

How to design a poster

A poster is a piece of paper or board mounted on a wall or other vertical surface designed to either attract the attention of groups of people to specific information, or to persuade people to think or act in a particular way. They usually include text, images and/or other graphic elements, but they can be either entirely graphical or entirely based on text. As posters are primarily a visual medium they are useful to communicate with people who are illiterate or who do not speak the native language. They are also quick way to communicate headline messages.

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This booklet gives general guidance about how to go about designing an effective poster, with particular reference to project posters.

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**Loughborough
University**

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Introduction

Posters are intended to inform or to persuade using primarily visual methods. Communicating in this way is different from communicating using only written text or speech and requires a different approach from writing reports or giving presentations. However, as with other forms of communication it is important to consider your audience.

Your audience

As a poster is all about communication, you will need to think about the group of people you are trying to communicate with at all stages of production. Keep your purpose in mind at all times. Are you trying to inform or persuade? Before designing the poster, ask yourself the following questions.

- Who is the poster for?
- What does your audience already know?
- What is your audience interested in?
- Who is the poster by?
- Why is the poster being produced?
- How big is your audience?

Location

Advertisers use billboard posters for mass campaigns designed to attract attention from several metres away. At a conference, however, posters may only need to read from a distance of one or two metres. All the same, A1 or even A0 sizes of paper may be required.

Ask yourself two additional questions:

- Where will the poster be displayed?
- How far away is your audience going to be from the location of the poster?

If you are only aiming at one reader at a time, then an A4 poster may be adequate. A large number of smaller posters (usually known as 'flyers') may be more effective in certain circumstances and can be easier to produce and transport.

Elements of poster design

Whilst a poster is primarily a visual medium and should therefore have visual impact, care should also be taken over the content which should be written in an appropriate style and laid out in a hierarchy of importance.

So the three aspects of design that work together to make a good poster are its **content**, its **layout** and its **visual impact**.

A sizes

	Millimetres	Inches
A0	841 x 1189	33.1 x 46.8
A1	594 x 841	23.4 x 33.1
A2	420 x 594	16.5 x 23.4
A3	297 x 420	11.7 x 16.5
A4	210 x 297	8.3 x 11.7
A5	148 x 210	5.8 x 8.3
A6	105 x 148	4.1 x 5.8

Poster production steps

To make designing a poster less intimidating for those who are not familiar with the process, it is helpful to break the task down into a series of production steps as follows:

1. Planning the message (content)
2. Visualising the message (layout)
3. Finding the right imagery (visual)

and:

4. Testing the draft
5. Revising and finalising

Step 1: Planning the message

However good a visual image may be, it will be of no use for a poster if it does not effectively communicate an aspect of the intended message. The message may be a simple slogan to encourage people to wash their hands or a summary of a complex project. To ensure that the content is clear but concise, the author should identify and review information creating a hierarchy of points and themes. This is a difficult skill as the usual temptation is to add more than less content, but this can reduce the impact of the poster.

Step 2: Visualising the message

Posters, like presentations and reports, need to tell a story, albeit a very short one. The layout is the bridge between the content and the imagery. It determines how viewers are going to see the final design and encourages them to

follow a route through the information. People tend to make up their minds about a poster in an instant. Unless it immediately engages them, they will not look at it in detail. Once their attention has been attracted, it needs to be sustained.

The layout of the poster is therefore critical. Essentially, a layout is the combination of appropriate levels of text, images and graphics and a colour theme that draws these elements together.

Posters are all around us. Before you start to design your poster, reflect on the huge variety of approaches to poster design you notice. Be critical and keep a mental note of any aspect of a poster that catches your eye.

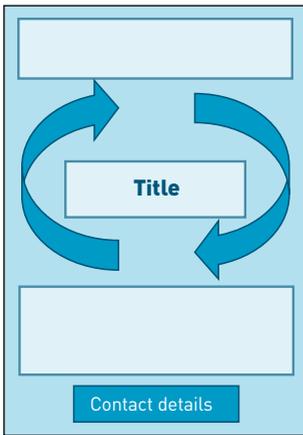
Then consider the following factors to help you visualise your own poster.

Project posters – questions of content

- What is the project about?
- Why is it important?
- What occurred?
- What were the results – and the conclusions?
- How can the viewer find out more?

All these layouts have a strong structure but are based on variations of text-based layouts. This can lessen their visual impact.

By focusing on the main message, other visual layouts may be suitable, communicating concepts more efficiently than lots of words.



A design can be described as 'balanced', having 'direction' or 'rhythm'. Consider alternatives before deciding which you think will be most suitable given the text and images you need to include.

