



Poster Design Manual
For
ENST 597 Final Projects

Spring 2004

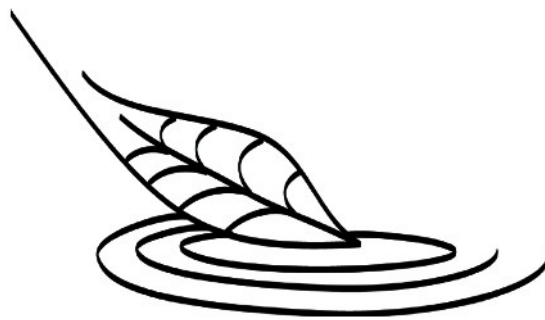


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Introduction

Effective beginning Fall 2005 semester, all ENST students who are undertaking the ENST 597 Project exit research option will be required to present a professional poster of their research to members of the Environmental Studies Council and to fellow peers. This manual has been developed to help Environmental Studies students to create an effective poster presentation. General information is included regarding the basic policies and procedures along with acceptable format guidelines. Information for this manual was compiled from a number of very good on-line sources that students are encouraged to explore further.

Since this manual cannot cover all situations and problems that may arise in the preparation of the poster presentation, each student is encouraged to discuss any problems encountered with his/her Project Advisor. If necessary, all ENST students are encouraged to consult the Environmental Studies Graduate Advisor. Please note: it is the student's ultimate responsibility to make certain that all Project and Poster Presentation requirements are met.

A Poster is a Visual Communications Tool

An *effective* Poster should:

- Assist the researcher in engaging with colleagues in conversation
- Convey the main element(s) of the research to as many people as possible

An *effective* Poster should:

- Deliver a clear message
- Be highly visible
- Be clearly read from 3 feet away

The *ideal* Poster should operate on multiple levels and be designed to be a:

- Source of information
- Conversation starter
- Advertisement for the research
- Summary of the ideas introduced

Though these basic tenets for an effective Poster seem simple enough to follow, there are many common problems that characterize poorly designed Posters including:

- Obscure research objectives (hard to find)
- Sloppy organization
- Poor graphics
- Text too small

This Poster Design Manual has been developed to guide students through the process of creating and presenting an effective poster while avoiding the easy-to-fix mistakes that can plague the beginner.

Basic Steps from Idea to Poster Presentation

Following this list you will find a more detailed description of each highlighted concept. Although you may find that it is useful to follow these steps in a relatively sequential pattern, they are primarily meant to serve as a guide for reference. The first four steps, however, really should be considered before you begin the actual mechanics of planning the layout and construction of the Poster.

- 1. Know Your Message:** What is the one thing that you want your audience to learn? Focus on this message throughout the Poster. If something does not reinforce your message, leave it out.
- 2. Consider Presentation Requirements:** Be aware of the size of the poster that you are required to produce along with the ENST regulations regarding minimum font and graphics sizes.
- 3. Know Your Audience:** Your audience determines the tone and content of your Poster.
- 4. Write an Effective Abstract:** You want to interest people enough to continue viewing your poster. An effective abstract does this, and also serves as an outline for your poster. You might wish to think of a poster as an illustrated abstract.
- 5. Create an Effective Poster:** Carefully plan, draft, edit, and construct the Poster.
- 6. Present the Poster Effectively:** Have a plan for what you will do at the meeting. Bring along written documentation for viewers to take away.
- 7. Evaluate the Results:** Incorporate what you have learned into your next Poster.

Know Your Message

Considering the fact that your audience has only a limited time to view your poster, if there was one thing you could say on the Poster, what would it be? It all starts with an idea. You must turn that idea into a succinct message and support it with a combination of images and short blocks of text.

Why is it so important to have a simple, clear and unified message in your Poster? First of all, at poster sessions there often is intense competition for audience attention. In their first 3 seconds your audience will determine whether to stay and explore your content or leave. If they stay you have 30 - 60 seconds to secure their attention by conveying an overall understanding of your subject matter (see Appendix for 60-Second Evaluation).

Select a statement, photograph or diagram that is sure to attract your audience's attention. This is your 3 second hit. Your focus item should be enlarged so that it is clear what your topic or theme is from a distance and perfectly legible from 3 feet. Then once you have grabbed your audience's attention, do not lose them by obscuring your message. Techniques for avoiding commonly made mistakes will be provided throughout the rest of this manual.

Remember:

- State main concept/conclusion succinctly
- *All* visuals and text should relate to the main point/conclusion.

Consider Presentation Requirements

Now that you have your main message sorted out, there are a number of practical considerations to keep in mind such as:

- ***How much room do you have?*** Determine specific size requirements. This will ultimately affect the content of your poster by determining what you can be able to fit on it, along with what you will have to leave out along with how all of the important elements will be organized.
- ***How much money do you have?*** The amount of money that you are willing to spend will shape the design elements of your poster. Do you wish to use cardboard or foam? Is it worthwhile to laminate the Poster or not? Should you construct the Poster from smaller pieces added together or should you choose to have it printed out onto one large piece of paper?
- ***What are your time constraints?*** Set up some informal deadlines for yourself. Start with the due date and work back to create milestones. It is also crucial to leave time for review and editing.

These design elements will not necessarily have an impact on the content of your Poster, but they may influence its style and attractiveness. Ultimately, it is important to remember that less is sometimes best and fancy details will not make up for poor content.

Know your Audience

Effective communication starts with knowing who your audience is. With this in mind it is important that you shape the content and design of your poster to accommodate the interests and comprehension levels of your audience members. There are three general kinds of audiences:

- **Specialists only:** With this type of audience you can assume a high level of disciplinary knowledge, use jargon, and take other appropriate presentation shortcuts in order to maximize your message.
- **Wide-ranging discipline:** This is the kind of audience that you could expect to find in the average ENST student gathering. You can assume familiarity with the discipline in general, but there are so many sub-specialties that jargon is to be avoided and language simplified.
- **Very general audience:** You cannot assume familiarity with any discipline and must explain everything in the most basic terms.

