

Academic Poster Design & Presentation

Honors Symposium

Sections:

- [Where do I begin?](#)
- [Presentation basics](#)
- [How to design an academic poster](#)
- [Where can I print my poster?](#)
- [Detailed instructions on how to create a poster in PowerPoint](#)

Where do I begin?

Answer these three questions:

1. What is the most important/interesting/astounding finding from my research project?
2. How can I visually share my research with conference attendees? Should I use charts, graphs, photos, images?
3. What kind of information can I convey during my talk that will complement my poster?

Presentation basics

- An academic poster is an opportunity to showcase and communicate information about your research or creative project.
- Your poster will be on display for 1 and a half hours. Be prepared to talk that long. Have water available to you. You will need to have your poster set up before the start of the session. Allow yourself plenty of time for the set up. You are also responsible for the removal of your poster at the end of the session.
- Remember: most of the people you talk to will not be experts in your field. Try and design your poster with a general audience in mind.
- Come up with a 2-3 minute answer to the question, "Tell me what your project is about?" Anticipate other questions you might be asked and think about your response.
- You may wish to have handouts, business cards, and a way to collect names and contact information for anyone interested in receiving more details about your research.
- No electrical outlets are typically available for audiovisual presentations. If you are incorporating a tablet or video clips into your presentation, make sure your portable device's battery is properly charged.
- You will mount your poster on a cardboard base with binder clips. The cardboard base, binder clips, and tripod will be provided by the Honors College.

How to design an academic poster

1. Posters should be electronically generated and printed in advance of the conference. Microsoft PowerPoint is the most common program used to design posters, but options such as Canva and Adobe InDesign are appropriate as well.
2. Feel free to use the basic PowerPoint poster template provided by the Honors College. You should customize this template to your purposes and preferences.
3. Look at poster examples online. Search for “academic poster” or “research poster.” You can even look for examples in your own field: “History academic poster,” “Biology academic poster,” “Anthropology research poster.”
4. You can use any template or format you choose. However, the poster size should be 36” x 48” with landscape orientation.
5. Your poster is a visual tool. It should be informative, easy to read, and brief. Think of a poster as a series of highly efficient, organized “panels” (a storyboard) upon which appear synopses of the relevant information you want to convey – just enough to get your point across. Text should be concise and minimal. Less is often more.
6. Use of bullets, numbering, and headlines makes it easy to read.
7. Organize your poster materials in an easy-to-follow sequence, using headings, such as “Introduction,” “The Research Question,” “Methodology,” and “Findings.” These headings will make it easy to identify the key points.
8. Use large fonts. For headings, use at least a 48-point font. For text, use nothing less than 18-point. Important information should be readable from about 10 feet away.
9. For line-spacing, choose 125%-150% of the font-size. For example, if you are using a font-size of 30 points, you should select a line-spacing of 38-45 points. (With some software, this is expressed as a ratio, such as 1.5 or 150%). This is also good use of typography.
10. Make your poster appealing. Incorporate color. Use photographs, graphs, charts, maps, and the like. Simplify charts and figures to include only information that can be grasped at a glance. Be attentive to the layout and placement of your materials, and maintain high content to background contrast.
11. Place the title of your work in a prominent position on your poster. Try and keep the title short. Be sure to include your name and any important basic information about you and your project: for Honors capstone projects, your department/major and faculty advisor; for other projects, the course in which the project was completed, instructor or faculty advisor, etc.

Where can I print my poster?

1. We recommend you send a digital copy of the poster in PDF format to your printer well in advance of the symposium.
2. If you send your poster to steeletm@jmu.edu by March 29, the Honors College will pay for your poster to be printed.
3. Some departments and colleges have printers that can make posters.
4. Some departments and majors offer mini-grants to help you defray the costs of the poster. The Department of Psychology, for instance, has an online application form for poster printing funds.
5. The JMU East Campus Copy Center is a great resources for printing your poster. Posters on the cheapest paper cost as little as \$12 to print. Send your poster in a PowerPoint file (PDF is also acceptable) to copycenters@jmu.edu. Please allow at least 48 hours for your poster to be printed.