Text

With care, text can be used as part of the visual message. Different fonts will change the **character and mood** of the message. There is a wide variety of fonts to use, but it is better to use only one or two different fonts and to use standard typefaces such as **Arial**, **Helvetica** or **Swiss**, for example, as these are easy to

Expertise

Graphic designers have experience and skills that go far beyond the scope of this booklet but the issues mentioned will enable the reader to discuss the content with the designer and raise awareness of some of the basic aspects of design. This gives the designer a good idea of what is required and he or she can produce the final artwork.

read. These are termed 'sans serif' fonts. Emphasis can be added by using **bold** or *italic* text.

People need to be able to read the poster, from a distance. Here are recommended minimum font sizes for typical sizes of paper.

- For A4 use a minimum of 12 pt
- For A3 use a minimum of 16 pt
- For A2 use a minimum of 24 pt
- For A1 use a minimum of 34 pt

Text can also be used as a visual image, with words taking the shape of an object. This is a good way of attracting attention and getting a message across quickly, but does require good graphical skills.

Images and graphics

As a visual medium, posters can include a wide range of images, photos, illustrations, diagrams, graphs or drawings to provide or support the message. Finding the right image is an important step in the process. (See step 3 below.)

Colour

Like text, lots of different colours on a poster can distract from your message rather than enhance it. A colour scheme should reflect the message or be used to draw the viewer in to take a closer look. Use colour for **visual impact** too.

Often, 'less is more'! Have this in mind when planning a colour scheme.

Step 3: Finding the right imagery

The viewer needs to be able to understand the visual imagery you use on your poster. Even something as simple as a cross (✘) or a tick (✔) can be misunderstood. For example a ✘ may mean 'wrong' when used to mark coursework, but means 'right' when it is used to select a candidate on an election ballot paper.

Details can be misunderstood if the audience does not share the same 'visual language', as you or your designer. For example, engineering drawings have a language all of their own that non-engineers may not understand.

Images of people, particularly faces are always engaging. Using images of people

Purposes of pictures

Decoration ~ simply to offer relief from the visual tedium of prose!

Amusement ~ to touch on the lighter side of the subject.

Expression ~ to convey an emotion or stimulate feelings about the subject.

Persuasion ~ to encourage viewer towards a change in practice or behaviour.

Illustration ~ superior form of decoration – where the picture enriches understanding of the text but is not strictly necessary to it.

Description ~ to show what something looks like ~ in a way words alone could not do.

Explanation ~ to show not just what something looks like but also how it works or how to operate it.

Simplification ~ to 'edit' reality by cutting out aspects that would confuse or distract the viewer.

Quantification ~ to represent different numbers and quantities with lines or areas of different sizes in graphs or charts.

Problem-posing ~ to act as a focus of questions, encouraging analysis and investigation.

Adapted from Rowntree, 1994.

with physical features similar to the people you are aiming your message at is more likely to engage them as they will see that the message is meant for people like them. Consider the age group of your audience and the style of clothing people wear, for example.

Step 4: Testing a draft

A poster is all about communicating a message. You or your designer will need to check with a sample of your audience to ensure that the message is being understood. Usually suggestions are invaluable to help you refine and refocus your message.

Step 5: Revising and finalising

When you receive feedback, try not to be too defensive about your original design, even if you think it is right as it is. Focus on comments that most members of the sample group make. You may need to reconsider other alternative options. Design can also be subjective, however, so not everyone will necessarily agree with you or others whose opinions you have sought.

Summary

Designing a poster requires a range of skills, as content, layout and visual aspects all contribute to your message having an impact on your viewers. Keeping the message and the visual aspects simple is often the route to success. A simple rule is to plan, do and review.

Reference

ROWNTREE, D. 1994. *Preparing materials for open, distance and flexible learning: an action guide for teachers and trainers*. London: Kogan Page in association with the Institute of Educational Technology, Open University.

Design tools

Whilst there are various computer programs that can be used to design a poster, it is often easier to make early drafts using large sheets of paper, pens, pencils, crayons, scissors, glue, pictures cut out of magazines that can be moved around.

It can take time to become proficient with design software so spend time on developing a good clear message rather than learning to use a complex program.

White space

Having too much information on the poster can make it confusing. Blank areas around an image or text can provide more emphasis than text forced into a tight space.

