DESIGNING A RESEARCH POSTER FOR THE HUMANITIES/SOCIAL SCIENCES

Maryland Center for Undergraduate Research

1201 Marie Mount Hall  ugresearch@umd.edu
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A RESEARCH POSTER?

- Allows you to present results clearly and efficiently
- Facilitates conversations with conference visitors interested in your research
- Serves as a stand-in so people can learn about your work when you’re not present
- Gives you practice in concisely summarizing complex topics and public speaking

Undergraduate Research Day 2014, photo courtesy Thai Nguyen
HOW DO YOU FORMAT A RESEARCH POSTER?

- STEM disciplines traditionally follow IMRaD format (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion), but this doesn’t always apply to humanities research.

- Formats that work for humanities:
  - **Modified IMRaD**: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Conclusions
  - **Thematic**: Group sections of your poster according to sub-themes
  - **Narrative**: Tell a story about your topic; particularly useful for a specific event (i.e. World War II)
  - **Questions and Answers**: Summarize your main research questions and how you answered them

Sample of a music poster using modified IMRaD format, University of Texas at Austin, Office of Undergraduate Research

www.ugresearch.umd.edu
Sample of a Linguistics poster using thematic format. Institute for Humanities Research, 2013 Humanities Undergraduate Research Award Presentations.
Sample of a history poster using narrative format,
University of Colorado, Colorado Springs
Sample of a history poster using questions and answers format, University of Oxford, The Oxford Research Center in the Humanities, Poster Competition Trinity 2014.
SOFTWARE FOR POSTER DESIGN:

- Microsoft PowerPoint and Publisher are popular and available for free to UMD students through Terpware (http://terpware.umd.edu/)
- Apache Open Office Draw is a free downloadable program particularly helpful for making diagrams: https://www.openoffice.org/product/draw.html
- There are many free poster templates online. Several are listed on our website at http://www.ugresearch.umd.edu/current-createresearchposter.html. However, most of these are done in the IMRaD format and may need to be modified for your research.
POSTER SIZE AND ORIENTATION:

- Most conferences will have a set size and orientation for posters
- For Undergraduate Research Day, dimensions should be 36 x 48 inches (3 x 4 feet) and can be portrait or landscape
- It is easy to adjust slide size in PowerPoint. Go to Design > Slide Size > Custom Slide Size
LAYOUT FOR YOUR RESEARCH POSTER:

- Arrange content from left to right, top to bottom
- Place logo, title of project, and your name at top
- Font size should be large and readable from far away
- Text used in main body of poster should not exceed 800 words
- Avoid long, unbroken expanses of text; use phrases and bullet points
- Left-align your text blocks; justified text leaves awkward gaps
- Set a thin black border (1-2pt) around images; include captions
- Whenever possible, align your text boxes and images
- Leave space for works cited and acknowledgments at bottom
- Include your full name and contact information

Thanks for reading my poster. This is a summary of my research project which I worked on this summer as a Maryland Summer Scholars project.

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FORMATTING YOUR POSTER:

- Keep style elements consistent

- Font and font size:
  - Avoid exotic fonts like Comic Sans
  - Use no more than two font faces—don’t let your poster look like a ransom note!
  - Sans-serif font for headings (Arial, Helvetica, etc.)
  - Serif fonts for text (more readable), Times New Roman, Palatino
  - Poster needs to be legible from 4 to 6 feet away
    - Headings 36-54 pt.
    - Text 24-36 pt.
    - Captions and data labels on charts and graphs 18-20pt

- Color:
  - Avoid dark or patterned backgrounds, as these waste ink and are hard to read
  - Avoid red text on green or vice versa. Those with color blindness can’t read it
  - Use only 2-3 colors for your background and text boxes

DON’T get CARRIED AWAY With Exotic and Hard-to-read FONTS

Helvetica / Garamond
Caslon / Univers
Futura / Bodoni
Garamond / Futura
Gills Sans / Caslon
Minion / Gill Sans
Myriad / Minion
Caslon / Franklin Gothic
Trade Gothic / Clarendon
Franklin Gothic / Baskerville

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Finding Images for Your Poster:

- When possible, use images in the public domain, without copyright restrictions, or where you own the copyright.
- Copyright Law allows some “fair use” of copyrighted works for educational purposes.
- Images of art, architecture, and historical artifacts are available for free through databases like ArtStor (available via UMD Libraries Research Port with UMD login) and websites of museums including:
  - Smithsonian Institution: [http://collections.si.edu/search/](http://collections.si.edu/search/)
  - National Gallery of Art: [http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/collection-search.html](http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/collection-search.html)
  - The British Museum: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx)
TECHNICAL TIPS FOR DEALING WITH IMAGES

- Ideally, images that are printed should have at least 300 dpi (dots-per-inch) resolution
- Find/scan the highest resolution image possible. When scanning, save image in TIFF format
- Use Adobe Photoshop (PC) or Photos (Mac) to adjust resolution, resize, and crop images
- To screenshot webpages:
  - PC: Hit CTRL + PRINT SCREEN buttons simultaneously, then paste the photo into a graphics editor (Photoshop or MS Paint)
  - Mac: Hit Shift + Command + 4, then drag the crosshair to select the area you want for your image. Release and you will find the image as a .png file on your desktop
  - Check to make sure that image does not become “pixelated” when enlarged

Example of pixilation, from “Pixilation” entry, Wikipedia.org
WHAT’S WRONG WITH THIS POSTER?

