

LSA Annual Meeting Poster FAQs

By Kristen Syrett

Introduction

Congratulations! You've been selected to present a poster at the LSA meeting. Now you're probably wondering how you get started. This guide is intended to take you through every step of the process from start to finish. We have anticipated the variety of questions you may have about creating and presenting a poster. If you find that something is not covered by this guide, please let us know by contacting the LSA at lsa@lsadc.org!

How do I get started?

The first thing you need to do is create a file for your poster. You can do this in a word processing program such as Powerpoint or Word very easily. In Powerpoint, go to File...Page Setup to customize the dimensions. Select a width of 48 inches and a height of 36 inches (for landscape orientation) or a width of 36 inches and a height of 48 inches (for portrait orientation). These are the maximal and suggested dimensions. If you exceed these dimensions, you run the risk of having your poster drape over the sides of the display or worse, not being able to display your poster, because the space cannot be accommodated.

How do I design my poster?

Before committing anything to paper, you may wish to begin by visualizing how the final product will look, and come up with a plan. If you've never made a poster before, this guide will help you consider the overall design. This includes how to divide information into different sections and how to provide the audience with visual aides to make the content more accessible and cohesive and give your poster a natural flow. When working on your poster, keep in mind that there may be moments when people are looking at your poster without you there, or when they arrive at your poster while you are already in the middle of a presentation. You want to make sure that your poster helps them to follow along and extract the main points without your direct assistance.

Layout

Conference participants walking through a poster area will want to easily identify the subject matter of the posters and determine whether they want to learn more. Even if your research topic is not at the top of their list, they may be drawn to your poster because of its aesthetics, readability, and your presentation style. Well-designed and well-attended posters are like magnets, so do your best to make your poster well organized, attractive, and accessible.

At the top of your poster, include the title of your poster (as it was indicated in the abstract you submitted and as it is listed in the program). Under this in a smaller font size, include the name(s) of the author(s). Below this in either the same or a reduced font size, include author affiliation(s). You may wish to include a university, center, or company logo; if so, check on regulations related to graphics and

visual identity. You may choose to include the conference name and date in this area. You should include a contact email address either here or at the bottom of your poster near the acknowledgements and/or references. The rest of the content will go underneath the title area.

The sections of your poster should be clear, logical, and easy to follow. Your poster should have a flow to it. Give each section a heading, such as the following: introduction, problem, puzzle, previous research, method, proposal, claim, results, conclusions, open questions, acknowledgements, references. You will most likely include some, but not all, of these sections. Some presenters like to number their sections (similar to a paper) to assist the audience members in proceedings from one section to another, but this is not necessary if the headings and progression are clear. The introduction and previous research typically go towards the upper left, the open questions, acknowledgements, and references towards the lower right. Any main claims or results (especially in the form of figures, tables, logical representations, trees, etc.) should be in the center, where they pop out.

Text

The rule with text on posters is to minimize, minimize, minimize! Too much text means that your poster may be visually overwhelming to the audience, it may be difficult to distill the main points, and it will be challenging for the audience to follow along with both your poster content and your oral presentation. It is usually the case that you can reduce the amount of text on your poster. Consider having the largest percentage of space on your poster devoted to graphics or visual aids, and having there be as much text as there is white space. Aim for at least a one-inch margin of white space around your poster; this may be required for printing purposes anyway. Remember that empty space serves multiple purposes: it helps to delineate sections, gives the audience a 'rest' as they follow along, and allows your key points, figures, and tables to pop out that much more.

You may find it challenging to reduce text – especially with more theoretical work – but here are some suggestions to help you accomplish this. Do not include your abstract; it is in the Annual Meeting Handbook already. Avoid full sentences, and instead use bullet points, indentation, symbols, and key words and phrases indicated with special font to emphasize important points. Use active, not passive, voice. Instead of saying something like "We found the following..." just list your findings under "Results." Consider including a caption with each figure or table that very briefly summarizes the main point of that information.

Logical representations or formulae should have just as much accompanying explanation as needed to be clear. Use examples, trees, and visual schema in place of text explanations wherever possible. Doing so makes your poster more attractive, makes it much easier for your audience to follow along and distill the main points, and helps your poster to complement and support your oral presentation. You do not need to include every important point or side note on your poster – let there be some information you can add in as needed when you present, based on the level of interest and expertise in your audience members. This demonstrates both that you know what is absolutely essential to make your point and that you can improvise while presenting and interacting with your audience.

