

## Poster Hints

### Physics 460

**Introduction:** In a poster presentation your work is “posted” on a display board in a large open area with dozens (sometimes hundreds) of other similar presentations. Your research is examined and appraised by your colleagues as they pass through the hall, moving from one poster to the next. Typically, posters are “left up” for several hours or more, and you are required to “attend” your poster for all (or at least a significant fraction of) the time it is on display. This is to permit you to engage interested persons in conversation about your studies and to answer any questions they may have about your work. Interactions of this type are among the primary benefits of this type of “oral” presentation. They afford excellent opportunities to meet other researchers working on problems similar to your own and to exchange ideas and discuss new approaches with them. They also offer chances to get constructive feedback on your efforts in a generally informal and highly collegial manner. In most cases, a reviewer rarely “reads” the entire poster, but instead “scans” the abstract, the data tables and figures, and the conclusions for information that piques their interest. Once “hooked”, they may examine the details of the poster more carefully and begin to ask questions. This is where the real “meat” of the exchange takes place, but to get to this point, the display must in some way “grab” the attention of the passer-by. Thus, to be effective, not only must the scientific content of the poster be sound and credible, but the manner in which the science is conveyed must also be attractive and engaging

At professional meetings, poster presentations are a popular means of communicating scientific results because they have the capability of reaching large audiences and the potential for rich exchanges between investigators.

The poster must be suffused with the utmost professionalism. Just as in a written report, careful attention must be paid to such issues as style, organization, clarity, accuracy, completeness, and citations. A poster presentation laden with misspellings and/or mispronunciations, incorrect equations or wrong definitions, and poorly organized data tables and illegible graphics will not only be ineffective at conveying your message, but it will leave a lasting and highly uncomplimentary impression on your audience. The remainder of this note will address ways to avoid such pitfalls in your own poster.

*Poster Presentation Basics:* The term “poster” is a bit of a misnomer for this type of presentation, insofar as it can be prepared on single sheets of standard-sized paper or in special larger, sometimes glossy or laminated formats (at a cost, of course!). Regardless of the particular physical form adopted, here are some “do’s and don’t’s” regarding poster presentations that may be helpful in preparing them.

**Do** make sure you know how much area you will be allowed within which to display your poster. Layout your final version beforehand to make sure it will fit inside the boundaries specified by the conference officials.

**Do** check out as early as possible the nature of the display boards that will be used to support your poster. Make sure you have the appropriate fasteners (push pins, staples, double stick tape, etc.) available to attach your display to the board surface.

**Do** use a large sans serif font, perhaps **18-24 point arial**, so that your poster may be read easily from a distance of at least a meter. Sometimes, if the aisles separating the display boards are crowded, reviewers may not be able to get closer than a few feet from your work. If they can't easily read the material from that distance, they will simply move on past, and you will have lost your audience.

**Do** adopt an outline or "bullet" approach to presenting your information. Long paragraphs of dense text are hard to read and absorb quickly. Short, direct phrases or sentences that express your major points are much more effective at conveying your message to a potentially interested, but time-pressed passer-by.

**Do** leave lots of "white space" around your poster. Use wide margins, and if you must present some of the text in paragraph form, double or triple space the lines to enhance readability.

**Do** use high quality, spare diagrams, pictures, graphs and charts whenever possible to present your experiment, data and results. Avoid lengthy, complicated tables and graphics. If tabular data must be included, make sure that their layout is as clean, clear and uncluttered as possible; again, use large fonts and shun the use of footnotes.

**Do** try to make your poster visually appealing, but not distractingly so. Add some color to your presentation: use different **colored inks** and **bold** fonts to highlight important issues and results. If your display has been prepared on individual 8½ x 11 inch paper, back each sheet with 9 x 12 inch colored construction paper to provide a suitable border for each page; if your presentation consists of printed PowerPoint slides, consider carefully what type of background to choose so that the text is highlighted, but not overwhelmed, by it. The application of large, colorful, but tasteful banners for title information and section sub-titles can also be effective in drawing attention to your poster and its content. Including diagrams, figures, and/or dramatic images imported from the Internet is also an effective and eye-catching way to present your information.

**Do** have available for quick distribution to interested parties preprints of your paper or at least copies of principal results and data tables. This will provide colleagues with a lasting, if not permanent, remembrance of their interaction with you and may prompt further communication either at the meeting or later after the participants have returned to their home institutions.

**Do** keep a list of people (including names, affiliations, and telephone numbers or e-mail addresses) with whom you have discussed your work. Such information can be very helpful in establishing a network of contacts in the field from whom to draw support and assistance in the future.

**Don't** leave your poster unattended for long periods of time. If you must be away from your station during the time your work is displayed, leave a note attached to your poster indicating when you plan to return and encourage reviewers to leave their names and contact information on a suitably placed form at the display. Again, the whole point of the display is to encourage contact between you and other interested researchers, and you really don't want to miss any opportunities to engage colleagues in meaningful conversation about your work (and theirs as well) if at all possible.

**Don't** stand directly in front of your poster. To do so blocks the view that passers-by have of your display. Stand to one side, being careful not to inadvertently eclipse neighboring posters, or position yourself more towards the center of the aisle, keeping a watchful eye for attendees who

linger at your station and give evidence of having interest in your investigation. In such circumstances, it is appropriate to approach such persons, introduce yourself, and ask if they have any questions about the material presented in the poster. Often, this is enough to “break the ice” and initiate a rich and satisfying conversation about the project.