

# Creating a poster for a conference: top tips

Download the College's guide for help with designing your poster.

A poster enables you to condense the aims, methods, results and conclusions of your research into a portable form of presentation.

As a medical student and trainee, it is important to get experience presenting posters. Doing so represents excellent opportunities to demonstrate you are meeting specific areas of the specialty-specific and generic curricula. Posters can also be used as evidence for your annual review of competency progression.

## Poster sizes

Conference posters usually need to be A1 or A0. Orientation (i.e. portrait or landscape) varies.

Be sure to contact the event organiser to find out the specifications of posters accepted. Some conferences now use screens to display posters digitally.

## Designing your poster

If you use Microsoft Office software to design your poster, PowerPoint or Publisher are the best two options.

If you can, use design software to create your poster. Adobe InDesign, Illustrator and Photoshop are feature-rich professional software.

Open source alternatives include OpenOffice, Inkscape, Gimp, Piktochart,

## Layout

### Headings

Use distinct headings to separate out the information in your poster and make it easy for people to find the information they're looking for.

Common sections include:

- title
- authors
- background and aims
- method
- results
- conclusions.

## **Colours**

Be consistent in your use of colours. Avoid dark backgrounds – white and very light backgrounds are best as they allow the content of the poster to be the focal point.

Don't use too many colours: use a maximum of three different colours in your headings and text. Try to use the same colours in your charts and illustrations.

Use white (or negative) space – that is, the space that isn't used for anything – to give your content room to breathe.

## **Font**

Never use more than two fonts: one for headings and one for text. It is important to use commonly recognised and accessible fonts. Avoid Comic Sans at all costs.

Always left-align your text. Fully justified and centred text is difficult to read and may put people off from reviewing your poster.

## **Content**

### **Audience**

Think about your audience. Who are you writing for, how much explanation do they need? Always avoid jargon, but make sure you pitch your writing at the appropriate level.

### **Headings**

Use short, clear headings that clearly describe the information in each section.

### **Text**

Minimise the amount of text you use in each section. Write your copy, then re-read it and trim it. Leave it, then come back to it and trim it again.

Wherever possible, use images to explain a concept.

Avoid using abbreviations and acronyms – not everyone will know what they mean.

Use bullet lists where possible, rather than long sentences and paragraphs.

### **Images**

Include charts, figures, diagrams and photographs in your poster where possible.

Make sure your images are as clear as possible. Wherever you can, strip back the information in your graphics so your figure is telling just one story. If you have more than one story you want to tell, pick the most important one.

The resolution of images should be at least 150ppi, but 300ppi is more preferable. Use PNG or TIFF files; avoid JPG images.

### **References**

Include a list of references and acknowledgements where appropriate. Be careful not to use too much room in your poster for this. In some cases, you may wish to link readers to your research, in which case references and acknowledgements could be left out and a link provided instead.

## Printing

Before printing your poster, always proofread it. It can also be helpful to ask a colleague or friend to review it, specifically commenting on the design, layout, legibility of information and clarity of the poster.

If the conference you're attending expects you to print the poster yourself, be sure to use a professional printing company that offers full-bleed printing. If you aren't able to do this, make sure you leave a suitable margin of white space in your design.

## Presenting

At some conferences, you may be asked to give a 1–2 minute presentation summarising your poster. You won't have time to cover everything, so decide what the main messages and key points are and practice keeping to time.

The presentation is your opportunity to showcase your work and encourage the audience to come and visit your poster for further information. It can also enable you to network with others working on similar projects and research and lead to collaboration.

Conferences often have dedicated poster viewing sessions, where a panel of reviewers will visit your poster and ask you some questions about it. They could ask you questions based on any aspect of your presentation, so be sure you're familiar with all of the content.