

# Guide to Preparing a Professional Poster

Generally, the attractiveness of a poster is highly correlated with the quality of the work being presented. Badly designed posters can bury the message, although sometimes visually pleasing posters can say nothing of consequence.

## Printing the Poster

The poster can be printed at TCNJ's ITS office in the basement of the Library building or at an off-campus location.

Plan Ahead!! Don't wait till the last minute to print your poster. Plan to print the poster at least two days before the presentation date. Check if you need to make an appointment. Many departments have poster presentations at the end of the semester, so ITS will be busy during this time. Save your poster in a file format that is accepted at ITS.

## Poster Size

The maximum size printable at TCNJ is 38 inches (height) and 54 inches (width).

The minimum size recommended by the Department of Computer Science is 32 inches (height) and 40 inches (width).

## Designing and Creating the Poster

You may use MS PowerPoint, which is installed in the Holman PC and Mac labs, or another similar tool.

### If using PowerPoint:

Under "File->Page Setup" choose "Slides sized for "Custom" and enter the desired height and width. On this one "slide" you can make text boxes, regular boxes, import pictures or graphics, import figures (graphs), etc.

### Information to be presented on the poster:

- Title of the project / poster – typically at the top of the poster
- Student name(s) – typically below the title
- Mentor Name – Optional; typically on the same line as or below the student name(s)
- Department and Institution – typically below the name(s)
- Where and when presented – typically bottom right of the poster

Example: *"Presented at Celebration of Student Achievement, Spring 2012"* or  
*"Presented at Celebration of Computing, Fall 2012"*.

The poster should include the following information about your project. Rename the section headings as needed.

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
- Analysis
- Conclusions
- Acknowledgments

## **Tips for designing and formatting the poster:**

- Use design elements that help to clearly present information about the project. Don't choose something just because it is a "cool" feature provided by the tool you are using.
- Keep the overall design and layout clean, simple and organized.
- Dump PowerPoint's color palette
  - PowerPoint was designed for projecting images in a darkened room. The deep blues and fluorescent greens that look good in that setting often produce posters that are too dark and difficult to read (and expensive to print in color).
  - Stay away from primary colors on primary colors (no reds on blues, or reds on yellows). Instead, use a background in a muted color, one that is closer to white on the color spectrum, for a more professional tone.
  - Stick with black as the text color.
- Put each section of the poster in it's own box.
  - Minimize the number of different boxes you use.
  - Clearly differentiate between the sections in some way. For example, use a different background color for the box; outline the box with lines; etc.
  - Use consistent internal margins for textboxes, for example, 0.3 inches.
- Every element on the slide has formatting options in PowerPoint, for color, line thickness, etc. Right-click (or Ctrl-click on a Mac) the element to get to the formatting option.
- Caption all figures and tables. Link images and text.
- Consider the font.
  - You don't have to stick with just one. Adding a little variety, and even downloading a font that isn't available on PowerPoint, can make your poster stand out. But never use more than two or three fonts. Use sans serif fonts like Helvetica or Gill Sans for the body and a serif for the titles. (Some designers prefer serif fonts for the body, as they can help guide the eye through the word.)
  - Emphasize titles in one way: boldface, italics, or underline, but not all three.
  - Larger font sizes are essential. Suggestions are:
    - 85 – 88 pt bold for the title,
    - 72 pt for names and addresses,
    - 44 – 54 pt for the headers,
    - 32 – 44 pt for the body text, and
    - 28 pt for caption text.
- Align all elements.
  - Under "View," choose "Grids and Guides," choose "Display grid on screen."
  - You make want to choose "Snap objects to other objects" to help you align, or you may do it by eye with the grid to help you.
- Keep margin widths in between the boxes consistent.
- For all sections try to minimize the amount of text you use. Bulleted lists are great. Shorten your text lines – long lines of text are more difficult to read. Once you've created your content, read it again to see how many words you can cut. Pretend you're writing a text message, and paying for every word.

- While justifying text on both the right and left (i.e., full justification) makes for very neat-looking columns, it can cause distracting vertical “rivers” of spaces down the page. Left justifying text makes for an easier read.
- Even though it’s the most important part of the poster, the conclusion is often placed at the bottom. Instead, place it prominently, such as at top of the rightmost column.
- Make sure the conclusion is more than a restatement of your results. It should directly address the hypothesis you lay out in the introduction or abstract.

**The Checklist: What to do before you print**

- Give the poster a test run and save yourself the embarrassment of finding mistakes when you are standing in front of your poster at the presentation.
  - Project your poster in a classroom and run through your presentation.
  - Check for readability at 6 feet.
  - Print out a small copy to better judge your layout choices.
  - Use a ruler to make sure all columns are aligned
  - Check and re-check spellings and grammar.
  - Make sure that it presents the point of your project in the most convincing light.
  - Ensure that acronyms are expanded at least once, and unfamiliar terms are defined.
- Check your file size. Make sure you haven’t inserted a 500 MB image, or one that’s low resolution.