

# Resources for Poster Presenters

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## *Effective Scientific Posters*

### Quick Reference

George R. Hess

A poster is a *visual* communication tool.

An effective poster will help you ...



... engage colleagues  
in conversation.

... get your main points  
across to as many  
people as possible.

Posters serve as ...

- » a source of information
- » a conversation starter
- » a summary of your work
- » an advertisement of your work

## Tips for Effective Poster Presentations

Get your message across with effective *visual displays of data* and small blocks of supporting text. Think of your poster as an illustrated abstract.

**Tell readers** why your work matters, what you did, what you found, and what you recommend. Avoid excessive focus on methods – it's the results and implications that count!

**Overall appearance.** Use a pleasing arrangement of graphics, text, colors. Your poster should be neat and uncluttered – use white space to help organize sections. Balance the placement of text and figures.

**Organization.** Use headings to help readers find what they're looking for: objective, results, conclusions, etc. A columnar format helps traffic flow in a crowded poster session.

**Minimize text – use graphics.** Keep text in blocks of no more than 50-75 words – don't create large, monolithic paragraphs of prose.

**Text size.** All text should be large enough to read from 1-2 meters, including the text in figures. Title should be larger, to attract attention from far away.

**Use color cautiously.** Dark letters on light background are easiest to read. Stick to a theme of 2-3 colors. Avoid overly bright colors – they attract attention but wear out reader's eyes.

**Don't fight reader gravity,** which pulls the eyes from top to bottom (first), and left to right.

**Include full contact information.** You want to be found – the reader should not have to look up anything to find you.

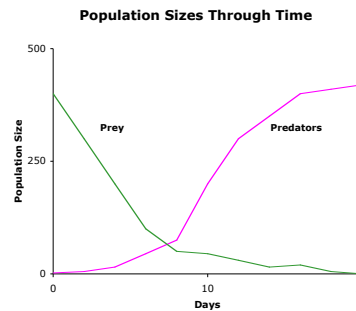
## Clean graphs show data clearly!



**Desired message:** Prey decreased as predators increased.

Focus on relationships – exact values are usually not important.

Eliminate “chart junk” to keep focus on data (Tufte 1983). Grid lines, detailed ticks on axes, data markers, and grey background are not needed.



Label data directly, when possible. Legends force reader to look back and forth to decode graph.

Message is now loud and clear!

**Prepare a 3-5 minute verbal explanation.** Some people will ask you to “walk me through your poster.” In making such a presentation, don't read the poster. Instead, give the big picture, explain why the problem is important, and use the graphics on your poster to illustrate and support your findings and recommendations.

**Prepare a summary handout.** You want people to remember your work – a handout provides a written record for readers. You can include a miniature version of your poster plus more detailed graphics, tables, and prose. The handout is something else you can refer to when talking to people about your work. Be sure to include complete contact information.