- Example of a bad poster layout from Colin Purrington’s blog:
- Background image distracting
- Dark background wastes ink
- Title perspective hard to read
- Logos too large
- Background color and sizes of text boxes inconsistent
- Text boxes not aligned or consistently spaced
- Too much text!
- Text in boxes is justified, leaving awkward space
- No illustrative images or charts
- Bad graphic of guinea pig

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**ABSTRACT:**

One general benefit of space travel is a potential medical benefit. In a zero-gravity environment, bone mass density increases, which may help prevent osteoporosis. However, this benefit may also have some drawbacks. In a zero-gravity environment, the body may not get the necessary stimulation to maintain bone density. Therefore, it is important to monitor bone density in space travelers. This study aimed to assess bone density in a group of space travelers using a DEXA scan. The results showed a significant increase in bone density in the space travelers compared to the control group. This finding suggests that space travel may have a beneficial effect on bone density. Further studies are needed to investigate the long-term effects of space travel on bone density.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS:**

Five space travelers were selected for the study. A DEXA scan was performed on each traveler before and after space travel. The results were compared to a control group of non-space travelers. The DEXA scans were performed at the same time of day to minimize any diurnal variation in bone density.

**RESULTS:**

The mean bone density increase in the space travelers was 5.2% compared to the control group. This increase was statistically significant (p < 0.05).

**CONCLUSIONS:**

The results of this study suggest that space travel may have a beneficial effect on bone density. Further studies are needed to investigate the long-term effects of space travel on bone density.
SAVING AND EXPORTING YOUR POSTER

- Look at your poster at 100% resolution to make sure there is no pixilation of images. In PPT, go to View > Zoom > 100%
- Be sure to spell-check your poster and have someone else proof it
- Embed your fonts in the file: go to File > Options > Save > Embed fonts in the file
- Save your project as a PDF (Portable Document Format) for printing—this will preserve your layout
- Save for maximum print resolution (not web resolution)
**PRINTING YOUR POSTER:**

- Don’t leave printing to the last minute, especially during crunch periods—print at least 5 days before you need it.
- McKeldin Library, 2nd floor, printer in Learning Commons, can make posters up to 36” x 48” [http://www.lib.umd.edu/tlc](http://www.lib.umd.edu/tlc)
- The Engineering Copy Center in Glenn Martin Hall can print posters up to 2400” x 42” [http://www.copycenter.umd.edu/](http://www.copycenter.umd.edu/)
PREPARE FOR THE POSTER SESSION:

- Write out and practice versions of a “poster talk” of various lengths: i.e. a 30, 90 second, and 3 minute speech
- Dress in neat and clean clothing; does not need to be “interview” clothing but you should be dressed more formally than what you normally wear to class
- Wear comfortable shoes—you may be standing for a long time without a break
- Get an extra-large plastic bag or shipping tube to protect your poster in transport in case the weather is bad—poster ink can streak in the rain

Don't dress this casually—and remember a plastic bag for your poster!
DURING THE POSTER SESSION:

- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace
- Maintain eye contact with your visitor
- Keep your language simple—don’t overwhelm your listener with jargon
- Use your hand to direct your listener to your poster
- Do not wear sunglasses or chew gum
- Thank people for their interest and remember to smile!
FURTHER RESOURCES:

- MCUR Creating a Research Poster page
  - [http://www.ugresearch.umd.edu/current-createresearchposter.html](http://www.ugresearch.umd.edu/current-createresearchposter.html)

- See following slides for links to more research poster websites
  - and links to sources for images and software
GENERAL RESOURCES:

  https://www.depts.ttu.edu/tlpdc/Resources/Teaching_resources/TLPDC_teaching_resources/PresentingConferencePapersAndPostersInTheHumanities.php

- McDayter, Mark. “Design Tips for Creating an Arts and Humanities Poster.” Electronic Textuality and Theory at Western, Western University, February 21, 2013.
  http://rgettatwestern.wordpress.com/2013/02/21/design-tips-for-creating-arts-and-humanities-poster/

- Roundtree, Aimee. “Posters for Humanities and Social Sciences Student Research Conference,” Department of English, University of Houston-Downtown.
  https://www.uhd.edu/academics/sciences/scholars/Documents/workshop-poster.pdf

  https://colinpurrington.com/tips/designing-conference-posters-2/
  - Includes tips on what to include, do’s and don’ts, design resources, templates, tips for presenting, and more
EXAMPLE POSTERS:


- “Poster Samples.” Undergraduate Research, University of Texas at Austin. [https://ugs.utexas.edu/our/poster/samples](https://ugs.utexas.edu/our/poster/samples)
FINDING IMAGES FOR YOUR POSTER

- Online libraries, archives, historical societies; many have digitized archival materials online; look under “collections”
  - Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org)—many out-of-copyright books as well as archival materials; many institutions contribute
  - Creative Commons (http://creativecommons.org)—online archive with images in the public domain or where creator has given permission for others to use
  - Library of Congress (http://www.loc.gov/collections/) has thousands of images in the public domain; browse its digital collections
  - National Archives DocsTeach online primary sources (http://docsteach.org/)
The University of Maryland at College Park has on its communications website a page where you may download high-resolution official university logos. These are in EPS format (encapsulated post script), and you will need a graphics editing software such as Adobe Illustrator to open and edit them:

- https://brand.umd.edu/downloads.html

The cloud version of the Adobe Creative Suite can be installed for free from Terpware (http://terpware.umd.edu/) using your UMD student ID.