



## **Tips and guidance on preparing an academic &/or conference poster**

**Dr. Julia Petty [Neonatal Nurses Association]**

Academic posters are used for a variety of purposes but are essentially communication and networking tools. They can be a highly effective means of sharing knowledge, promoting some aspect of your work or triggering debate about specific issues relating to research, quality improvement or education.

Overall, your poster needs to be clear, concise and easy to read. Below is some practical guidance on how to create a poster that is effective, informative and achieves its purpose. A video version of this guidance is also available.

### **Be clear about the purpose of your poster**

Think carefully about the audience and what you want your poster to achieve – for example, do you want to grab delegates' interest or inspire engagement in a specific aspect of your practice or research?

A poster should convey a clear message about its overall purpose which should be relevant to your work or project; this should include project / research question(s) or objective(s), as appropriate.

### **Tailor your poster to the audience**

Knowing your audience will help to ensure that your poster will be readily understood. Some conferences / events attract delegates from a range of countries outside the UK who may be unfamiliar with UK institutions and/or terminology, so please avoid using acronyms as these may be unfamiliar to some colleagues.

Conferences / event may also attract delegates from across healthcare professions and encourage cross-specialism sharing of best practice; please therefore ensure you take this into account when using terminology.

### **Think carefully about what content to include**

Everything you include on the poster, including text and graphics, should relate directly to the purpose and focus of your poster. Given space limitations, you'll need to be selective, concentrating on those aspects likely to be of greatest interest to the audience. When presenting data/data trends, use of tables, charts and graphs can be effective. When using images, it is important to use a high resolution (at least 300 pixels/square inch) so they are sharp and clear. Also, charts and graphs are usually more effective if they are simple – two-dimensional graphs are usually clearer than three-dimensional ones. Every graphic and figure should be labelled with a short legend. It is also good practice to include references and relevant web links. A QR code and / or a URL to signpost to further information is also useful for posters viewers as well as the contact details of the poster author(s).

### **Think carefully about the design and layout of your poster**

Firstly, think about the template for your poster. PowerPoint has a range of poster templates that you can choose and populate. Think- do you need landscape or portrait layout? [NB- event / conference requirements differ relating to desired layout and size, so do check this first].

It's important to think carefully about how much text you need to explain the purpose and focus of your poster, the background, research methodology/methods (if appropriate) and any findings/conclusions/take-home message(s). Aim to produce a poster that is eye-catching, with its content visible from at least two metres, otherwise colleagues may not pause to look at it.

### **Poster lay-out- some tips....**

- The layout should be logical, easy to follow and visually pleasing.
- It is essential that information is clearly sequenced, using concise headings and sub-headings.
- Text that is left justified (rather than fully justified) tends to be easier to read.
- Ensure that paragraphs are not too long.
- Use of bullets can help to break up text but should not be overused.
- The clarity of text can also be enhanced by increasing the line spacing.

- The sequencing of information/reading order should be obvious. In English-speaking countries, people expect to read from left to right and from top to bottom. However, know your audience, their background and consider where your conference is held in the world, to ensure accessibility / inclusivity.
- The best posters are well balanced through careful arrangement of text and images/graphics.
- Try to ensure that your poster is not cluttered – it's easy to be tempted to include too much detail, resulting in reduced impact of the message. Less is definitely more in terms of the overall impact of key messages.
- Text size and use of fonts: the main text (arranged in appropriate chunks) should be less than 600 words.
- Try to avoid using font sizes less than 24 and avoid complex or decorative fonts. Sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Calibri, are easier to read.
- Think carefully about style – no more than two fonts is advisable.
- Use capitals, italics and underlining sparingly.
- Ensure that your use of colour does not detract from the text or images in the body of the poster. Using too many colours or colours that clash can be visually distracting (and remember that some people are colour blind).

### **Checking & printing –**


Once you've completed your poster to your satisfaction.....

- proof-read it very carefully to check for missing words/typos, etc;
- seek feedback: ask someone who has not seen your poster to read it carefully and provide some constructive feedback; it can also be useful to observe their reactions as they do this.
- save your poster as a pdf and then arrange to print the poster according to the conference / event requirements and space allowances – usually size A0 or A1;
- stand back from it (at least 2 metres) to see what it looks like and assess its overall clarity;

## FINALLY, THINK.....

- Purpose: is the purpose of the poster clear?
- Quality and clarity of the information included on the poster: is the message clear?
- Design of the poster: does it demonstrate good practice?
- Inclusivity: is the poster designed to ensure an inclusive & accessible approach?\*
- Overall visual appeal and impact of the poster: does it attract the viewer's attention?
- Relevance of the message to clinical practice, research or education.


