

Building a Poster using PowerPoint

*A guide for using PowerPoint
to present your information
in a large-format poster.*

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1: Know your story.

What is the main information you want your audience to receive? In the short time someone will stand in front of your poster, what do you want them to learn? Be sure the title reflects the story being told and include only what supports that story. If you're unsure of your story, the audience will be too.

2: Know your audience.

Knowing your audience helps you choose the best way to reach them, and the best language to use. Are they from your own field or the general public? Do acronyms need to be defined? If many languages are spoken, consider less text and more pictures to communicate your story. Remember, some images or words may be offensive to some audiences.

3: Think about how you are going to use the poster.

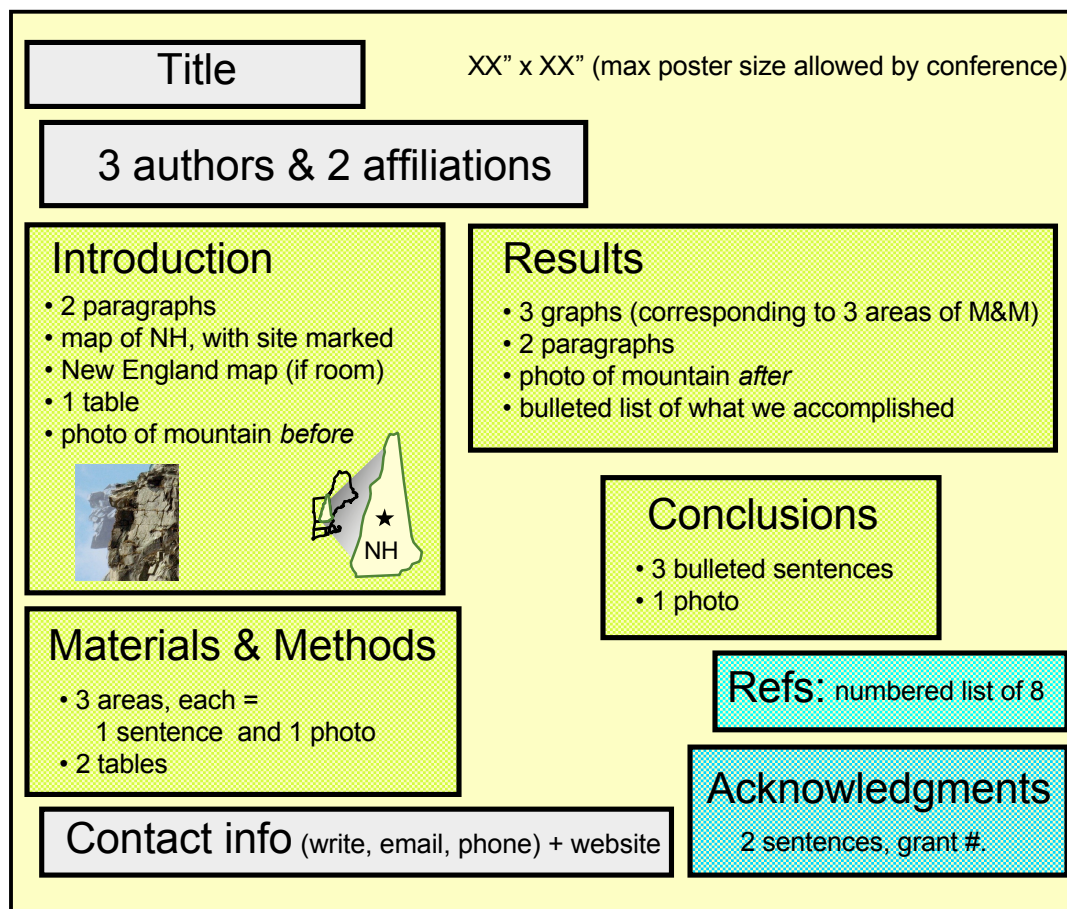
You are making a visual tool to convey information to an audience. Before you begin to design the poster, consider its use.

- Where will it be used? How close will the reader be to it?
- How much space is allowed to display it?
- Will it stand alone or will you be there to add to its content?
- Does it need contact information? Website? Phone number?
- Will you use it in more than one situation? If so, consider changes to the content or size to accommodate more than one use.
- Did someone give you assistance with, or funding for, your research? You may want to include an acknowledgment.

4: Organize everything into categories. Make a sketch.

