

# Advice for Poster (IT)

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7 March 2017

- Talks, papers, posters are all ways to communicate information to the audience. It makes sense to make the information exchange maximally efficient and beneficial to both sides (authors and audience)
- Commonalties stop about here: it is important to realize that talks, papers, and posters are actually three different genres, and what works for one of them is very likely to be a disaster for others
- This note, as the two previous ones [1,2] puts in writing what we keep saying to each and every student/postdoc embarking on poster preparation. What we say is obvious, but few people stop and reflect on these things. Also, what we say is likely not very original. DB remembers learning some of these things from colleagues, especially, the ones from Oxford, where effective communication seems to be a topic that is given its due attention
- A typical medium-size conference would have, say, a poster session with 100 posters and a duration of two hours. This comes to less than a minute per poster... Some people read the program and go to specific posters (a good idea!), but others just walk in in the hopes to spend the two hours productively. The presenters are there eagerly awaiting the chance to present themselves and their work. This is a GREAT opportunity for confluence of interests, it needs to be taken advantage of!
- Here we can already remark that some presenters print their articles and pin them to the board. This is the WORST possible way of presenting a poster (and a lot of lost opportunities). This limits the audience to those who will specifically come to the poster to meet the author
- So, thinking of making a poster as a task whose efficiency we wish to maximize, we have the following conditions:
  - It is reasonable to expect that most visitors would want to spend no more than five minutes at any given poster (excluding your direct competitors who would want to sneak all possible details ☺)
  - The visitor wants to leave your poster having learned something
  - You want the visitor to “take home” some key information
  - You both want to feel good after the short interaction
  - For the visitors who have not done their homework before attending the session, which is perhaps a majority, your first task is actually to get them to stop at your poster to start with
- This already gives us an idea of what an effective poster might look like
  - A large and attractive title; perhaps some good central image
  - Low density of information, presented in the clearest possible way, with a visual structure of the poster that guides the sequence of their visit
- What does the visitor want to know?

- What? What is the general area of the work? What is the subject? Is this theory or experiment?
- Who? Who are the authors and where are they from (the authors clearly want to convey who they are as well)
- Why? What motivates work?
- How? What are the methods? Is there a collider, a spacecraft, or a laser lab involved?
- Results: what are the main conclusions?
- Who cares? This is perhaps one of the most important parts
- Some successful posters in fact, explicitly list these questions on the poster and use them as structural anchors
- What if the visitor needs to dig deeper? There are various techniques to address the needs of these “advanced” visitors. Some people have pockets attached to the posters with reprints of papers that visitors can take; it is not a bad idea to have a notepad or even a laptop or an electronic notepad ready to pull out extra images, and to write upon if there is a discussion
- The poster genre basically prohibits having full-sentences text on the poster. It takes too long to read... So:
  - Only use “bullets”
  - The grammar for such text is unusual: the amount of words should be minimized; everything that is not essential should be removed; articles (a, the) are not allowed; there are no full stops at the end; as much as possible should be shown with logical flow symbols like →, ⇒, ⇐, etc.
- When using plots from other people’s work, at the very least, a visible reference should be given. Imagine you come to a poster and see your own plot shown without any acknowledgement (happens to me all the time)
- Here comes a fun idea: we illustrate our preaching with making an illustration showing a poster on how to make posters that is created using our own recipe!
- An idea: Think what you would like a “happy customer” to tweet after visiting the poster...