Detailed instructions on how to create a poster in PowerPoint

1. Create one large slide in PowerPoint that is 36 inches tall and 48 inches wide. It is important that you take this step at the beginning, so that the result is high-resolution enough for printing.
 - Open PowerPoint and choose File -> New -> Blank Presentation
 - For the slide layout, choose: Blank Slide (with no title)
 - Select: File -> Page Setup
 - Enter 48" for the width and 36" for the height
 - Make sure your slide is in "Landscape Mode" (wider than it is high)
 - To view your entire poster on the screen at one time, select: View -> Zoom -> Fit
 - To zoom in on sections of the poster to work on them in finer detail, select: View -> Zoom -> 100% (or some other level or resolution)
2. Next, cut and paste images, text, blocks, and charts into the PowerPoint slide that you have created.
 - To open a text box on your poster, select: Insert -> Text Box
 - Then click anywhere on your poster and begin typing in the box.
 - You can size/move the text box by using the lines and dots on the edges of the box.
 - You can change the font size, color, and so forth as you would in Microsoft Word.
 - You can put gridlines on the slide so that you can line up your pictures and text by clicking on the Show/Hide Grid button on the toolbar. If you don't see the shortcut, click View -> Grid and Guides -> then check the box for Display Grid on Screen. You can also change the spacing of the grid lines right above the Display Grid on Screen option.
 - Other objects can also be inserted in a similar way by selecting the appropriate object (picture, diagram, chart, table) from the Insert menu. Keep in mind that any images will be blown up in a poster and there may be some distortion or pixilation when it is printed. Be sure to use high resolution images.
 - You can add colors to the poster by using autoshapes and changing the fill color. Shortcuts for these options can be found on the drawing toolbar. If you do not see the drawing toolbar (located

at the bottom of the screen) select Tools -> Customize -> Toolbars -> then check the drawing box and the toolbar should appear.

- You can stack shapes or text-boxes on top of each other. For example, if you wanted to create a colored border around a white textbox, you could use the rectangle autoshape to draw a box and fill it with a color. These options are located on the drawing toolbar. You could then draw and textbox inside the rectangle. Right click inside the textbox, choose the Format Textbox option, and change the fill color of the textbox (change it to white or any other color).
- Right click inside the textbox again and choose the Order option, then choose Bring to Front, so the textbox would be seen on top of the colored rectangle. You can stack shapes, pictures, graphs, etc. in the same manner by right clicking on the object and choosing the Order option.
- If you have objects stacked on top of each other, you can group them together so all the stacked objects become line one new object. The can be moved around the page together. This is done by clicking on each object you want to be grouped together while holding down the Ctrl key. For example, if you had a textbox with a colored rectangle behind it you could click the rectangle to select it, then hold down the Ctrl key and click on the textbox. Right click on the object and select the Grouping option, then click Group. (Ungroup can also be selected in the same way to separate the objects again.)
- Remember to leave at least 1/4-inch of white (unprinted) space around the outside of your poster since large-carriage printers typically cannot do “full bleed” printing (i.e., they cannot print right up to the edge of the paper).

3. You can also paste other PowerPoint slides (from a previous presentation, for example) right onto the poster.

- Open a PowerPoint presentation file.
- Select: View -> Slide Sorter.
- Right-click on a slide and select Copy.
- Go back to your PowerPoint poster file and select: Edit -> Paste Special -> Microsoft PowerPoint Presentation Object.
- Now you can move and size the slide as a separate object on your poster.

4. Create a final PDF version for printing.

- Select: File -> Save As -> then type your “postername in the File Name field (also select the folder and sub-folder location where you want to store the file).
- Select PDF as the Save As Type to ensure you make a PDF version
- Select: Save