Before opening PowerPoint, assemble everything you want to include on the poster. This is the time to edit! Ask yourself: "Is it necessary? Does it help tell my story?" If the answer is "Not really", don't use it.

Make a rough sketch and refer to it as you bring text and images onto the poster. THIS IS NOT A DESIGN, but a listing of what goes with what, the general order the poster is to be read, and other requirements, like size.



Arrange all the text and images into main categories; this organizes the information for the reader and helps them navigate through the poster without hunting for related parts.

List everything within each category. Keep all graphs and images near related text. For example, if the text refers to *Figure 1*, place the figure nearby and give it a title (you may not have to call it "Figure 1"). If a table is used, place it where the reader will find it useful and give it a title; this can often eliminate both the need to call it *Table 1* and the extra words used to describe where it is. *Don't expect the reader to hunt for anything; chances are, they won't.*

Note: In this sample, there are 4 categories of equal importance- Intro, M&M, Results, and Conclusions; these should have the same body text size & font, and their subheadings should be the same style. Refs, contact info, & acknowledgments are less important, smaller text size can be used.

5: Review your sketch and edit more.

The goal of the poster design is to make the information easy for the reader to grasp. Anything that does not aid that process is distracting. Unnecessary words are like boulder fields to climb through. Make the path easy and the readers will read; your information will reach someone.

Avoid a poster that is all text; remember, you are making a visual tool! Photos communicate immediately; a strong image can bring people to your poster. Too much text can be overwhelming; the audience may walk away. The audience for your poster is standing (unlike sitting to read a journal article); they may stand for a minute or two - make it easy!

Print out a sample of text at 30pt to get an idea of the space it will occupy on the poster. Edit!

6: Begin.

Open PowerPoint (PPT); >File; >New; >Blank Presentation; >Slide layout, choose the empty box (Blank). Under File, >Page Setup, select Custom (the default is "On-screen Show"). PPT allows a maximum of 56" in both dimensions; but since our printers are 44" wide, the largest a PowerPoint poster can be is 44 x 56 (either vertical or horizontal format).**

**** Note: If you participating in the PowerPoint Poster Training and Printing Service for the URC 2005 from UNH Photographic Services, your poster MUST BE 36" x 36", no variation.**

7: Enter text.

■ Directly in PPT

Choose the text tool; click and drag to make a text box; begin typing; it will expand as you add text. The text box can be resized to fit any column width by pulling on the horizontal handles. Select text and change font style, size, or color.

■ From Word

With both Word and PPT open: Select the text in Word, Copy, return to PPT. Create a text box, then Paste.

The text can now be edited; size, font, and color changed. Creating a text box *first* is important, because once filled with text, it can be resized easily and the text will wrap to fit.

Enter all the main text (paragraphs, not titles) at the final point size (~ 30pt to be read from 5ft). This will give you an idea of the space remaining for graphics or images. Captions, references, acknowledgments, and contact information can be a smaller point size (~18, 24, depending on style).

AVOID THIS: “Gray Mass”

Pare down. If the reader spends only 1 minute in front of your poster, don't make them work hard, make the information easy to get. Avoid “gray mass”- a large block of text with no breaks. Create subheadings, pull out key words, pull out a bulleted list if items are listed, rather than have an important list lost inside the gray mass. Fonts- 2 or 3, keep it simple. Your poster should put forth your message, not be an ad for fonts and colors. Generally, a different font or color is used to visually bind like ideas or attract attention- example- title of poster, subheadings, author, graph titles. The “body text” -paragraphs of text in each section- should be easy to read, generally dark on a light background is easier to read, if there is a large amount of text. It is usually about 30pt on a poster about 6ft long. Print out a small section at 30pt and try reading it from 5ft. You may want to change the line spacing if bottoms of “y's”, and tops of “f's” are too close. PowerPoint often leaves too much space between lines (>Format, > line spacing, change to 0 .9 or 0.8).

DO THIS: The “Gray Mass” has been organized for the reader.
(The text has been divided into categories and useful headings added.)

Pare down.

- Avoid “gray mass”– a large block of text with no breaks.
- Create subheadings, pull out key words; if items are listed, use bullets rather than have an important list get lost inside a “gray mass.”
- Don't make the audience work hard. They may spend only one minute in front of your poster; make the information easy to get.

Choose a font and color.

