

Poster Printing Tips

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- DO NOT use Microsoft Powerpoint. Although the status quo for making posters, the initial benefits in ease of use and application familiarity will be far overshadowed with problems that commonly arise at printing time. Microsoft Office products are horrible at handling large documents. Since posters tend to be rather image intensive, the *.PPT file size will be at least 7–10 MB for your average poster. This value is nearly tripled in the amount of data that is sent to the printer for rather mysterious reasons having to do with printer drivers and image compression schemes (or lack thereof). Instead, it is recommended that you use a vector drawing or page layout program such as Adobe Illustrator, Macromedia/Adobe Freehand, Quark Express, or Adobe In-Design. The learning curve for these programs is really not that steep, and you should be able to generate a decent looking poster within a week if you are a first time user. The benefits are better graphics rendering and more refined control over layout geometry that would require to many work-arounds in MS Powerpoint to accomplish.
- Keep the poster “image heavy”. That is, try to have at least half of the space on the poster devoted to images or diagrams that describe the work presented. As such, try to keep the amount of text down to what would fit on 1–1.5 pages (10 pt, single-spaced with 1 in margins), including the abstract and references. The idea is that you want viewers to be able to get the main points of your poster with only a single glance.
- When working on the text for your poster, I find it is best to use \LaTeX and BibTeX instead of MS Word and Endnote. To get the text into your poster, translate the *.TEX source file into a Rich Text Format (RTF) document using Latex2rtf. Open the RTF file can be then read by Wordpad (available on MS Windows systems under Start → Programs → Accessories) and copy the text into appropriate text fields in your poster. It is important that on this last step that the text be copied as “unformatted text” to avoid strange looking results. Although this seems a bit convoluted the main benefit lies in the ease of using BibTeX as a mechanism for citing references and styling the references listing. I’ve found the MS Word + Endnote way of doing things far to complicated compared to using the `\cite` command in \LaTeX + BibTeX. Other benefits include \LaTeX ’s macro capabilities — try typing *S. cerevisiae* 5 times in a document without misspelling it at least once!
- \LaTeX is far superior to MS Equation Editor or MathType for complicated sets of equations. Unfortunately, getting them into your poster isn’t necessarily straight forward. The methods that work for now are to (1) generate a PDF from the *.TEX source and copy the graphics directly into your poster document as a Device Independent Bitmap (DIB) or (2) convert the PDF graphics to a PNG image and import that image into your poster. The later usually gives better results and allows for the use of alpha transparency which is handy if you have a non-white background.
- If you have a lot of non-vector based graphics (e.g. microscope images) on your poster, make sure you embed them in the file for easy document transport. Otherwise, you have to copy all the images you used if you move your poster document. This is at least how things work in Macromedia/Adobe Freehand.
- Stick with fonts that should be available on any computer, or that can be replaced with a reasonable facsimile — e.g. Times New Roman, Courier New, Arial. Convert odd fonts used for logos or symbols to paths to avoid “Missing Font” errors.
- Output the final result as a PDF simply because EVERYONE has Adobe Acrobat Reader these days. Some PDF converters don’t allow the converted page size to exceed 45 in in length, notably the one in Macromedia/Adobe Freehand. Thankfully, this isn’t far off from the standard length of 48 in for most posters. Since PDFs are natively vector based, scaling the document up at printing time to fit the page margins should result in relatively no degradation in image quality. Be sure to do this conversion from within your vector/layout program and not from a raster graphics program like Adobe Photoshop. The difference is that a PDF coming from a vector source will be a vector output and require little printer memory. If it comes from a raster graphics program the output will essentially be a big image. Imagine how much space is required to store a 36x48 in TIFF.

- At 100% scaling, characters at 72 pt font appear 1 in tall. Poster titles should be at least 1 in tall and readable from 3–4 ft away. Text within the poster appears best at 24–36 pt font and should never be smaller than 12 pt.