Creating Effective Academic/Research Posters

This handout provides an overview and additional resources to aid in writing center consultations for academic/research posters. Poster presentations are designed to concisely deliver a representation of a writer's research. A research poster should ultimately help a writer begin a dialogue with their audience about their area of study. The following prompts should help a writer begin to organize and synthesize their research project into a cohesive poster.

Basic Information to Include

- Title of research project
- Research question/Abstract
- School, program, advisor information

Purpose

- What is the main argument or point of your research?
    - What are some of the main takeaways that you would like your audience to understand through your poster?
    - How does your research situate itself with other research that has been done?
    - What is unique or interesting about your research, or the conclusions that you reached?
- Because of a poster's limited space, not all the details of your research will have space. These questions can help you identify what the most important aspects of your research are that should be included in your poster presentation.

Audience

- Who is your audience?
- Will you be presenting to peers, staff/faculty, a mix of both?
    - The demographic of your audience will dictate the tone and the information that is appropriate to present. Academic audiences in your field or area of study will need less information and explanation than an individual unfamiliar with your focus will need. What types of information would be necessary for either audience?

Information Organization

- Based on the subject, the organization of information on an academic poster can vary greatly. Here are a few examples

o   Scientific Posters, IMRaD (Introduction, methods, research, and discussion)

o   Social Sciences/Humanities, also IMRaD, or a creative narrative approach.

● Ask yourself what information would be the most helpful to know immediately

o   In what order would you need to encounter information to make sense of your project?

o   Is there a natural order to the information you are presenting?

o   Is there any foundation information you need to present to make sense of your research? (This information might go first to help your audience contextualize your research).

Style and Design Suggestions

● Use fonts that are sized appropriately and easy to read, such as serif fonts (exp. Times New Roman, Arial, Garamond, Bookman Old Style etc. 24 pt. minimum)

● Size of information = importance of information. (i.e. larger fonts indicate more important details)

● Include graphs, tables, charts to add visual representations of your conclusions

● Include relevant illustrations

● Balance text with visuals to avoid overwhelming your audience

● Consider how the eye will travel across the page (i.e. left to right, top to bottom, top-left to bottom-right

● Use headings to separate sections and introduce new topics, discussions

● Utilize blank space to direct your audience's eyes
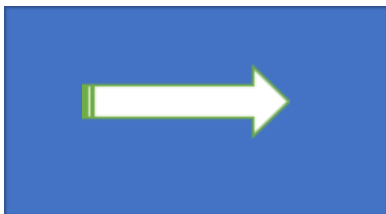
[Additional Resources]

UNC, "Poster and Presentation Resources: Academic Poster Presentations"
https://gradschool.unc.edu/academics/resources/postertips.html Excellent resource for content, organization, templates, and multi-genre examples

UNC Libraries, "5 Tips in 5 Minutes: Academic Posters"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_bsqdKnpQE Quick video showing how to integrate organization suggestions

Purdue University, "Tips For Designing Posters"
http://guides.lib.purdue.edu/c.php?g=799769&p=5716387
Detailed explanations of each stage of scientific method

NPR, "To Save the Science Poster, Researchers want to Kill it and Start Over"
https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/06/11/729314248/to-save-the-science-poster-researchers-want-to-kill-it-and-start-over Alternate poster-style prioritizing accessibility