

Tips on Professional Posters

By Yolanda Griffiths, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA

1. **Use a large roll versus individual sheets.** There is no question that the large, one-piece posters look more professional than individual sheets or boards. There are many online sites, such as www.makesigns.com, that have templates and other tools in PowerPoint. In fact, within a few days this site will print your poster, laminate it, and mail it to you in a transportable tube for carrying it to and from the Conference. Excellent professional service done inexpensively.
2. **Consider the Graphics**
 - a. Use at least a 24-point font so the poster can be easily read from 4 to 6 feet away.
 - b. Do not use contrasting vibrant colors, such as hot pink text on a lime green background. Dark words on light background are easier on the eyes. I made this mistake when playing around with one of the examples I sent (a poster on creative arts) to be creative and playful; however, it was very hard to read.
 - c. Have enough white space, which is as important as the content. Too much text without some breaks for pictures, clip art, or icons makes for a very boring and tedious poster. Too many large pictures or graphs, without a clearly linked explanation to the topic, has a negative effect as well.
 - d. Use a sans serif font because this is easier to read. Examples include Arial, Tahoma, Comic Sans Relief, etc. Do not use Times New Roman or Courier (which are serif fonts).
 - e. Research posters should follow the template described in the presenters' handbook. Descriptive posters should have some logical organization and argument, with supportive literature or pictures.
 - f. Size makes a difference. The boards offered by AOTA are usually large, and it is wise to take advantage of all the space, if possible. Tiny posters on such large boards look ridiculous.
 - g. Have handouts or cards available. Often, persons coming to view the posters want to contact the authors for more information. As a presenter, you are answering so many questions at once that it is very challenging to try to write down contact information for viewers. A pocket mounted on the board for handouts or business cards is perfect.
3. **Dress professionally.** First impressions are hard to change. Business dress tells me you respect the people coming to view your poster and want to appear scholarly as well as professional.
4. **Do not use the time standing next to your poster as a social hour.** Nothing bugs me more than trying to ask a pertinent question to the poster presenter while he or she chit chats with buddies or friends who have come to see the presenter, and not the poster. I understand the concept of professional socialization, but time with presenters next to their posters is limited.
5. **Come prepared with push pins to put up posters.** I am always amazed at people who arrive with posters and think that they can put them up with Scotch tape or masking tape.

6. **Research posters should not be an article stapled to the display board.** Pick out key terms and critical points, and be sure there is a conclusion or state that the research is still in progress.
7. **Do not plagiarize information—always cite your sources!** If you do not cite sources, it is assumed that what is presented is your original work.
8. **Do not use cutesy three-dimensional props** such as flowers, toys, or even examples of equipment such as splints on the board. Take a digital picture and print that instead.
9. **Professional posters should not have cartoon-like stickers, sequins, glitter, or foiled letters.** Think scholarly rather than carnival attraction.
10. **Be sure you have signed consent** when you take pictures of patients, clients, family members, students, or anyone else in the photo. Posters at a national conference are a form of public display and require the consent of individuals who are photographed.