Designing a Research Poster for the Humanities/Social Sciences

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• This information session geared towards students participating in Undergraduate Research Day in late April.

• Poster traditional to STEM fields but some humanities’ conferences have adopted it.

• Purpose of the research poster:
  • Visual prop for talking to visitors at conference
  • Stand-in for when you are not there

• What skills do you use in making a research poster?
  • Presentation of ideas visually
  • Public speaking
  • Summarizing complex topic concisely
  • Will use these skills again-and-again academically and professionally

Undergraduate Research Day 2014, photo courtesy Thai Nguyen
• Good design is important to attract attention

• Colin Purrington says that it takes only five seconds for someone to decide whether to read your poster

• Don’t leave planning and design of your poster to the last minute—plan ahead!
Format for your Research Poster:

STEM disciplines traditionally follow IMRaD format (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion)

Some potential humanities formats:

- Modified IMRaD: Introduction, Research & Methods, Discussion/Topic Summary, and Conclusions
- Thematic: Group sections of your poster according to sub-themes
- Narrative: Tell a story about your topic; particularly useful for a specific event (i.e. World War II)
- Questions and Answers: Summarize your main research questions and how you answered them

Sample of a Classics poster, University of Texas at Austin, Office of Undergraduate Research, http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/our/poster/samples
Software For Poster Design:

• Both proprietary and open source software can be used to make a research poster

• Microsoft Power Point is a popular software to use and MS Office suite can be downloaded for free with a UMD ID and login through Terpware (http://terpware.umd.edu/)

• See additional resources section at end of presentation for other software programs and links
Poster size and orientation:

- For Undergraduate Research Day, dimensions should be 36 x 48 inches (3 x 4 feet)
- Can use portrait or landscape orientation
- You can create your poster from scratch in Power Point or other software or use/modify an existing template
- It is easy to adjust slide size in Power Point—go to Design>Slide Size>Custom Slide Size
Design for the Venue and Presentation Style:

• Check with the conference organizers for any requirements for poster size & orientation

• Undergraduate Research Day—Posters pinned to fabric display panels; can also use adhesive Velcro dots

• (Other conferences may ask you to mount posters on foam core board and display on standing or tabletop easels)

• Most posters are oriented as landscape (horizontal), although some people use portrait orientation (vertical)
Layout for your Research Poster:

- Most people read posters from left to right, top to bottom
- Place logo, title of project, and your name at top
- Can use two or three column format, or none at all
- Text used in main body of poster should not exceed 800 words
- Avoid long, unbroken expanses of text; use phrases and bullet points
- Left-align your text blocks; justified text leaves awkward gaps
- Set a thin black border (1-2pt) around images; include captions
- Whenever possible, align your text boxes and images
- Leave space for works cited and acknowledgments at bottom
- Include your full name and contact information

Thanks for reading my poster. This is a summary of my research project which I worked on this summer as a Maryland Summer Scholars project.

Justified text
Font, Font Size, and Color
Remember, keep style elements consistent

Font and font size:
- Sans-serif font for headings (Arial, Helvetica, etc.)
- Serif fonts for text (more readable), Times New Roman, Palatino
- Avoid exotic fonts like Comic Sans
- Use no more than two font faces—don’t let your poster look like a ransom note!
- Poster needs to be legible from 4 to 6 feet away
  - Headings 36-54 pt.
  - Text 24-36 pt.
  - Captions and data labels on charts and graphs 18-20pt

Color:
- Avoid light text over dark background—wastes ink and hard-to-read
- Avoid red text on green or vice versa
- those with color blindness can’t read it
Finding Images for Your Poster:

- When possible, use images in the public domain, without copyright restrictions, or where you own the copyright.

- Copyright Law allows some “fair use” of copyrighted works for educational purposes.

- **ArtStor** (art/architecture database available via UMD Libraries Research Port with UMD login ([http://www.lib.umd.edu](http://www.lib.umd.edu))

- Museums such as the British Museum have images from collections online for download.

- Libraries and archives have online digital collections.

- For more ideas and links, see “Further Resources” section at end of this presentation.

Horsemen from the West frieze of the Parthenon, marble relief sculpture, Greek, 438-432 BCE, British Museum, London
Technical Tips for Dealing with Images:

• Ideally, images that are printed should have at least 300 dpi (dots-per-inch) resolution

• Find/scan the highest resolution image possible. When scanning, save image in TIFF format

• Use Adobe Photoshop to adjust resolution, resize, and crop images

• Screen-captures of webpages may be used in poster:
  • Hit CTRL + PRINT SCREEN buttons simultaneously and paste into graphics editor (Photoshop or MS Paint)
  • Check to make sure that image does not become “pixelated” when enlarged

Example of pixilation, from “Pixilation” entry, Wikipedia.org
What’s wrong with this poster?