Some examples

WEDC Developing
knowledge and capacity
in water and sanitation

POSTER 15

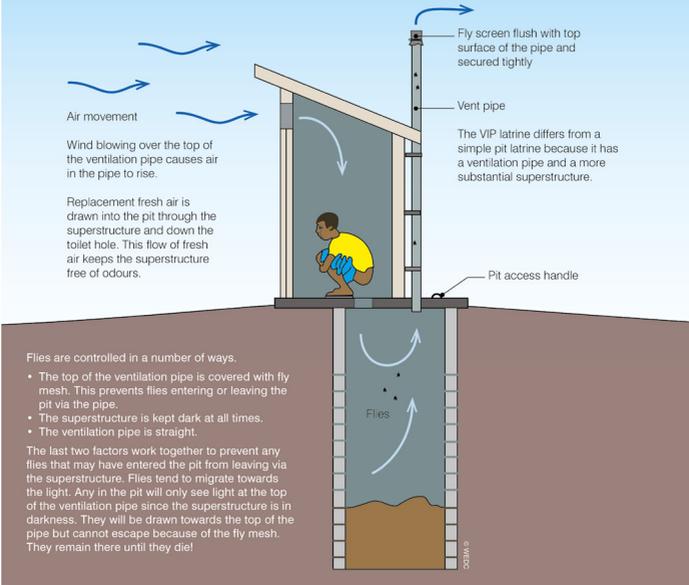
Ventilated, improved pit latrines (VIP latrines)

Solid materials such as newspaper, corn cobs, leaves, sticks or stones used for anal cleansing are not suitable for use with pour-flush toilets as the water seal is likely to become blocked or broken. However, the addition of a vent pipe to a simple pit latrine is an alternative way of reducing the nuisance of flies in the cubicle if the cubicle is kept clean. This type of latrine is called a ventilated, improved pit (VIP) latrine. There are a number of designs to suit different situations but they all work in much the same way.

Air movement

Wind blowing over the top of the ventilation pipe causes air in the pipe to rise.

Replacement fresh air is drawn into the pit through the superstructure and down the toilet hole. This flow of fresh air keeps the superstructure free of odours.



Fly screen flush with top surface of the pipe and secured tightly

Vent pipe

The VIP latrine differs from a simple pit latrine because it has a ventilation pipe and a more substantial superstructure.

Pit access handle

Flies are controlled in a number of ways.

- The top of the ventilation pipe is covered with fly mesh. This prevents flies entering or leaving the pit via the pipe.
- The superstructure is kept dark at all times.
- The ventilation pipe is straight.

The last two factors work together to prevent any flies that may have entered the pit from leaving via the superstructure. Flies tend to migrate towards the light. Any in the pit will only see light at the top of the ventilation pipe since the superstructure is in darkness. They will be drawn towards the top of the pipe but cannot escape because of the fly mesh. They remain there until they die!

For further information visit:
<http://wedc-knowledge.lboro.ac.uk/>



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Informative posters. This poster was designed to describe the features of a particular type of latrine. With a short introduction, most of the detail is best shown in the illustration.

Slope Alarms

— Listening for Landslides

- **Acoustic slope monitoring system**
- **Low cost solutions**
- **CE marked sensors**
- **High sensitivity**
- **Award winning**
- **Robust**

- Provides information on slope displacement rates continuously and in real-time
- Proven performance at multiple sites in UK and overseas
- In operation for more than 5 years in a variety of environments

Technical details

- The sensor architecture protected by a UK patent (GB 2467419) is sensitive to small displacements and very slow displacement rates with continued operation at large displacements.
- Low cost materials are installed in the borehole and the overall cost is lower than current sub-surface deformation monitoring instrumentation such as in-place inclinometers.



- Sensor elements are located at ground level for ease of maintenance and reuse. The technology comprises a simple waveguide design, with one sensor able to inform timing of site inspections and trigger manual reading of inclinometer casings.

UK sites

- Nafferton Embankment, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne
- Ruthlin & Dyffryn, Monmouthshire
- Hollin Hill, North Yorkshire
- Flat Cliffs, Filey, North Yorkshire
- Scarborough Spa, North Yorkshire
- Toton, Southampton

International sites

- Peace River, Alberta, Canada
- Grossraiffing, Austria
- Ripley, British Columbia, Canada
- Passo della Morte, Italy



Academic staff Prof. Neil Dixon & Dr Gary Fowmes
Research Fellow Dr Alister Smith



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Project posters. This poster was designed as one of a series to be displayed in the School of Civil and Building Engineering laboratories at Loughborough University. There was no need for a contact address due to its location so only the staff responsible for the project are given in the footer. The red colour scheme is suggestive of danger which reflects the nature of the project. This was produced at A1 with a strong title header so that it can be seen from a few metres away.

3D Concrete Printing

A concrete additive manufacturing machine for printing large-scale concrete components

3D Printing

An revolutionary way used for prototyping creating unique jewellery industry

It uses digital components by 3D printing

The Bench

There are many outdoor furniture these application

Linking digital manufacturing & more freedom a work at access

Facade panel

Facade panels a increasingly built unique identity

Architectural design of the panels and performance of it

With this technical better by utilising



Academy Richard

Analogue Workshop

- The analogue workshop for a wide range of metal and plastic objects - from small scale building details

- The workshop provides an environment for students to develop their skills by working in a hands-on understanding of applications.

