


# Guidelines for Designing Effective Posters

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*These guidelines are intended to help Georgia Tech ECE undergraduate students who are participating in the GT Capstone Design Expo as they prepare posters for the competition. The worksheet-style handout is used during the hands-on, interactive workshop on "Designing Effective Research Posters" to help students articulate and visualize their work.*

**A poster is a visual presentation, NOT a paper!**  
**Start with images, NOT with text!**


  
Opportunity Research Scholars Program  
School of Electrical and Computer Engineering  
Georgia Institute of Technology

## Title

Lab  
Name/Logo  
Faculty Advisor

**Student Name(s), Faculty Name(s)**  
 School of Electrical and Computer Engineering • Georgia Institute of Technology • Atlanta GA, 30332 USA

abstract	experiment	discussion
introduction	results	conclusions
background		references

  
Georgia Tech School of Electrical and  
Computer Engineering  
College of Engineering

Company Logo

## Effective, visually appealing posters...

1. Grab the audience's attention
2. Encourage discussion and conversation
3. Summarize and advertise your work

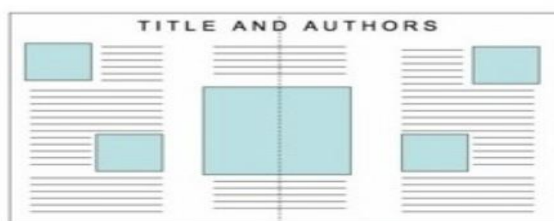
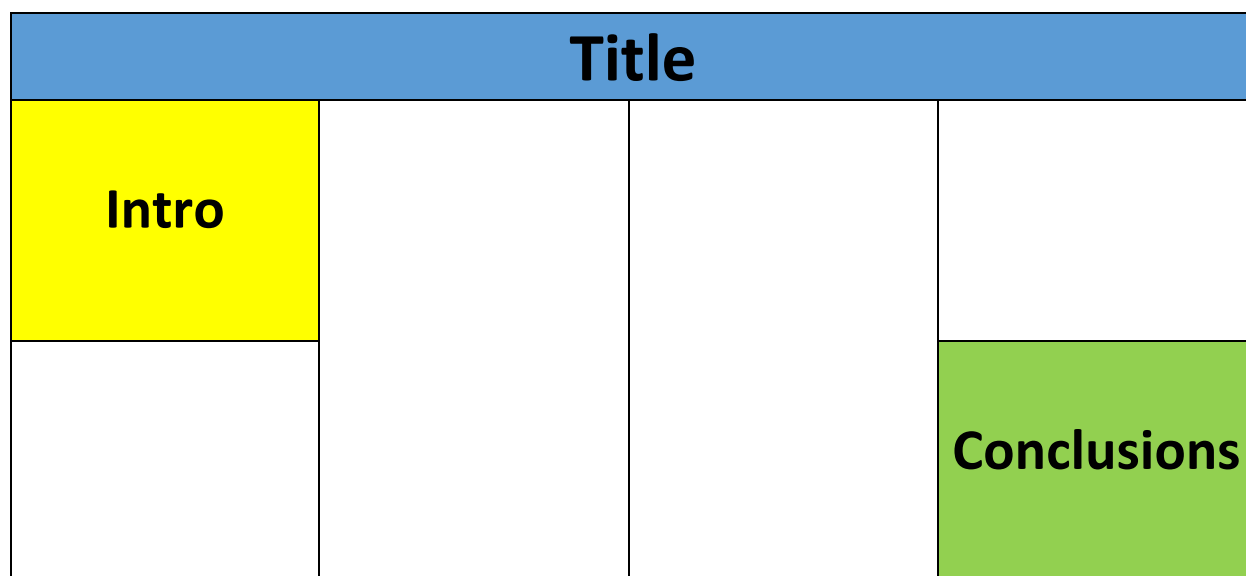
As with all writing, **rough drafts are critical for producing an effective poster**, so don't imagine for a second that you can successfully cobble a poster together two days before it is due.

- ✓ Produce a rough draft several weeks in advance.
- ✓ Have others review it/provide feedback.
- ✓ Practice presenting your poster out loud (even better, record yourself).

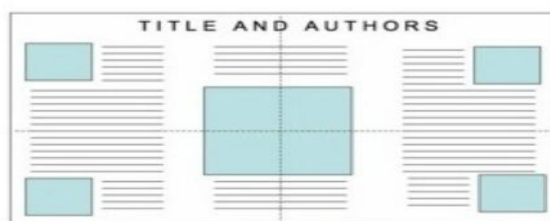
## Visual Appearance: Characteristics of the Layout

The poster is a visual presentation of information. Rely sparingly on verbal print (text). **Rely more heavily on graphs, charts, tables, and images to communicate information.** Your poster should NOT be a copy of your written paper transferred onto poster board.

