Writing Studio
http://twp.duke.edu/writing-studio

Creating Scientific Poster Presentations

Thompson Writing Program
DUKE UNIVERSITY

Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy Series

Overview: What Are Visual Rhetoric and Visual Literacy?

The simplest definition for visual rhetoric is how/why visual images communicate meaning. Note that visual rhetoric is not just about superior design and aesthetics but also about how culture and meaning are reflected, communicated, and altered by images. Visual literacy involves all the processes of knowing and responding to a visual image, as well as all the thought that might go into constructing or manipulating an image.

Definition of Genre:

Scientific poster presentations—visual representations of an abstract submitted and accepted to a conference—should include both text and graphics. They should have more information and detail than a written abstract but significantly less than a full scientific paper.

Text:

- Include the original abstract, generally in the top left corner. Unless conference guidelines specify not to include the abstract, do so since this text is what will appear in conference proceedings.
- Keep text between 700 and 800 words for a standard 3-foot-by-5-foot poster. This amount of text provides enough information without appearing crowded.
- Divide the text into parts that match the abstract itself. (These may vary slightly depending on the abstract guidelines—for example, whether "Background" or "Introduction" is the initial section.)
- Use bullet points or paragraph form, depending on which conveys the material more clearly.

Graphics:

- Include no more than eight tables and figures. Restraint in this area will prevent the poster from looking too busy.
- Consider using one or more tables in the Results section—tables arrange data in a way that is easy for the viewer to compare.

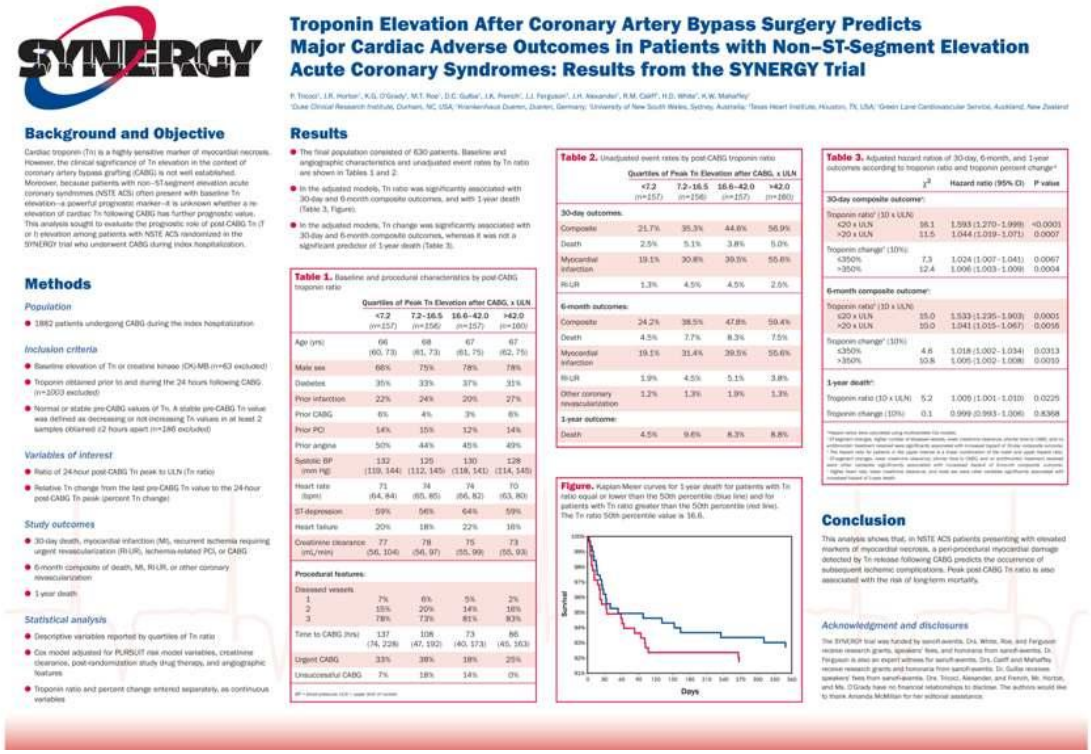
Colors:

- Use a white or light-colored background for visual clarity.
- Avoid using more than three additional colors. (Programs like PowerPoint and Microsoft Publisher have color-scheme recommendations.) White, black, blue, red, and yellow (only for graphics) are clearest from a distance.
- Lightly shade every other row in tables to increase readability. Keep color of shading consistent.

Format:

- Place the title along the top of the poster, with author names underneath in a smaller font. Provide degrees for each author and institutional affiliations in a key format using superscript numbers, letters, or symbols. In a separate window, list the corresponding institutions.
- Arrange the information into four columns for a 3-foot-by-5-foot poster, three for smaller posters.
- Put citations in the bottom right corner, at the end of the text.

Sample poster layout: image courtesy of the Duke Clinical Research Institute



Recommended Resources:

http://www.swarthmore.edu/NatSci/cpurrin1/posteradvice.htm
Detailed advice on designing posters in the sciences, including a list of common poster pitfalls; developed by biologist Colin Purrington of Swarthmore College.

http://people.eku.edu/ritchisong/posterpres.html
A highly visual guide to assembling poster presentations, developed by biologist Gary Ritchison at Eastern Kentucky University.

http://phdposters.com/gallery.php
A portfolio of posters designed by the company PhD Posters. Consider the variety and the efficacy of these visuals.

Handouts in the Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy Series

Overview: Visual Rhetoric/Visual Literacy
Writing about Comics and Graphic Novels
Writing about Film
Writing about Paintings
Writing about Photography
Writing with Maps
Using PowerPoint and Keynote Effectively
Creating Scientific Poster Presentations
Crafting and Evaluating Web Sites