Life Sciences Research Symposium Poster Guidelines

General aim and format

- A poster is a graphically based approach to presenting research. In presenting your research with a poster, you should aim to use the poster as a means for generating active discussion of the research.
- Limit the text to about one-fourth of the poster space, and use "visuals" (graphs, photographs, schematics, maps, etc.) to tell your "story".

Design and layout specifications

- The entire poster will be mounted on a 4’high x 8’wide poster board. The poster does not necessarily have to fill the entire working area.
- When you start PowerPoint, a list of available presentations will appear on the right side of the screen. Choose “Blank” presentation.
- Once created, the work area must be set to the final size of the poster.
- Do this by selecting File, Slide Setup.
- PowerPoint limits the page width to 56 inches, and the height to 36 inches (this is also the width of the paper roll).
- LIFE SCIENCE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM POSTER DIMENSIONS are 48” by 36” (while it is your choice which orientation you choose we suggest you use a landscape orientation – long dimension is horizontal)
- When your poster prints, 1 inch will be clipped from either end. In the window Slides Sized For: select Custom. Then enter 48 in the Width window and 36 in the Height window (or vice versa depending on orientation).
- A banner displaying your poster title, name, and program (or class, if appropriate) should be positioned at top-centre of the board (see figure below). When listing your affiliation, please include the following: Name, Program, McMaster University. For example, Pat Chow-Fraser, Life Sciences Program, McMaster University.
- Make it obvious to the viewer how to progressively view the poster. The poster generally should read from left to right, and top to bottom. Numbering the individual panels or connecting them with arrows is a standard "guidance system" (see figure).
- Leave some open space in the design. An open layout is less tiring to the eye and mind.
**Figure 1:** Conventional layouts for a poster. Long panel at top-center is title/author banner. Individual panels can be connected by numbers and arrows. Also, note the use of space between panels to achieve visual appeal. (*from:* C. W. Connor, 1992, *The Poster Session: A Guide for Preparation:* U. S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 88-667.)

**Lettering**

- Word-process all text (including captions).
- Text should be readable from five feet away. Use a *minimum* font size of 18 points. 24 font size is recommended.
- Lettering for the title should be large (at least 70-point font). Use all capital letters for the title.

**Visuals**

- Present numerical data in the form of graphs, rather than tables (graphs make trends in the data much more evident). If data must be presented in table-form, **KEEP IT SIMPLE**.
- Visuals should be simple and bold. Leave out or remove any unnecessary details.
- Make sure that any visual can "stand alone" (i.e., graph axes are properly labeled, maps have north arrows and distance scales, symbols are explained, etc.).
- Use color to enhance comprehension, not to decorate the poster.
- Make sure that the text and the visuals are integrated. Figures should be numbered consecutively according to the order in which they are first mentioned in the text. Each visual should have a *brief* title (for example: Figure 1- Location of study area).
- In PowerPoint, graphics can be added by inserting from a file or by pasting via the clipboard. In general, inserting a graphic file is the safest and simplest method. Pasting a graphic from the clipboard has the problem that it is usually pasted as an object belonging to the program that created it. If you need to do this, the safest approach is to use Edit, Paste Special to insert the graphic as a picture.
- ALWAYS use graphic images that have the .TIF extension.
- Bitmap graphic images can be very large and it’s important to know just how much information you need to include. Here are some good rules to keep in mind:
  - Allow about 72 pixels per printed inch. A photographic image that will print in a box 5” by 3” need not be much larger than 360 x 216 pixels to produce a pleasing result. Colour depths typically have bit values such as 8(256 colours), 16(32K colours) and 24 (millions of colours). When saving a bitmap, choose the smallest bit depth that provides enough colours to represent your image.
- Try and keep your background simple; incorporating an image as your background can cause printing problems and makes it harder for your readers.
- Very obtrusive backgrounds can distract the eye from the text. The more contrast between the background & the text, the easier it is to read.

**Text**

- Keep the text brief. Blocks of text should not exceed three paragraphs (viewers won't bother to read more than that). Use text to (a) introduce the study (what hypothesis was
tested or what problem was investigated? why was the study worth doing?), (b) explain visuals and direct viewers’ attention to significant data trends and relationships portrayed in the visuals, and (c) state and explain the interpretations that follow from the data. In many cases, conclusions can be summarized in a bullet-point list.

- Depending upon the stage or nature of your project, the text could also include sections on future research plans or questions for discussion with viewers.

- Cite and reference any sources of information other than your own, just as you would do with a research paper. Ask your professor about the particular citation system that you should use (different discipline may use slightly different styles). The "References Cited" is placed at the end of the poster.

Miscellaneous Suggestions

- SIMPLICITY IS THE KEY. Keep to the point, and don't try to cover too many things. Present only enough data to support your conclusions. On the other hand, make sure that you present sufficient data to support your conclusions.

- When you begin to make your poster, first create a list of the visuals that you would use if you were describing your project with only the visuals. Write the text after you have created the list of visuals.

- Before the poster session, rehearse a brief summary of your project. Many viewers will be in a hurry and will want a quick "guided tour" of your poster. Don't be afraid to point out uncertainties in your work; this is where you may get useful feedback.