## EXAMPLE POSTER



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### Facilitating an empathetic approach to parenting: An innovative practice experience for children's nursing & social work students using infant simulation dolls

Dr. Julia Petty; Dr. Lisa Whiting; Sheila Roberts; Professor Brian Littlechild; Dr. Karen Mills; School of Health and Social Work, University of Hertfordshire, UK



#### BACKGROUND

□ In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nursing and Midwifery Council, in 2021, advised nurse education providers that they could provide students with simulated practice experiences.

□ As a response to the restrictions preventing face-to-face classroom contact, an innovative approach to simulation experience was developed using RealCare dolls. These are infant simulators designed to teach health related matters, previously used within dementia care (Mitchell, 2014) and with young people (Herrman et al., 2011). However, limited empirical evidence supports their use (Brinkman et al., 2016) for educational benefit.

□ This opened an opportunity to explore their value with children's nursing (CN) and social worker (SW) students in providing simulated practice in relation to gaining an empathetic insight into parental experiences (Whiting et al., 2021).

#### METHODS

□ One cohort of first year CN students (n=50) were provided with a RealCare doll to care for; they were subsequently invited to participate in an interview to ascertain their perception of the doll and its ability for them to develop an empathetic insight into parenting. Interview data collection for the CN students was undertaken between July-September 2021 with 9 participants. SW students were given the doll in February / March 2022 and will be invited for interview in Spring 2022. Emerging themes are being collated for the 2 groups. In addition, students are required to reflect on their learning and its application to practice in readiness for their next placement.

#### FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

□ Common emerging themes for the CN students are as follows:

- The need for preparation / support in the use of the RealCare doll; challenges in recognising the dolls' / babies' needs; the emotional & physical impact of caring for the doll; developing empathy for parents' and the value of reflective learning.
- Themes for the SW students are still being collated and analysed and will add to / further enhance the above findings.
- The findings aim to inform the future teaching and learning of students using a creative simulation approach in relation to the development of empathy, a core skill for nursing and SW professionals. In turn, we aim to explore the use of RealCare dolls in other groups including, potentially, parents.

#### AIM & OBJECTIVES

□ **Aim** To evaluate the use of RealCare doll for simulated practice experience in relation to the development of an empathetic insight into parenting amongst CN and SW students.

□ **Objectives**


- To gain insight into an innovative approach to simulation practice in children's nursing and social work education using infant simulators.
- To understand how RealCare simulation infant dolls can be used and explored in a learning and teaching capacity, an area currently unexplored.
- To consider how such an approach may enable CN and SW students to empathise with parents in their practice.

#### REFERENCES


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#### EMERGING THEMES


Emotional & physical impact




Preparation & support in doll use




Empathy with parents



Recognising the baby's needs



Reflective learning



“I feel like I've got a lot out of it because now when I'm back on the ward although I do empathise with people, I can really feel like it's fresh again”

“It was quite tiring and ...sometimes it was I suppose a bit overwhelming... But putting [it] in relation to a hospital setting it must be really, really hard for parents caring for a child that's really distressed. It must be exhausting”

## **Inclusivity and accessibility**

**\*You need to consider inclusivity in your poster design. The following guide has some examples of different considerations along with the Dos and Don'ts for specific needs / groups of people.**

- **Ensure good colour contrast between font colour and background as this makes a huge difference in how easy something is to read.**
- **Avoid printing on glossy or reflective paper because it will produce glare.**
- **Choose a legible font, avoiding ones that are unusual or particularly decorative as these are harder to decipher. Sans serif fonts, such as Arial and Calibri, are usually highlighted but many more fonts have been designed to be clear and easy to read, and this includes some serif fonts.**
- **For something that is for reading close up, apply a font size at least equivalent to 12pt in Arial (some fonts are smaller so it is important to compare and adjust as required) and ideally above 14pt.**
- **Avoid using italics and ALL-CAPS, except sparingly, as it generally makes the pattern of text harder to read. Avoid using too much text and avoid information overload. Keep it simple.**

**If text is reversed out (e.g. white on black background) the font may need to be bold to ensure it is clear enough. Note that this style can be more tiring to read so is best avoided for long sections.**

- **For posters and display boards, a larger font should be used.**
- **Use text colour that has a strong contrast with the background colour.**
- **Ensure representation across diverse groups (e.g. ethnicity / race, age, gender) in your use of imagery.**
- **Consider your use of inclusive language – is the wording clear and easy to understand for a non-English speaking person? Is the language inclusive of marginalised groups and does it avoid making assumptions (e.g. use 'partner' rather than father / use both parents and/or carers)**

# Poster design for inclusivity

## Designing for users on the autistic spectrum

### Do

- ✓ use simple colours
- ✓ write in plain English
- ✓ use simple sentences and bullets
- ✓ make buttons descriptive – for example, Attach files
- ✓ build simple and consistent layouts

### Don't

- ☒ use bright contrasting colours
- ☒ use figures of speech and idioms
- ☒ create a wall of text
- ☒ make buttons vague and unpredictable – for example, Click here
- ☒ build complex and cluttered layouts