- Keep it simple; use only 2 or 3. The poster should put forth your message, not be an ad for fonts and colors. Use the same font or color to visually bind like ideas and a different font or color to attract attention.
- Choose colors that complement the poster content: a background color that enhances the images used and a text color that contrasts enough with the background to be read easily. Generally, dark text on a light background is easier on the eyes. Lots of white text on a dark background can start to vibrate!
- Avoid all caps unless more space is added between words.

POWERPOINT POSTER TITLE (tight)

POWERPOINT POSTER TITLE (with spaces)

You can type directly in PPT or copy text from Word. With both Word and PPT open: 1) Select the text in Word (a phrase, paragraph, or entire section) and copy it. 2) Return to PPT, create a text box, and paste.

The text can now be edited and the size, font, and color of the text box changed. Creating a text box *first* is important, because once filled with text, it can be resized easily and the text will wrap to fit.

- **Consider the references:** Long references within a paragraph can interrupt a train of thought and take valuable space. You can number the references and place only the number within the text like this (5). Be sure the numbers are correct!
- **Check font size:** A good starting point for body text is 30pt on a poster ~6' long. Print out a small section at 30pt and try reading it from a distance of 5'. This will give you an idea of how much room it takes. Remember, changing font styles may change the size; 20pt Arial is larger than 20pt Palatino.
- **Adjust line spacing:** If the bottom of a *y* and the top of an *f* are too close, enlarge the spacing between lines. If the space is too large, reduce it from the default 1 to 0.9 or 0.8. The distance between paragraphs can also be changed; if the space seems too large, try 0.5 (>Format; >Line Spacing). Remember, be consistent.
- **Use one space between sentences:** A space is automatically placed after an ending punctuation, so one hit on the space bar is enough.
- **Avoid equal justification:** Unless the spacing is quite even to start with, once justified,

there are often large gaps. On a large-format poster, it can look awkward and be hard to read.

The lines above are equal justified. Some fonts are interpreted by the printer as shapes and not letters; spaces occur inside a word, making the sentence difficult, and sometimes humorous to read. Your information is lost in the shuffle. “Comic sans” is a troublesome font and does not equal justify well:

hum orous diffi cu lt insidi e a wo rd

- **Keep text blocks “tidy”:** Delete empty spaces. Make sure text blocks are no larger than the text they contain. If left too large, they may be “clicked on” by mistake; or, when included in a group, the group may be overly large. Take this suggestion seriously, it will save you grief.
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9: Import photos.

- Insert >Picture >From File, and select the file from wherever it is stored (folder, desktop, CD...). Images should be at least 100dpi, the same size they will be on the poster. Unsure of their size in the final design? Use a rectangle as a place holder and scan it later. Save the image as a “JPG”; it is easier to insert into PPT.
- Cropping a photo in PPT: Select the image, choose the crop tool from the Picture palette and crop from any side. The remaining image can now be resized. (If the picture tools aren't in sight, open them under View; >Toolbars; >Picture.) Experiment with these tools for enhancing images. Know that you can reverse this crop and get your image back.
- “Framing” photos: Select the image, view at 100%, >Format, >Colors and Lines, leave the fill “none.” Select a line color and width to add a border around the photo. The default width is quite thin; try 1.0 or 1.5.

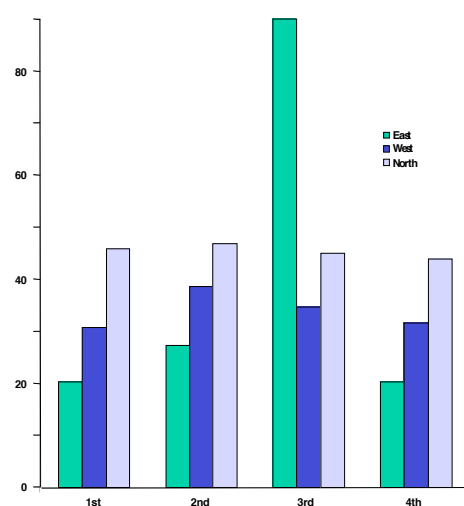
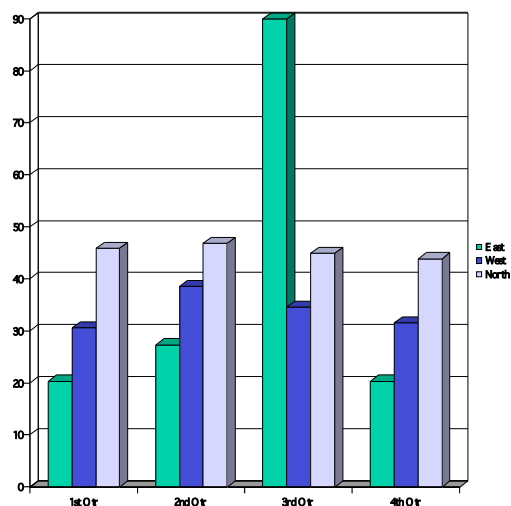
10: Simplify graphs.