With those three audience types in mind, it is important to note that there are three types of people in almost any audience:

1. **People in your field of specialization** are likely to seek out and read your poster, even if it is not very good.
2. **People in related fields** might study your poster, if they can be “hooked” quickly. They are worth capturing, because they can have interesting insights and perspectives about your work.
3. **People in unrelated fields** are not likely to read your entire poster, but might want to quickly read and glean the main points.

You want to – and can – satisfy them all with an effectively constructed Poster!

Write an Effective Abstract

An abstract is a succinct description of your work. It should...

- **Explain why your work is important** – set the context and pre-empt the question “So what?”
- **Describe the objective(s) of your work.** What are you adding to the current knowledge?
- **Briefly explain the methods.** Unless the research is about methods, this should not be a major focus of your abstract.
- **Succinctly state results, conclusions, and recommendations.** This is what most people want to know. Do not say, “we present the results of our study and recommendations for action” – tell them what you found and recommend directly.

(see Appendix for a checklist and sample abstract)

Create an Effective Poster

Okay, you have thought of all of the angles and clarified your goals for your Poster, now what? There are many resources available on the Internet to help you prepare the kind of Poster that you would like to make. You are encouraged to seek these sources out, ask for advice, and use this manual as your starting point for creating the final product. At this stage there are a number of technical considerations that you will need to take into account in the process of creating an effective Poster: preparation; design for impact; and Poster construction.

PREPARATION

Decide on Your Printing Method

Single Sheet Poster (Plotter Printed)

Advantages: Large single page laminated posters are attractive, durable and fashionable. A variety of media is available for plotters so you may print your poster on paper, canvas, plastic, and photographic type papers.

Disadvantages: Printing at a service bureau can be expensive. Printing generally takes an hour but you may not be the only one printing so it can often take a full working day before your poster is ready for pick-up. Large posters can be bulky and easily damaged.

Multi-Sheet Poster (8 ½ X 11 inch pages on Bristol Board)

Advantages: Single 8 ½ X 11 inch sheets can be printed on most office printers, reducing the cost and time required to make your poster. Smaller sheets may be packed in luggage or transported easily.

Disadvantages: Assembly may be frustrating. Working within letter size paper can constrain where you place items on your Poster.

Printing Handouts

You may wish to print your entire poster on one sheet of letter size paper to use as a handout. Posters can be printed on letter size paper by using the FIT TO PAGE function within the print menu.

Lamination

Lamination significantly reduces the speed at which your poster will fade. Posters printed using non-archival inks (these include those found on most plotters and printers) will significantly fade in the first 6 months if displayed in normal room lighting. If your Poster is laminated it may be hung for several years before noticeable fading occurs.

Organize Your Information

Divide your information into the main sections that you would like to cover. Posters can be created with as many or as few descriptive sections as you wish. Generally speaking, you should go light on the number of headings/sections. Simplicity is always a virtue. The following list represents a few examples of sections you might expect to include in your Poster:

Title	- concise name of poster, contributors, organization
Introduction	- statement giving quick overview of poster
Problem	- statement of the problem
Method	- brief discussion of the processes and procedures
Results	- outcomes, findings, data
Conclusion	- summary, discussion of significance of results, a few easily remembered key conclusions

Once you have divided your content into main sections, take each of these sections and summarize the contents into 3 categories:

Heading	- title the audience will see first, headings help readers find key sections
Statement	- one sentence relating to the heading, the audience will read this definition and should have an understanding of this particular section
Support Material	- if the definition has sparked their interest, the audience members will move on to this section which should include documentation and illustrations

Sketch Layout of Your Poster

Sketch out a rough layout of your final Poster indicating the placement of graphics and text. This will help you organize your space and determine if you need additional illustrations or less text. A few tips to keep in mind:

- Balance the placement of text and graphics
- Use white space creatively to define flow and information
- Don't fight "reader gravity" that naturally tends to pull the eye from top to bottom, and from left to right
- Column format makes Posters easier to read in a crowd

Using Graphics for Impact

Properly designed graphics communicate relationships quickly. Here are a few tips to consider when you are deciding which graphics you should include and how:

- Graphs should be simple, clean and specific.
- Stick to simple 2-D line graphs, bar charts and pie charts and graphics. Avoid 3-D graphs unless you are displaying 3-D data.
- Aim for 40% graphic content.
- No photo, graphic or chart should be small than 5 X 7 inches. Be sure to crop and enlarge photographs to eliminate unnecessary information and focus attention only on significant details.
- Viewers see what they are told to see in an image, so title or provide captions for your graphics.
- When scanning materials for a poster, 300 dpi (dots per inch) is sufficient for 5 X 7 inch photographs, 675 dpi for slides.
- Avoid images from the Internet as they do not tend to look very good once enlarged (soft edges with large pixels),

Edit, Edit, Edit!

- Eliminate all but the vital elements
- Reduce your information to concise legible statements
- Whenever possible, reinterpret text as charts, graphs or illustrations

Tips for How to Effectively Present Your Poster

- Arrive early at the display site in order to ensure that you have adequate time to set up your poster presentation.
- Bring copies of a handout for your readers. It should include a miniature version of your poster and more detailed information about your work and references. You want people to remember your work!
- Put the handouts and business cards (if you have any) nearby.
- Dress professionally.
- Have a 5-8 minute presentation prepared.
- When making this presentation, do not simply read the poster. Instead give the big picture, explain why the problem is important. And use the graphics to illustrate and support your key points.