View poster for the autistic spectrum

**Designing for users on the autistic spectrum**

Do...	Do this.	Don't...
use simple colours		use bright contrasting colours
write in plain English		use figures of speech and idioms
use simple sentences and bullets		create a wall of text
make buttons descriptive	Attach files	make buttons vague and unpredictable
build simple and consistent layouts		build complex and cluttered layouts

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For more information, contact: access@digital.homeoffice.gov.uk

## Designing for users of screen readers

### Do

- ✓ describe images and provide transcripts for video
- ✓ follow a linear, logical layout
- ✓ structure content using HTML
- ✓ build for keyboard use only
- ✓ write descriptive links and headings – for example, Contact us

### Don't

- ☒ only show information in an image or video
- ☒ spread content all over a page
- ☒ rely on text size and placement for structure
- ☒ force mouse or screen use
- ☒ write uninformative links and heading – for example, Click here

View poster for screen readers

**Designing for users of screen readers**

Do...	Don't...
describe images and provide transcripts for video	only show information in an image or video
follow a linear, logical layout	spread content all over a page
structure content using HTML5	rely on text size and placement for structure
build for keyboard use only	force mouse or screen use
write descriptive links and headings	write uninformative links and headings

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## Designing for users with low vision

### Do

- ✓ use good contrasts and a readable font size
- ✓ publish all information on web pages (HTML)
- ✓ use a combination of colour, shapes and text
- ✓ follow a linear, logical layout and ensure text flows and is visible when text is magnified to 200%
- ✓ put buttons and notifications in context

### Don't

- ☒ use low colour contrasts and small font size
- ☒ bury information in downloads
- ☒ only use colour to convey meaning
- ☒ spread content all over a page and force user to scroll horizontally when text is magnified to 200%
- ☒ separate actions from their context

View poster for low vision

## Designing for users with physical or motor disabilities

### Do

- ✓ make large clickable actions
- ✓ give form fields space
- ✓ design for keyboard or speech only use
- ✓ design with mobile and touch screen in mind
- ✓ provide shortcuts

### Don't

- ☒ demand precision
- ☒ bunch interactions together
- ☒ make dynamic content that requires a lot of mouse movement
- ☒ have short time out windows
- ☒ tire users with lots of typing and scrolling

View poster for physical or motor disabilities

**Designing for users with low vision**

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## Designing for users who are D/deaf or hard of hearing

### Do

- ✓ write in plain English
- ✓ use subtitles or provide transcripts for video
- ✓ use a linear, logical layout
- ✓ break up content with sub-headings, images and videos
- ✓ let users ask for their preferred communication support when booking appointments

### Don't

- ☒ use complicated words or figures of speech
- ☒ put content in audio or video only
- ☒ make complex layouts and menus
- ☒ make users read long blocks of content
- ☒ don't make telephone the only means of contact for users

View poster for Deaf or hard of hearing

**Designing for users who are Deaf or hard of hearing**

Do...	Don't...
write in plain English <b>Do this.</b>	use complicated words or figures of speech
use subtitles or provide transcripts for videos	put content in audio or video only
use a linear, logical layout	make complex layouts and menus
break up content with sub-headings, images and videos	make users read long blocks of content
let users ask for an interpreter when booking appointments	don't make telephone the only means of contact for users

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## Designing for users with dyslexia

### Do

- ✓ use images and diagrams to support text
- ✓ align text to the left and keep a consistent layout
- ✓ consider producing materials in other formats (for example, audio and video)
- ✓ keep content short, clear and simple
- ✓ let users change the contrast between background and text

### Don't

- ☒ use large blocks of heavy text
- ☒ underline words, use italics or write capitals
- ☒ force users to remember things from previous pages - give reminders and prompts
- ☒ rely on accurate spelling - use autocorrect or provide suggestions
- ☒ put too much information in one place

View poster for dyslexia

**Designing for users with dyslexia**

Do...	Don't...
use images and diagrams to support text	use large blocks of heavy text
align text to the left and keep a consistent layout	underline words, use italics or write in capitals <b><i>DON'T DO THIS</i></b>
consider producing materials in other formats (for example, audio or video)	force users to remember things from previous pages - give reminders and prompts
keep content short, clear and simple	rely on accurate spelling - use autocorrect or provide suggestions
let users change the contrast between background and text	put too much information in one place

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Source: Gov.uk



## Useful resources

- Gov.uk- [Dos and don'ts on designing for accessibility](#)
- The Sensory Trust- [Designing inclusive posters](#)
- [Best practices when designing infographics for diversity and inclusion](#)
- [Creating a poster for a conference – top tips](#)

For further advice on designing your poster or if you would like templates or examples, contact Dr Julia Petty, UK NNA, University of Hertfordshire

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***Good luck with your poster design & presentation.***

