Hints on preparing posters for AMEE Conferences

AMEE welcomes variety and ingenuity in preparing posters. The following suggestions and recommendations have been compiled based on published literature and by reference to various websites, but are not intended to be prescriptive. Poster presenters are encouraged to read the publication by Hess and colleagues: Creating Effective Poster Presentations: AMEE Guide no. 40. Medical Teacher 2009; 31: 319–321

Introduction

A successful poster provides just enough information to convey the key point(s) clearly and succinctly. It is important to get the message across quickly – you may only have a short time to capture the viewer's attention. Too much information on a poster causes confusion and will be time-consuming to read. It may be better to focus on one key point, unless subsidiary points are essential to its understanding. Those sufficiently interested can always request further information via the contact details given, or discuss the work at the poster session. The poster should be attractively laid out, and logically sequenced, with visual representation preferable to large chunks of text. Thinking of a poster as an "illustrated abstract" (Hess and Liegel, 2004) may help. Careful use of colour and size of text is important. Question and answer type posters work well, and interactive posters are frequently well-rated by participants.

Content Guidelines

Posters may report research results, or may be descriptive, e.g., presenting a theory, a new curriculum/course or teaching method.

Research posters: The following components are usually included:

- Introduction and identification of need;
- Objective(s), purpose(s), research questions(s);
- Methodology (sample, methods for data collection and evaluation): It is more important to communicate the results and conclusions than to go into detail about the methods. If participants show a particular interest in the methodology they can always request further details to be sent, e.g. a copy of a questionnaire used in the study;
- Data analysis;
- Results/Discussion: It may be appropriate to report only some of the more important results, in the interests of space. Complex argument is not appropriate for a poster. Tables and figures are a good way of communicating results rather than blocks of text as they are frequently easier to understand, visually more attractive and less space-consuming.
- Conclusion(s)/Take home message(s): It is recommended that only conclusions clearly supported by the results are displayed on the poster, and more speculative conclusions should not be included.

Descriptive posters: The content and structure of descriptive posters are more flexible and will largely be decided by the purpose of the poster. It is suggested however that the following aspects should be considered in relation to content:
- Introduction to the topic/identification of need;
- Objectives/purposes of the work;
- Description of what was done;
- Discussion of what was achieved and how the work has advanced understanding of the topic;
- Conclusions/take-home messages.

Style Guidelines

Layout:
• The title of the poster, name(s) of authors, address where the work was carried out and contact details should be prominently displayed, together with a logo if appropriate;
• It is not necessary to cover the whole poster with information – use of 'white space' provides a pleasing contrast, particularly where a large amount of colour is used on the poster;
• "Reader gravity" – the natural way in which the reader's eye is drawn to look at the poster, suggests that information should be laid out either from top to bottom, or left to right;
• Small blocks of text of up to 75 words are recommended, and use of appropriate level of headings makes the poster easier to read;
• Abbreviations should be explained the first time they are used;
• Bulleted lists are frequently a good alternative to blocks of text;
• Visual representation is preferable to text wherever possible. Diagrams, tables, photographs, arrows etc can aid readability and add to the attractiveness;
• One appropriately sized poster is always preferable to a number of separate sheets put together.

Font and colour:
• Sans serif fonts such as Arial or Helvetica are generally considered to aid legibility for posters. Between 20-28 point is recommended for text and at least 72 point for the title. The title should span the width of the poster. Font should be consistent throughout the poster, and appropriate levels of headings should be used. References should be limited to 5, and the font size should be smaller than the poster text.
• Judicious use of colour is recommended, with a maximum of two or three primary colours (e.g., red, blue, green or yellow) introduced (however some shades of yellow may be difficult to read). Black type on a white background is standard practice, and patterned backgrounds should be used with care.

Figures and graphics:
• Figures and graphics should be of good quality and should be appropriately labelled with short legends;
• Graphs and charts should have an appropriate scale and labelled axes.

Additional information not on the poster: It is helpful if presenters can have the following additional information available by the poster board:
• Printouts of their posters or handouts of the key points, and contact details, for participants to take away. Around 50-75 copies would be appropriate;
• A note on their poster board of the time(s) they will be available by the board for those who would like to discuss the poster outside the formal presentation time.

Bibliography
• Durai R and Venkatraman R (2005) How to prepare a good poster. Hospital Doctor, 19 May, p38;
• Hess G and Liegel L (2004) Creating Effective Poster Presentations.
http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters (accessed 02 June 2004);
• Nicol A A M and Pexman P M (2003). Displaying Your Findings: a practical guide for creating figures, posters and presentations. Washington DC: American Psychological Association