Font Choice

Choose a font that is both easy to read and can be read by other computers (if you are sending your file to someone to be printed). If possible, embed TrueType fonts and symbols in your document. Choose a minimal number of fonts – either one font throughout, or one font for headings and another for content. The default font for figures and tables may be different, so check to make sure that the font on these elements coordinates with your other choices. You may wish to choose a serif or sans serif font throughout. Another option is to choose a sans serif font (such as Arial, Helvetica, or Verdana) for headings and a serif font (such as Times New Roman or Cambria) for text. Use bold or italics only when absolutely necessary in order to emphasize key information.

Font Size

It is important to choose a suitable font size. If your font is too small, your audience will not be able to read your content. If it is too large, your poster may look unprofessional and amateur. Keep in mind where your audience will be standing when they are viewing your poster and listening to your presentation. Your title, headings, and text should be legible to your audience, standing 5 to 6 feet away from your poster, but you may even want to make this information visible from even further away, since audience members will be scanning the poster session to see which posters they'd like to attend.

Consider these font sizes (points) as general guidelines. Generally, the information at the top of the poster ranges between 60 and 125, with the title between 80 and 125 and the author and venue information between 60 and 90. Some of this information can be in bold, and the title could be in all caps, depending on how this looks. If you are assigned a poster number or a poster session number, include it in the top banner area in one corner in 90- to 100-point font.

Section headings are generally between 50 and 70. Again, you may consider bold or all caps, depending on how this looks. Content in the major sections is generally between 24 and 32. Content in the acknowledgements and references areas can be smaller, and go as low as 20. Avoid going below 20-point font in any area. Of course, these sizes vary depending on the font you choose, your use of bold or italic font, the amount of space available for content, the amount of white space to fill, and so on. Keep font sizes uniform across like categories. Content such as acknowledgements and references can be in a smaller font. Keep in mind that because the dimensions of your poster are large, the font and objects on your poster will be also be large. When you are working, you will want to zoom in to specific areas to edit content and objects.

Figures and Tables

The data you include in your poster should emphasize relationships or trends, draw a connection to previous findings, bear on your predictions or hypothesis, and/or support your main conclusions. In your presentation, focus on these aspects, instead of exact values. In your figures, eliminate any elements such as superfluous colors, tick marks, grid lines, and so forth that are not essential and could detract from your message. Consider the form of figure or table that will best capture this information. Make sure that images and figures are embedded (if possible) and that they are saved in a high enough resolution to ensure a crisp image when printed.

Audiences should not have to guess or depend on your explanation to determine what your results demonstrate. Give your figures and tables titles and/or captions. The caption can be a brief explanation of the main finding. Label your axes on graphs and provide row and column headings in tables. Place results of any statistical analyses below or to the side of your figures and tables, using a smaller font size.

Colors

Use a minimal number of colors. When choosing colors, consider those that are favorable to reading and viewing purposes, and those that best represent your university or organization. Make consistent use of your colors to draw attention to key areas like the title, headings, graphs, and keywords, and to separate the sections. You can also use indentation, bold or italic font, outlining or borders, symbols, and/or bullets to highlight important information. Do this sparingly, though.

How and where do I print my poster?

Many copy shops and other printing facilities have the ability to print large posters. Check with the facility in advance to enquire about pricing and time limitations. Some can print onsite, but some require advance notice. Some departments or universities have poster printers on site, and may either print the poster for free or charge a nominal fee. Some companies online allow you to send or upload the ppt or pdf file to them directly and pay for printing online, and they will print the poster and ship it to you. Some companies can do this within one to two days. Check online for available resources.

Some facilities offer the option of printing in a glossy or matte finish, or laminating your poster. If these options are available to you, consider the following. A glossy finish or laminating - while perhaps more professional looking - may cause a glare. Having your poster laminated is more costly, but some presenters like this option, because it allows them to preserve their posters. Instead of lamination, you may choose to protect your poster with a spray, such as those put out by Krylon, which are used by artists to prevent smudging. These are inexpensive and available in hardware and art stores. If you choose this option, you should apply the spray in a well-ventilated area (and not your hotel room).

If you are planning a practice presentation for your department or lab before heading to the LSA meeting (which we highly recommend), you can either print a draft of your poster in advance or use a projected version of your poster in a pdf or Powerpoint format. This dry run will provide you with very helpful feedback - such as whether your poster is easy to follow, whether you have chosen the right size for content and figures, whether your main points pop out, and whether your oral presentation supports and further elaborates upon what you have included on your poster.

When you print your poster, you may also want to print 8.5 x 11 or A4 size versions of your poster (color or black and white) to use as handouts for your presentation. To do so, go to File...Print, and select 'Scale to Fit Paper'. Make sure you can see your entire poster on the paper in the Print Preview, and that the orientation is correct. Follow the suggestions on the conference website to determine how many handouts to print out. It is a good idea to include your email address on both your poster and your handout.

