

Guidelines for Constructing and Presenting a Poster

By
Steven Taylor, Girls and Boys Town
Prepared for the Foster Family-based Treatment Association

What is a Poster?

A poster is a method of visually presenting information and answering questions on an individual basis. A summary of the topic is presented on a large surface so that people can walk by, read the information presented, and ask the presenter questions. Posters must include a presentation of data that has been collected to evaluate the idea being presented.

Why present a Poster?

There are several reasons why a person might chose a poster format rather than a presentation.

1. You might not have enough information for a presentation/symposium.
2. You might have some preliminary information and data about your topic, but you are not ready to present it to a large group.
3. Some people are uncomfortable speaking in front of a group or prefer one-to-one contact.
4. A poster is a good way for your agency to gain professional recognition as a contributor to the field.
5. A poster is a good way to get new staff and students involved in FFTA and give you a chance to shape their presentation skills.
6. A poster presentation can be included on your resume.

How to chose a Topic for a Poster?

A poster may be an effective method of presenting the results or preliminary data from a research study. Such posters typically focus on presenting the results form a large body of data with particular attention paid to careful research design and data analysis. But, a poster can also be an effective way of communicating to an interested audience the results of smaller projects, such as your work with an individual child, a family, or other small group. The poster may focus on a novel treatment plan, work with a child with a particular disability or problem, a particular type of family environment or placement, the treatment of a number of children with a similar diagnosis, etc. Posters can be submitted

by anyone who has some interesting data to share. Such posters frequently use single-subject, quasi-experimental, or small-group designs.

What is Included on a Poster?

A poster will contain some or all of the sections listed below. You are free to use sections which best describe your subject matter (the only required sections are the Title, Abstract, Method, and Results). Keep in mind that poster-session content should be brief and easy to digest visually. Each section, except perhaps the results, should fit on one to two pages. In a poster you just want to give an overview of what you did; people who want to know the details will ask.

Title & Authors	(required) The title, author(s), and their affiliations are usually centered at the top of the poster.
Abstract	(required) This is a very brief (no more than one page) description of the study. The reader should be able to read this paragraph and get a very general idea of what was done and the results.
Introduction	(optional) The introduction provides a brief background as to why the issue is important or why the study was done. It is common to end this section with a sentence or two stating the purpose of the study.
Subjects & Settings	(optional) This is a brief description of who the subjects were in the study and the setting where the study took place (e.g. in the foster-home, in the school, in the therapy session, etc.)
Method	(required) This section briefly describes your research methods and/or summarizes your intervention. You may also want to include a picture or two if this is an efficient way to communicate how you did something.
Results	(required) This section is the one that you may feel free to break the one-to-two-pages-per-section rule. Use a reasonable number of pages to show the important data that support your conclusion.
Conclusion	(optional) Use this section to briefly summarize the relevance of your findings, the possibilities for future research, or the potential limitations of your study. Bulleted or numbered highlights often work well.

Dimensions

A poster is approximately 4 by 6 feet, but check the conference information for specific dimensions (see Figure 1). The poster can be oriented either horizontally or vertically. It should be readable from a distance of 6 feet. Choose a font that is easy to read (some suggested fonts or font families including Bookman, Times, Ariel, Century Schoolbook, and Courier). Some approximate letter sizes are given below (keep in mind fonts are different sizes so a 1 inch letter in one font will not necessarily be 1 inch in another).

Title of Presentation	1 1/2 inch letters
Author(s)	1 inch letters
Affiliations	3/4 to 1 inch letters
Headings	3/4 to 1 inch letters
Text	1/4 to 3/4 inch letters

Materials & Construction

The components of the poster (titles, text, graphs, etc.) are usually printed on paper (at least 20 lb. Paper, slightly heavier is even better) and then mounted on a backing material (e.g. **poster board**). Be imaginative with colors, this is one way to make your poster stand out. You can cut sizes so that your poster can be taken down and transported easily. The best way to mount paper on a poster board is with rubber cement, spray adhesive, or glue stick.

The components may also be printed on **heavy-duty paper**. This is available at art supply and photographic supply stores. The advantage is that this may be rolled up and transported in a tube.

Find out what will be provided to each poster presenter. If a bulletin board is provided, then smaller sections may be made and tacked to the bulletin board. If only an easel is provided, then you will need to bring a backing board (such as a foam board) to mount the poster onto. It is a good idea to bring extra mounting materials (such as thumbtacks) even if the conference is supposed to supply these. It is also a good idea to bring extra glue, thumb tacks, and other supplies just in case something unexpected happens.

Graphics

The critical element in a poster is the presentation of the results – the data. Whenever possible, the data should be presented in graphic form, not a table. Bar charts, line graphs, and pie charts, can all communicate information very efficiently. Once again, readability at a distance is the key. If you are using line graphs, make large data points with heavy lines to connect data points. Do not connect data points across conditions if your study has more than one phase or condition. Make sure charts or graphs have easy-to-read titles and labels. If you are presenting multiple data on one chart or graph, use colors or shapes that are easily distinguishable.

Transportation

Protects your poster during transmit. It is best to construct your poster so that you can take it down and assemble the sections on-site, although if you are travelling by car you can leave it on a large poster board. You may also want to wrap it in plastic, or have some handy in case you get stuck in a downpour.

Presentation

Be sure to arrive at the poster site at least 15 minutes before the scheduled start time to get things set up and handle last-minute emergencies (at some conferences, posters will be numbered and you will set your poster up at the corresponding number). Put your poster on the bulletin board or easel and arrange your table (see Figure 2). At the table, you should have handouts, tablet, pen, and a refreshing drink as you may be talking a lot. For handouts you can simply make a copy of your poster text (printed 2-sided in normal-sized fonts) or have a more detailed manuscript if one is available. In either case, make sure the handouts include your name and how to contact you for more information. The pad and paper is used primarily for the names and addresses of people requesting information after you've run out of handouts (the experienced poster attendee will bring business cards or address labels so they don't have to write their name repeatedly).

Remain at your poster for the entire poster session. Arrange for co-authors to help you with set-up, take-down, and to relieve you for a break if necessary. Take down the poster immediately following the session.