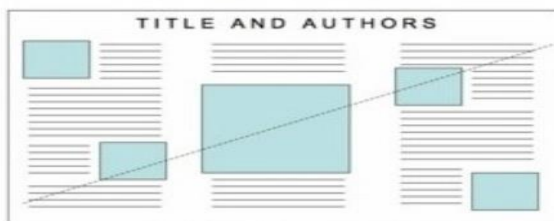
1. Use colors to attract attention and to emphasize or to distinguish different components/sections.
2. Use graphs/tables to convey information.
3. Use images/photos/diagrams to show your work and connect with the audience.
4. Think bullet points, not paragraphs.
5. Layout should be symmetrical in appearance (right/left and top/bottom halves balanced).
6. Include major sections: Title, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, Future Work, References.
7. Sections are labeled and appear in a clear order.



Horizontal Symmetry



Horizontal & Vertical Symmetry



Diagonal Symmetry



Asymmetry  
(text-heavy on left, image-heavy on right)

Image from: <http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/NewSite/CreatePosterLayout.html>

## Illustrations

The success of a poster directly relates to the clarity of the images and graphics.

- Self-explanatory graphics should dominate the poster.
- No raw data! Translate data into meaningful terms/numbers for the audience.
- A minimal amount of text should supplement the graphic materials.
- Use white space between poster elements to differentiate and accentuate these elements.
- All details of the images/diagrams/tables/figures/photos should be readable from a minimum of 6 ft away.
- Restrained use of 2 - 3 colors for emphasis.

## Formatting Tips

- Avoid using dark color backgrounds for your poster. Aside from using a lot of very expensive ink, dark background color *dramatically* reduces the "impact value" of any color that is used in images, charts, and photos. You want your viewer's eye to be drawn to your *images and graphics*, not to your background color.
- Format the title, headings, chart names, and axes labels in "sentence case" (e.g., "How to train cats to perform cold fusion") or "initial caps" (e.g., "How to Train Cats to Perform Cold Fusion"). All caps is hard to read and strains the eyes.
- Make sure that details on charts and photographs can be *comfortably* viewed from 6 feet away. A common mistake is to assume that figure details (axis numbers, labels) are somehow exempt from legibility rules. On the contrary, most of viewers will prefer to look at *only* your figures! For the same reason, don't use smaller font sizes for your figure legends.
- Choose one font style and stick with it. A single font style for everything: title, headings, text, figure/table captions and labels. Don't mix and match.
- Left justify all text. Avoid centering text.
- Font size should vary.

**Title**

100 point bold

**Authors**

36 point bold

**Sub-titles**

54 point bold

**main text**

32 point

**references**

28 point

Image from:  
[http://www.tc.umn.edu/~schne006/tutorials/poster\\_design/design\\_01.htm](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~schne006/tutorials/poster_design/design_01.htm)

## **Interacting with the Audience**

Posters don't stand alone. Your communication/interaction style will also influence the number of people who read your poster and talk with you about it. Stand by your poster at all times during your session. Use inviting behaviors (smile, make eye contact, say hello, introduce yourself, shake hands) to initiate conversation.

- Do you display a professional appearance and demeanor?
- Are you enthusiastic about your project? Can you convey this to others?
- Are you willing to approach people who appear interested in your poster?
- Are you able to talk about your work with different audiences?
- Do you know how your work fits into various fields of study?
- Are you responsive to questions about your project?

## **Tips for Presenting your Poster**

- Wear a name tag, if possible, so that viewers know that the poster belongs to you.
- Connect with your audience by preparing a strong introduction/elevator pitch.
- Do not refer to notes when explaining your poster.
- Speak to your *viewers* as you explain your poster.
- Point to specific parts of your poster whenever possible so that viewers are aware of your progression.
- Carefully walk your viewer through your figures. Avoid vagueness such as "this figure shows our main result."
- If more viewers arrive halfway into your spiel, finish the tour for the earlier arrivals first.
- Thank your viewers for visiting.

## **Additional Resources and Works Cited**

*Some information contained in this handout was derived from the following websites and online sources. These resources are not specific to ECE or ORS.*

Rebecca Miller, "Creating Effective Research Posters"

<https://www.research.undergraduate.vt.edu/Students/CreatingEffectiveResearchPostersPP.pdf>

Marilee P. Ogren, "Making a Great Poster"

[https://biology.mit.edu/sites/default/files/effective\\_posters.pdf](https://biology.mit.edu/sites/default/files/effective_posters.pdf)

Jeff Radel, "Designing Effective Posters"

[http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Poster\\_Presentations/PstrStart.html](http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Poster_Presentations/PstrStart.html)