Example of a bad poster layout from Colin Purrington’s blog:

- Background image distracting
- Dark background wastes ink
- Title perspective annoying
- Logos too large
- Light text on dark background hard to read
- Background color and sizes of text boxes inconsistent
- Text boxes not aligned
- Too much text!
- Results presented in sentences rather than charts
- Text in boxes is justified, leaving awkward space
- Bad graphic of guinea pig
The Festival of St. John the Baptist in Renaissance Florence

Elizabeth Tobey, [PhD, Art History & Archaeology, University of Maryland (2005)]

View and download a sample humanities poster (thematic format), “The Festival of St. John the Baptist in Renaissance Florence” by Elizabeth Tobey:

- tobeypaliosample.ppt (Power Point)
- tobeypaliosample.pdf (PDF)

Template for this poster was adapted from poster template downloaded from Colin Purrington’s blog on poster design.

www.ugresearch.umd.edu
Saving and Exporting Your Poster

• Look at your poster at 100% resolution to make sure there is no pixilation of images; in PPT, go to View>Zoom>100%

• Be sure to spell-check your poster and have someone else proof it

• Embed your fonts in the file: go to File>Options>Save>Embed fonts in the file

• Save your project as a PDF (Portable Document Format) for printing—this will preserve your layout

• Save for maximum print resolution (not web resolution)
Printing your poster:

- Don’t leave printing to the last minute, especially during crunch periods—print at least 5 days before the UG Research Day

- McKeldin Library, 2nd floor, printer in Learning Commons, http://www.lib.umd.edu/tlc

- The Engineering Copy Center in Glenn Martin Hall will also print posters, http://www.copycenter.umd.edu/
Prepare for the Poster Session:

• Write out and practice versions of a “poster talk” of various lengths: i.e. a 30, 90 second, and 3 minute speech

• Dress in neat and clean clothing; does not need to be “interview” clothing but you should be dressed more formally than what you normally wear to class

• Wear comfortable shoes—you may be standing for a long time without a break

• Bring a plastic bag to protect your poster in transport in case the weather is bad—poster ink can streak in the rain

Don’t dress this casually—and remember a plastic bag for your poster!
During the Poster Session:

- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace
- Maintain eye contact with your visitor
- Keep your language simple—don’t overwhelm your listener with jargon
- Use your hand to direct your listener to your poster
- Do not wear sunglasses or chew gum
- Thank people for their interest and remember to smile!
Further Resources:

MCUR Creating a Research Poster page, [http://www.ugresearch.umd.edu/current-createresearchposter.html](http://www.ugresearch.umd.edu/current-createresearchposter.html)

See following slides for links to more research poster websites and links to sources for images and software.
Humanities Posters:

David Forrest, Presenting Conference Papers and Posters in the Humanities, Teaching, Learning, and Professional Development Center, Texas Tech University, http://www.tltc.ttu.edu/teach/TLTC%20Teaching%20Resources/PresentingConferencePapersAndPostersInTheHumanities.asp


Mark McDayter, “Design Tips for Creating an Arts and Humanities Poster,” February 21, 2013, Electronic Textuality and Theory at Western, Western University, http://rgettatwestern.wordpress.com/2013/02/21/design-tips-for-creating-arts-and-humanities-poster/
General Websites on Research Posters:

• Designing a Research Poster by Colin Purrington, [http://colinpurrington.com/tips/poster-design](http://colinpurrington.com/tips/poster-design), includes downloadable templates in PowerPoint, Open Office Draw

• Research Poster Samples, Office of Undergraduate Research, University of Texas at Austin, [http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/our/poster/samples](http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/our/poster/samples)

• Presentation by Tracy Volz (Rice University), April 11, 2012, National Library of Medicine Training Center/National Network of Libraries of Medicine, handouts on Poster Checklist and Presenting your Poster available.
Downloading University of Maryland Logos

The University of Maryland at College Park has on its communications website a page where you may download high-resolution official university logos. These are in EPS format (encapsulated post script), and you will need a graphics editing software such as Adobe Illustrator to open and edit them:

http://www.brand.umd.edu/downloads.cfm

The cloud version of the Adobe Creative Suite can be installed for free from Terpware (http://terpware.umd.edu/) using your UMD student ID.
Software:

Proprietary

- Microsoft (MS) PowerPoint a commonly-used software for poster design-some departments have templates available with logo
- MS Publisher
- Adobe InDesign, part of Adobe Creative Suite

Free/Open Source:

- Apache Open Office Draw, [https://www.openoffice.org/product/draw.html](https://www.openoffice.org/product/draw.html)
More Resources: Finding Images for Your Poster:

- ArtStor (art/architecture database available via UMD Libraries Research Port with UMD login (http://www.lib.umd.edu)

- Museums (art, history, and anthropology collections)-here’s just a few:
  - Smithsonian Institution, Collections Search Center (http://collections.si.edu/search/) searches across multiple collections
  - National Gallery of Art, http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/collection-search.html
  - The British Museum Collections Online, (http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx ) sign up for free account and receive emails of high-resolution images for research and study

Horsemen from the West frieze of the Parthenon, marble relief sculpture, Greek, 438-432 BCE, British Museum, London
Finding Images for Your Poster, cont’d:

Online libraries, archives, historical societies; many have digitized archival materials online; look under “collections”

- Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org)—many out-of-copyright books as well as archival materials; many institutions contribute

- Creative Commons (http://creativecommons.org/)—online archive with images in the public domain or where creator has given permission for others to use

- Library of Congress (http://www.loc.gov/collections/) has thousands of images in the public domain; browse its digital collections

- National Archives DocsTeach online primary sources (http://docsteach.org/)