- Whenever possible, combine graphs to share axis titles, labels, or legends. Don't ask the reader to read anything twice.
- Keep it simple. A filled shape doesn't always need a line around it.
- Avoid “Chart Junk,” anything that does not help tell your story: 3-D graphs, lots of grid lines, shadows, or labels on every tick mark (use fewer labels and make the remaining ones larger).

- Create a simple graph from the beginning, avoiding 3-D elements, and background grids. Eliminate the legend if elements can be labeled directly. Often sections of a pie chart can be labeled within the pie, where the reader can see it quickly.
- If you are using an existing graph, simplify it. Select the graph; >Draw; >Ungroup. Delete everything that is not necessary.

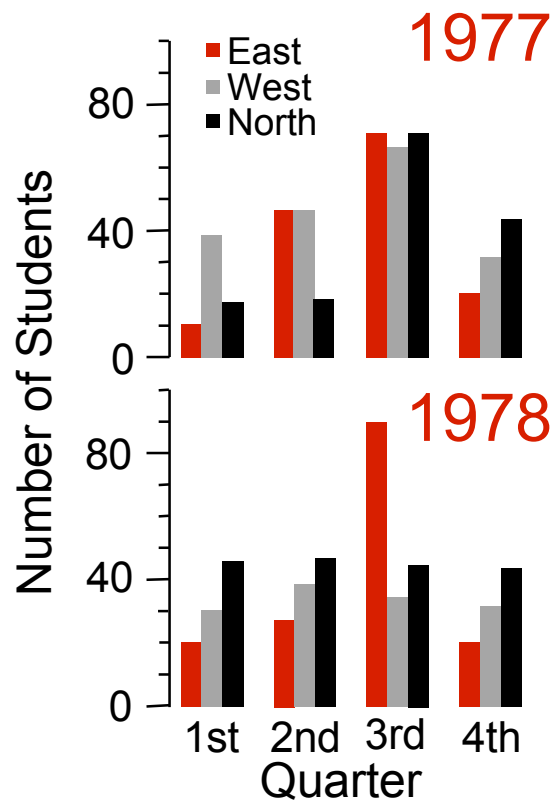
Before (unnecessary parts)

After (ungrouped, parts deleted)



- Increase the point size of lines and remaining text, staying consistent with all graphs. You may want to extend the length of some or all tick marks.
- Change colors to complement the entire poster; make sure the colors you choose for symbols are different enough from each other and contrast with the background.
- Create and “clean” graph in a separate PPT file; it will save zooming in and out. Copy and paste it into the poster; group all of parts and resize (hold Shift to keep proportions and lettering from being distorted). If some of the text-wraps have changed during the resizing, ungroup the graph and, one by one, pull out each text block so words aren’t broken. You may want to change the font sizes, styles, or colors.
- If 2 or more graphs are grouped together and have the same axis numbers and/or titles, let them share. The remaining titles or labels (or dates, as in the example) should clearly identify the difference between them. The graphs can share a larger title.

Further cleaning:



The bars were grouped and stretched to the right to accommodate larger, lower axis labels (this did not change the accuracy). Tick marks between bar groups were deleted.

11: Knowing some tricks always helps.

- **Extra guides, where to get them:** Select a guide (if no guides, >View; >Guides), hold **Ctrl [PC]** or **Alt [MAC]** as you drag another guide from it. Click on the guide at the edge of the poster or away from anything that you don't want selected and moved by mistake. The number of guides is finite! Be sure not to move the guides into the gray area outside the poster, they can't be retrieved.

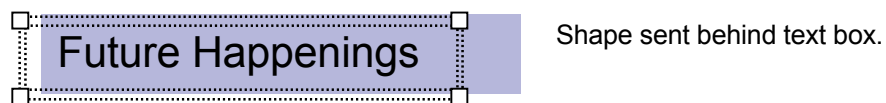
Use guides to set margins and columns. What seems "close enough" on your 17" screen might not be so nice when seen 5 feet wide. Uneven edges detract from the readers concentration!