You will probably want to transport your poster to and from the meeting in a poster tube. Poster tubes can be purchased online, at art stores, and in many places that sell plastic containers. But before purchasing a poster tube, ask around your department and see if anyone has one you could borrow for the meeting. Check to make sure the length of the tube (when fully expanded, if collapsible) is adequate for the dimensions of your poster.

Do not throw away your poster after you have presented! Take the poster back to your department or lab. Many departments and labs like to display good posters in the walls or in rooms after meetings. Doing so helps to promote the work being done by the affiliated researchers and emphasize productivity, the development and expanse of certain research projects, and collaborations among researchers.

How do I display my poster?

The conference organizers will supply push pins or some other device for mounting your poster. You should stick the push pins in the corners of your poster, and maybe also in the middle of each side to prevent sagging.

If you brought handouts, you should make sure they are visible. If you leave your handouts on the floor below your poster, you may forget about them, and the audience will most likely either not notice them (especially if they are in the back of a crowd of people) or not want to bend down to pick them up. If a stool or chair is available, you can put a stack of handouts on the chair next to your poster. Some presenters like to bring an accordion folder and hang it up with push pins, so that it can hold handouts. If you choose this option, make sure it is clear that the folder contains handouts (possibly by gluing or taping a handout to the outside with a label indicating 'Take one!').

You may want to post a sign-up sheet for people to leave their names, email addresses, and maybe also their affiliations. This list can be used for sending handouts (if you did not bring any or run out), the slides from related conference presentation, manuscripts based on the research (once they are ready for distribution), and/or questions or answers following up on conversations you had while presenting.

What do I need to know about presenting my poster?

At the LSA Annual Meeting, will be assigned a window of time during which you are scheduled to present your poster. Prior to this time, you should mount your poster as soon as you are permitted to do so (generally in the early morning on the day of the poster session). This allows for your poster to be visible well before the scheduled poster session, and for you to not be rushed preparing for the session. After the poster session, you may leave your poster up after you are done presenting, but you should take it down by the deadline that has been indicated to presenters.

The poster session itself lasts 1.5 hours. Within this timeframe, you should be at your poster the entire time. During this time, you will present your poster multiple times to multiple people. You will quickly get a sense of what works and what doesn't. Some of these presentations may be brief, and people will quickly move along to other posters. Other presentations, however, may last much longer, and your

interaction with your audience will be much more involved. Some audience groups will be composed of 1 or 2 people, while others may include 5 or more. You will be asked many questions, and yes, possibly interrupted. Go with the flow and have fun with this. In many ways presenting a poster can give you much more and more detailed feedback than presenting a talk.

As a presenter, your job is to determine things like how much or little you should say, how to address implicit or explicit questions, and whether you should wrap up the discussion and move on to a new round of presentations, or instead invite in additional audience members in as you continue your presentation. How do you do this? Listen to what your audience wants. If someone walks up and asks you what your poster is about, have a brief (one- to two-sentence) answer ready. If they look interested and ask questions, then you can provide more information. If someone asks you to walk them through your poster, that's an invitation to present more detailed information, going from start to finish.

Ask your audience if you should go into more or less depth, or how much of the background you should cover. Be prepared to explain certain elements in more or less detail, depending on peoples' questions and interest. Avoid reading directly from your poster or reciting a rehearsed oral presentation. You are presenting a poster, not a talk, and these call for two different presentation styles. Avoid long conversations with individual people, especially concerning material that is not directly relevant to your poster, since this makes you seem inaccessible and discourages other people from asking about your work.

As a presenter, you should also pay attention to more subtle communication from your audience. If you notice someone hovering near your poster, possibly reading through sections, you should address them and ask if they would like to hear about your work, or if they have any questions. Stand to the side of your poster while presenting, so that you don't block content. Be aware of where your audience is standing. If you notice people craning their necks to look around you or other audience members, readjust where you are standing to assist visibility and open up the viewing area. As you are talking to one person or one group of people, other people may join the crowd. Make eye contact with them. You may want to invite them in and possibly work in a sentence or two referring to material they may have missed.

Know the take-home message of your poster-the big claim you are making and why it is important. Make sure that no matter how much detail your presentation included, this point was clear. At the end of your presentation and/or interactions, make sure your audience members walk away with a handout, if you brought them, and that they know how to contact you, should they have further questions or comments.

If you have further questions about poster presentations, please contact the LSA at lsa@lsadc.org.