

**INTRODUCTION**

The primary purpose of a display poster is to report information. This can be done effectively by:

- ◆ Catching the viewer's interest and attention.
- ◆ Making the poster easy to read and understand.
- ◆ Telling a story.

Always keep in mind that if a viewer has to work hard to understand the message, s/he will not invest the energy to do so, and the poster will not be effective nor entice the audience.

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**POSTER DESIGN**

Be creative when designing a poster. Consider including the following visual elements to effectively illustrate information and provide viewing interest:

- ◆ Headlines
- ◆ Diagrams
- ◆ Tables
- ◆ Flow Charts
- ◆ Tactile Samples (material, parts, etc.)
- ◆ Cartoons
- ◆ Photographs
- ◆ Graphs
- ◆ Captions
- ◆ Illustrations
- ◆ Schematics

Be complete, but concise. Include enough information to provide a summary of the whole story, but not so much information that it looks like a report was glued to the board! The viewer is depending on the poster to summarize the important, essential points to tell a brief and interesting, yet factual and convincing, story. Consider the audience: a presentation for third-graders would be different than for scientists who are familiar with the topic. An effective technique to focus poster design is to think through how to briefly explain the objective, approach and solution to a friend not engaged in

the project.

### **Poster Size**

A recommended poster size is a freestanding, tri-fold poster with the central frame dimensions of 24 in. x 36 in. Standard posterboard works well if the poster will be mounted to a wall or bulletin board. If the poster is going to be propped on an easel, leaning against a wall or freestanding, use foamcore board that is stiffer.

### **Proofread Text**

Read the written text out loud to assure it makes sense. Edit and choose words carefully for clarity. Assume that the opportunity to further explain or clarify does not exist. Remember to label graph axes with descriptions and units of measure. To assist a viewer who wants to learn more, include all team members' names, the instructor's name and the date at the bottom of the poster.

### **Typeface**

Using a variety of typeface sizes can relieve boredom for the reader and provide a tool to express the message. For a 24 in. x 36 in. poster, a minimum of 18 point lettering size for text and/or descriptions is suggested. Headlines should be even larger. Make no text so small that a viewer would have to squint and move in very close to read it. Can a viewer easily read the units on the X and Y graph axes? Look for awkward automatic hyphenation of words, especially in large headlines, and modify them to make natural, easy-to-read breaks in phrases.

Selectively use **bold** and *italic* typefaces to create emphasis, but do not overuse. Also, beware **OF** providing too **MUCH** variety in **typeface styles** as it **OFTEN distracts** the viewer and decreases **LEGIBILITY**.

As a final review, stand back five feet from the poster and make sure every headline and text paragraph is easy to read. Some details (such as graph and image captions) may be acceptable with legibility at a closer distance of three feet.

### **Color**

Introduce color to direct the viewer's eye throughout the poster. Work with a limited pallet of compatible colors, and use the concept of "color jump" to repeat the same colors throughout the poster. Consider alternate color(s) for the background of the board—it does not have to be white!

### **Poster Composition**

Assess the composition and flow of the information presented on the poster. Does the viewer's eye naturally flow from the headline of the poster to the more detailed information *as if the story were being told in person*? Arrange the poster elements and use bullets, arrows and framing cut from colorful paper to help direct the viewer's eye and keep the process interesting.

### **Contrast**

Provide enough contrast between text and its background for easiest readability. For example,

black letters on a white background (or vice versa) provide excellent contrast. Black letters on yellow also work well; but red letters on black may not provide enough contrast for easy reading. In the latter case, the letters do not “pop” enough to work well. Step back from the poster and see how easy (or difficult) it is to read.

### **Neatness and Organization**

Neatness counts! Avoid the use of visible tape. Instead, use artist’s spray-mount adhesive, glue sticks or hidden tape (double-stick or rolls). Make sure every piece is well adhered to the poster. Although posters are most impressive when headlines and information are lined up squarely, the occasional placement of headlines and other poster components at intentional angles or curves can be dramatic and effective.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Using logic, creativity and consistency, posters can be an effective means of communication. If well planned and properly designed, posters can be fun, inexpensive and efficient to create. Although posters are not easy to transport, they are of great value when they “speak for themselves” in a crowded room.