Use guides to help align* shapes: select one shape at a time and bring it to a guide. Select all of them (holding Shift as you add more to your collection), Group them, and move them as a group to their new location.

* or use the Align tool: >Draw, >Align, > Align left (or right, top...)

- **Duplicating anything:** Select a text block, image, shape, or group of things, then hit **Ctrl+D [PC]** or **Apple +D [MAC]** for Duplicate. If it is text, you simply need to edit, the formatting is done! Subtitle styles such as "Conclusions", with a band of color behind the text, can be made by building a template and duplicating it; keeping the style consistent.

- Create a text box with the longest title and the one with tall letters like "k" or "g"; this ensures that all text will fit the template you are building.
- Create a rectangle (or any shape); give it a color and/or line; send it behind the text box (>Draw; >Order; Send to Back).
- Group the text box and colored shape, duplicating the group, then edit the text (i.e. change "Conclusions" to "Results").



Text edited, group stays intact:

Fill options endless:

Past Events

Future Happenings

- **The wee nudge:** Things attach themselves to an invisible grid, and sometimes this is not where you want them. To get just a wee nudge, hold **Alt [PC]** or **Apple [MAC]** as you click and drag the guide, object, text box, or group. Place it exactly where you want!

Margins:

Whatever size margin you choose, be sure left and right are the same; for a 36"- or 44"-wide poster, 1 1/2" to 2" is good for side margins. A general guideline: top and side margins are the same and the bottom margin is slightly larger than the top. This provides a good "visual base" for the poster to rest on. Good side margins help "frame" the poster, separating it from the others placed nearby. Use the guides to set margins. No guides?

View >Guides, and make sure "Guides" is checked.

Bullets: Let them do their job.

■ About Bullets

- Put a space after the bullet and tab the text over, so the bullets are in a column by themselves to highlight the lines.
- Be aware of what you are listing. Use a different size or color bullet for each level of information.
- Don't use a bullet if there is only one item (no list).

■ Making Bullets: 2 Methods

■ Standard Made

These are made within the text box: Select the line or lines of text; >Format; >Bullet, choose a style and a percentage of the font size. Experiment with different percentages; the default size often looks more like a period than a bullet. For simple lists with no text wraps, (each item being only one line) this way of making bullets is fine.

To delete a bullet, select the line; >Format; >Bullet; choose "none".

■ Hand Made

Create a shape with the box or circle tool (hold Shift if you want an exact square or circle); >Format; >Colors and Lines, choose a fill, no line (or just a line, no fill...). With the shape selected, duplicate it with keys Ctrl+D [PC] or Apple+D [Mac]. Vertically line up boxes along a guide (or use the align tool*) and move them as a group. Select one at a time and move it into place with the arrow keys.

* >Draw, >Align, > Align left (or right, top...)

Down side: Takes a bit of time.

Plus side: Your bullets are unique, custom made for your needs. Because the text box is on its own, problems with tabs and indents are avoided. You don't have to play the Tab Game!

Caution: Group the bullet shapes with the text box.

Choosing a poster background:

Format >Slide Background, >Background Fill, choose a color from those listed; choose More Colors; or choose Fill Effects for a gradient.

Trying to decide on a background? Ask yourself, “What helps tell my story?”

- A Background Color: It should complement the poster content and images. Experiment with different colors; you can change it any time. Keep the contrast high between text and background so that it is easy to read. Know that every printer will interpret the colors differently; check our color charts to see how our printer interprets your choice.
- A Background Template: Treat it like a recipe, not a prescription; ungroup it, delete or alter any part that doesn't support your story.
- A Photograph: It can be great background but the text over it must be easy to read. If light text is over a light area in the photo, you may want to put a rectangle of a darker color behind the text (or a rectangle of light color behind dark text on a dark photo).

Experiment with transparent color under the text so the photo will still be visible. Place the photo on the slide master to avoid unintentionally selecting it.

Deciding on a column width:

Referring to your sketch (step 4 above), place everything for each category together (text, images, graphs.); this will help to determine column widths. The columns don't have to be the same size; however, the space between should be the same. The width of a column is determined by the content it needs to hold.

The reader should not have to hunt for anything. Avoid, for example, having only 3 of 4 items in one column and the 4th somewhere else; they may read only three and miss the 4th.

Remember:

If it doesn't help tell your story, don't use it.

have patience • keep it simple • save often

Prepared by: UNH Photographic Services
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