

Poster preparation: Seven Simple Ingredients

Follow these basic rules for creating a poster that an audience will want to explore.

1. Know your audience.

In general, your audience members will fall into one of two groups:

People who know and understand your topic. Some people will be familiar with the basic concepts you're working with, but don't assume that they are familiar with all of the technical details.

People who don't know anything about your topic. This audience gives you an opportunity to teach them about the interesting information you've been learning and to convince them that the kind of work you are is important and has relevance.

2. Determine your take-home message.

What is the single most important thing you want your audience to understand, believe, accept, or do after they see your poster?

Include a succinct statement of your project's main argument, and the evidence that supports that argument.

Choose a few key pieces of evidence that most clearly illustrate your take home message.

Use visuals to distill and communicate your take-home message quickly and easily.

3. The how and why

Your poster should answer the following questions:

- a. How did you conduct your research?
- b. What real-world problems or questions prompted you to undertake this project?
- c. What does this project mean for you or for others?
- d. How do your findings impact scholars in your field and members of the broader intellectual community?

4. Keep the information minimal and scannable.

Viewers will spend just a few seconds scanning your poster, deciding if they want to read or learn more. Think of your own favorite poster: The visuals draw you in, the headline captures your attention, and additional text elaborates.

- a. Long, complex sentences are difficult for viewers to absorb.
- b. Use simple terms; avoid jargon
- c. Use interesting visuals, bold headings, and bulleted or numbered lists.
- d. Don't write paragraphs of information. Make it scannable!
- e. Be concise, precise, and straightforward.

5. Be ready to talk about your project.

- a. What you choose to say about your project is just as important as your poster.
- b. Be ready to answer questions and provide details about your project.

- c. Make sure you review the details of your project that were too small to include in the poster. You'll want to expound on that information in your conversations with viewers.
- d. Don't read from your poster. Use the poster as a visual aid only, and know your material well.

6. Let viewers digest your poster before you engage with them.

- a. Don't rush your viewers. Let them acquaint themselves with your project, and then offer to guide them through the poster.
- a. Greet viewers with a "hello" and a "thanks" for stopping.
- b. "Would you like a guided tour of my project?" This greeting usually works better than asking "Do you have any questions?" because after only a few moments, viewers might not have had time to come up with questions.

7. Practice talking through your poster.

- a. Show your poster to friends, classmates, and your mentor ahead of time to get a feel for how viewers might respond.
- b. Prepare a five-minute overview of the project, walking viewers through the poster, drawing their attention to the most critical points and filling in interesting details as needed.
- c. Make note of the kinds of questions you're asked, and be ready to answer them.