- Teachicians with a provide student to

- Throughout the year students are encouraged to learn and apply



Academy Robert

Daylight in Buildings Conservation and Heritage

Daylight in buildings

The use and conservation of daylight in buildings

The National Trust project to investigate to measure light cameras measure the surfaces in high-dynamic range is completed from multiple exposure



Academy John M

Sports Surfaces

The issue

Surfaces for sporting clubs

Research aim

- To develop if surfaces can perform
- To support if engineering

For short grass



Academic staff Dr Paul Fleming

Handpumps

Raising water

Groundwater is used by millions of people as their main source of drinking water. It is normally free from disease so does not require treatment. It does require lifting to the surface, however. Using a bucket is hard work & a simple pump can make this task easier and keep the water clean.

Why are there different types?

Handpumps have been developed over time and in different places. Some can only be used if the water is near the surface, others can pump water from deep underground. Some have been designed to make them easy to maintain, some are good for occasional use whilst others are stronger and can serve more people.

Where are they used?

Handpumps are found in many rural areas and in some urban locations in low- and middle-income countries. Often a particular model will be used in a country, so this makes it easier to supply spares and train maintenance staff.

The demonstration handpumps

The handpumps situated outside the labs and next to the John Pickford Building are used to demonstrate how handpumps should be maintained and give students on the WEDC MSc programmes the opportunity to develop these technical skills.



Other posters in this series, each with a unique colour scheme and quality images relevant to the subject.

NHS

Coughs and sneezes spread diseases



always carry tissues



cover your coughs and sneezes



throw used tissues in a bin



always clean your hands

Stop germs spreading

DOING GOOD DOES YOU GOOD

67% of people think we are less likely to be kind to others than 10 years ago.*

Research shows that doing good improves your mental health. It can reduce stress and improve your emotional wellbeing.

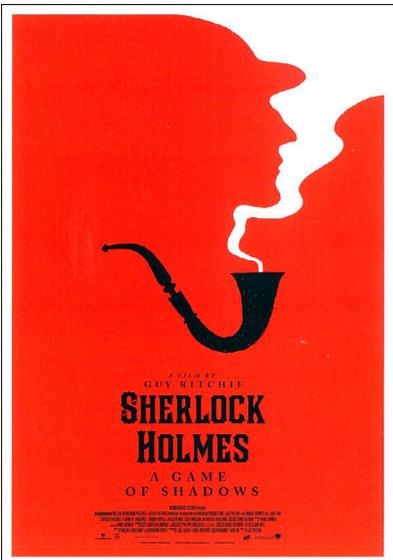
Get involved this Mental Health Awareness Week. Do one kind thing a day and tell us how it made you feel at:

facebook.com/mentalhealthawarenessweek
 mentalhealth.org.uk/doinggood

*Source: YouGov UK, April 2012

Mental Health Awareness Week 2012
 21-27 May

mental health foundation



A FILM BY GUY RITCHIE
SHERLOCK HOLMES
 A GAME OF SHADOWS

You are not just burning off calories...



You'll save one pound of CO₂ for every mile you don't drive.

On your part. Bike, stopped, ride the bus or walk and help make a difference in the health of our planet. Everyone is responsible!

Further examples. Top: Strong use of text. Below: Strong use of imagery.

STRESS

DON'T SUFFER ALONE

- more than 13 million working days are lost each year due to stress, anxiety or depression
- each year about 245,000 people realize they are suffering from work-related stress, depression or anxiety
- more than 500,000 workers believe their stress makes them ill
- professional and managerial workers have some of the highest levels of work-related stress

What's your employer doing?

prospect

“YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS YOU”

ALFRED LEIGHTON

US OPEN

Paul Smith

clean.

Your hands can prevent the spread of germs. STERIS

Top: The human face used in different ways. Below: Wit and simplicity – both attract attention.

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The Water, Engineering and Development Centre is one of the world's leading education and research institutes for developing knowledge and capacity in water and sanitation for sustainable development and emergency relief.

We are committed to the provision of effective, evidence-based and appropriate solutions for the improvement of basic infrastructure and essential services for people living in low- and middle-income countries. With over 45 years of experience, we offer expert advice and quality learning opportunities for sector professionals.

Founded in 1971, WEDC is based in the School of Civil and Building Engineering at Loughborough University, one of the top UK universities. Being a part of a leading university gives us a recognised platform of independence and quality.

What makes us stand out from the crowd is our outreach to practitioners. We use our knowledge base and our applied research work to develop the capacity of individuals and organizations throughout the world, promoting the integration of social, technical, economic, institutional and environmental activities as foundations for sustainable development.

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