CREATING AN ACADEMIC POSTER
Guidelines and Best Practices

CREATING AN ACADEMIC POSTER PRESENTATION

An academic poster is a summary of your scholarly research project formatted in a visually engaging layout. It should be academically sound, highlighting the context of your work by incorporating information and imagery (such as photographs, maps, charts, graphics, etc.).

The poster should be able to stand on its own as a clear, logical presentation of your work, without any explanation from you.

That being said, you should prepare an "elevator speech" – a one to two-minute summary of your project that you could deliver to anyone during a typical elevator ride. Don't wait for viewers to ask a question; say, "Would you like to hear briefly about my research?" This frees them from having to read and figure it all out themselves. Then offer to answer questions. If you don't know an answer, admit it, speculate with the person, or ask what s/he thinks.

A GOOD POSTER WILL

- Focus your message — what is the one thing you want people to remember?
- Convey your message visually
- Be readable from about 2-4 feet away
- Be clearly organized

POSTER CONTENT

Posters typically include many of the components listed below:

- Title
- Collaborators
- Relevant information thoughtfully structured in sections (with clear headings and body text, consistently formatted)
- Visual images that relate directly to the information
- Works cited

POSTER DESIGN TIPS

- **Microsoft PowerPoint** is the recommended option to design academic posters. **Download the 24x36 PPT template file** (already sized at 36 in. wide x 24 in. high) located on MyGraceland > Resources > Communications (on the right side, in the Student Resources box). There is also an Adobe Illustrator template file in the same location (only recommended for students familiar with that software). You will only be using one slide to create your poster, not multiple slides as you would for an actual power point presentation.
- **Contrast** is important when deciding on a color scheme, as you begin to import text and imagery. If you decide to use a darker background color, opt for a white or very light text color (and vice versa — light backgrounds/dark text). It is recommended to keep the background color either solid or a gradient build within PPT, but again, adjust the colors in the gradient so they are dark or light enough to contrast with the text.
- **Text/font size** should be larger than normal to account for the poster format and scaled by heirarchy of importance. Depending on your selected font(s), below are approximate font sizes:
  ◦ Title: 90+ pt
  ◦ Headings: 50-70 pt
  ◦ Body text 40-50 pt
  ◦ Group member names and works cited: anywhere from 30-40 pt
  * *These are suggested font sizes as a starting point, but you should use your own judgment based on the space you are filling and other visual elements. Think of it like a big puzzle — your text and imagery are the pieces you are fitting together.*
- **Do not use more than 2-3 font styles total.** However, you may utilize different thicknesses and styles within one font family (bold, italic, bold italic, etc.)
- **Use fonts that are easy to read** (such as Times New Roman, Garamond, Helvetica and Arial). If you would like to use a more ornate or stylized font, use it for the title only.
- **Avoid jagged edges for body text** — left-justify text within text boxes or full-justify blocks of text.

- **Avoid too much text** and undefined technical jargon (depending upon your potential audience). Even within defined sections of text, depending on your information, segment the body text into multiple paragraphs or utilize bullets for information you want to stand out.
- **Organize and align your content** with columns, sections, headings and blocks of text.
- **White space** is important to increase visual appeal and readability (this is the "empty" space between sections, columns, headings, blocks of text and graphics).
- **Selectively incorporate visual elements** (charts, graphs, photographs, key quotations from primary sources, maps and other graphics) that support the theme of your poster. If you want to incorporate a graphic rather than a photo, vecteezy.com is a searchable site that allows free downloads, but remember to include attribution in your citations section for any graphics you use.
- **Avoid fuzzy images; make sure all graphics are the largest resolution/size available** and crisp/easily visible (300 dpi is ideal, but for the purpose of a research poster class project, avoid any images under 1000 pixels wide).
  A starting place could be to simply search Google Images. To narrow down to the largest images available, once you've clicked on the Images tab and image results are displayed, click on Tools > Size > select Large. Remember to include photo sources in your citations section.

CAREFULLY REVIEW FILES

Prior to saving the final PPT file and PDF, students should look over their files to make sure all information is correct. **Edit your poster carefully** for typographic or grammatical mistakes and image quality.

Use the print preview function to make sure elements are not too close or going off the edges of the poster.

Make sure to save the file after any changes have been made so it reflects the final version.

If there is time before the deadline, it may be worth meeting with your professor so they can review your information one last time prior to submission.

EXPORTING YOUR POSTER FILE

After careful review of your file and when finalized, you will need to save it in a different file format for the printer (as a .PDF file).

To save, go to File > Save As > select PDF in the drop-down menu for File Format, and in the filename field, type in your group # or the first initial and last name of one group member (FLast_pstr or Group2_24x36) — so it's easily identifiable.

Once saved, we recommend opening the PDF file and looking over it carefully to make sure everything looks as it should. If there are any issues, you will need to go back to your PPT file to make corrections.

When you are sure it is final, submit the PDF file to your professor...and exhale. You're done!