very, very, clear and straightforward – 'lay it on a platter' for the reader – they'll get bored if there's too much writing or if it's too hard work. They'll be drawn to a simple, clear, visually attractive layout.

Don't try and cram too much in. It's tempting to include everything you're ever done! A poster should really tell one simple story.

## How about a radical new idea? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RwJbhkCA58

This video created by Mike Morrison in 2019. It presents the ground-breaking idea of just putting your key finding on your poster. Brilliant? Personally, it is too minimal.
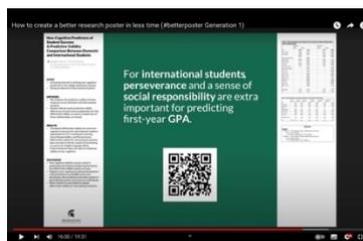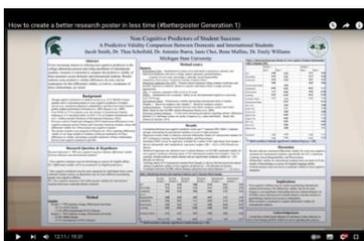


*The busy 'Before' poster (Left) and the distilled 'Key selling point' poster (right). The white borders on left and right of the coloured result area contain all of the accessory information that viewers might like to see (but probably, in reality, don't want or need to see on first viewing).*

### Illustrations should 'stand alone'

The thing that the reader is going to be most drawn to is the illustrations / figures. These are therefore really important. Make sure they are (a) attractive to look at (b) clear and not too 'busy' (c) they stand alone – that is that they are either very self-explanatory or they have a brief but fully explanatory legend.

### Look around for ideas

Take the opportunity to look at as many posters as possible – around the university, on the internet, and at conferences. Decide, from an artistic / visual point of view what works and what doesn't. If you see something that doesn't work, remember it and avoid doing it yourself. Also look for good ideas – if you see a colour scheme or design that you like, then file it away in your head for future use. Get into the habit of 'critiquing' posters you see not just for their scientific content but also for their design. You'll probably be making a lot of posters if you stay in science – it's always good to collect fresh ideas.

### Many conferences are switching to ePosters

An eposter is the same Powerpoint but resented on a flatscreen instead of being printed out. If the conference facility offers this, it makes a world of difference. All of a sudden there are oppor-tunities for, e.g., adding interactivity and linking to external data sources.



The real beauty of this system is no printing and transporting of your poster, and that you can keep working on it up to and during presentation time.

### Have fun!

Making posters is enjoyable! It's one of the few 'artistic' things that we get to do as scientists and it's really rewarding when you get your creation back from the printer or get to show it off at a conference. Have fun!