Guidance on Poster presentations

What is a poster?

A poster is simply a static, visual medium (usually of the paper and board variety) that you use to communicate your ideas. The difference between **poster** and **oral** presentations is that you should let your poster do most of the 'talking'; that is, the material presented should convey the essence of your message. You have to 'stand-by-your-poster'! Your task as the presenter is to answer questions and provide further details; to receive praise or suffer difficult questions.

How much content should I include ?

If you are presenting your poster at a conference or convention, you would have limited space. The space you are allowed will determine the content of the poster. If you have more detail you want to give people - prepare a hand-out.

What is the best format ?

As with an oral presentation, there is normally:

- a *Title* page, telling others the title of the project, who is involved in the work and the name of the institution to where you are studying.
- a *Summary* of the project stating what you have set out to do, how you have designed it, the key findings and the main results. If the research is on-going - then you should present your proposal and the research plan.
- an *Introduction* that should include clear statements about the problem that you are trying to investigate, or the characteristics that you are trying to understand. These should then lead to declarations of project aims and objectives.
- a *Theory* or *Methodology* section that explains the basis of the methods that you are using or the procedure that you have adopted in your study. You should also state and justify any assumptions, so that your study can be viewed in its context.
- if appropriate, a *Findings (or preliminary findings)* section that you use to show illustrative examples of the main outcomes of the study.

If completed:

- a *Conclusion* section, listing the main findings of your investigation, and
- a *Further Work* section that should contain your recommendations and thoughts about how the work could be progressed; implications for practice etc.

How should I design the content?

1. PLAN what you are going to do
2. Keep the material simple
   - make full use of the space, but do not fill a page full of information as the result can often appear messy and unreadable
   - be concise
   - be selective
3. Use colours sparingly and with taste
   - colours should be used only to emphasise, differentiate and to add interest. Do not use colours just to impress or decorate
   - choose background and foreground colour combinations that have high contrast and complement each other - black or dark blue on white or very light grey is good.
   - it is better to keep the background light as people are used to it
4. Do not use more than 2 font types
   - too many font types distracts, especially when they appear on the same sentence
5. Titles and headings should appear larger than other text, but not too large. The text should also be legible from a distance, say from 1.5m to 2m.
   - Do not use all UPPER CASE type in your posters. It can make the material difficult to read. Just compare the two sentences below:
6. A picture is worth a thousand words … (but only if it is drawn properly and used appropriately)
   - diagrams and drawings,
     - should be labelled
     - drawings and labels should be large and clear enough so that they are still legible from a distance

- do not try to cramp labelling to fit into components of a drawing or diagram. Use 'arrows' and 'callouts'.
7. Check your use of language
8. Maintain a consistent style
    - inconsistent styles give the impression of disharmony and can interrupt the fluency and flow of your messages.
    - headings on the different pages of the poster should appear in the same position on all pages.
    - graphs should be of the same size and scale especially if they are to be compared.
    - if bold lettering is used for emphasis on one page, then do not use italics on others.
    - captions for graphs, drawings and tables should either be positioned at the top or at the bottom of the figure.
9. Arrangement of poster components should appear smooth
    - remember that you are using posters to tell a story about what you have done and achieved. As in report writing, the way you arrange the sections should follow the 'storyline'.
    - sometimes it is helpful if you provide cut-outs of arrows to direct attention to the sequence of the presentation
    - use a new page to start off a new section
10. Review, review and review
    - make draft versions of your poster sections and check them for
        - mistakes
        - legibility and
        - inconsistency in style
    - try different layout arrangements
    - ask your partner, friends, colleagues or supervisor for their 'honest' opinions
    - be critical