Capstone Poster Design Guidelines

1. Purpose of an Academic Poster

An academic poster visually communicates the key message of your research. Like an oral presentation, it must highlight:

- **Significance** – *Why does your work matter?*

- **Structure** – *A clear story viewers can follow.*

- **Simplicity** – *Concise points, clean visuals, strong organization.*

Common issues arise when posters:

- Hide key messages in dense paragraphs

- Lack logical flow

- Overload viewers with text or low-quality graphics

Your goal is to help viewers grasp your message **within 10–20 seconds** and spark conversation.

2. Define Your Message and Audience

Identify your audience

Most viewers will know the general field but not your specific methods. Avoid jargon where possible.

Determine your goal

Are you trying to:

- **Build Understanding**

  Help stakeholders quickly grasp the core problem, approach, and significance of your work.

- **Show Relevance**

  Demonstrate why your project matters—how it connects to real-world needs, challenges, or community priorities.

- **Invite Collaboration**

Create opportunities for partners, mentors, or organizations to connect with your work and explore ways to support or extend it.

- **Inspire Action**
  Motivate stakeholders to take next steps—whether adopting insights, applying your findings, supporting implementation, or continuing the conversation.
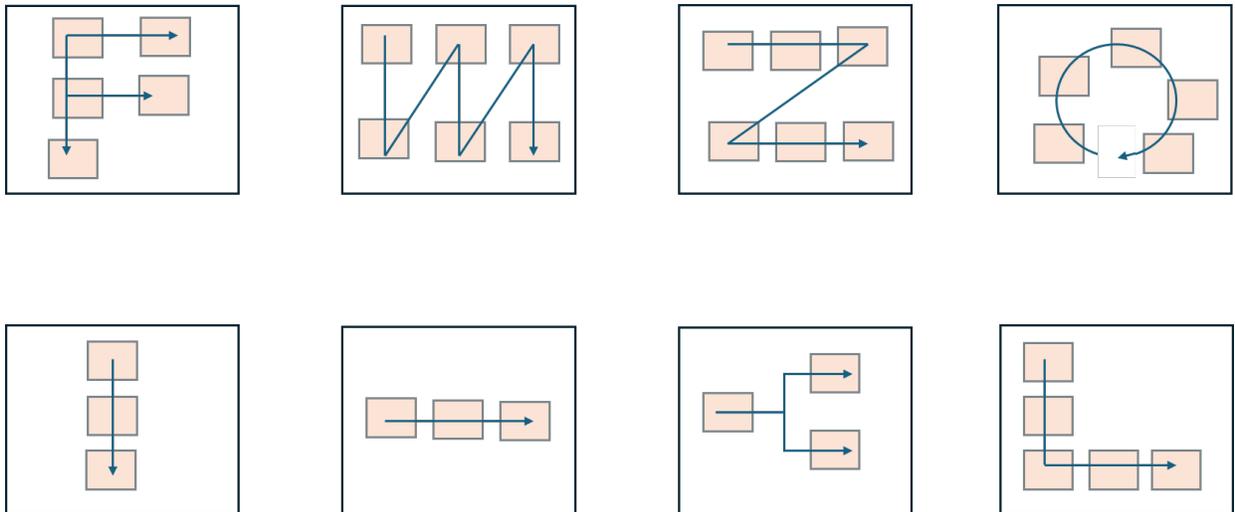
Your poster's emphasis should reflect this goal.

Craft a clear core message

Most posters can convey only one to two key points effectively. Every section, graphic, and heading should reinforce this single story.

3. Poster Structure

Posters should flow easily from one section to the next—usually **left to right, then down**, or **top to bottom**. Below are some examples of variation in the structural flow of a poster.

Recommended sections of content:

- **Title & Authors**

- **Introduction / Problem Statement**

- **Objectives**

- **Methodology** (often best shown as a diagram)

- **Results** (your main findings—use visuals!)

- **Conclusions / Recommendations**

- **References & Acknowledgements**

Have someone stand ~1 m away and check:

- Can they find the main message quickly?

- Does the layout guide their eye logically?

- Is it visually appealing and readable?

4. Writing for a Poster

Use descriptive, meaningful headings

Instead of generic headings like "Introduction" or "Results," use headlines that *say something*. Example:

- Instead of **Introduction** → *How Extreme Heat Is Becoming the Fastest-Growing Climate Hazard*

- Instead of **Results** → *Early-Warning Systems Cut Heat-Related Hospitalizations by 32%*

Keep text concise

- Aim for **300–800 words** total

- Use bullet points, short sentences, and white space

- Avoid acronyms and jargon unless essential

Use clear, accessible language

Your poster should make sense to someone outside your program.

5. Visual Design Principles

Fonts

- Title: **~96 pt**

- Section headings: **30–40 pt**

- Body text: **24–32 pt**
Ensure your key points are legible from **2–3 meters away**.

Colour choices

- Use consistent colour themes

- Avoid red–green combinations (colour-blind accessibility)

- Tools:

  - https://coolors.co

  - https://www.canva.com/colors/

  - https://www.tableau.com/blog/examining-data-viz-rules-dont-use-red-green-together

Graphics

- Posters should be **<25% text**, with visuals doing most of the work

  Use high-quality images and diagrams. Paste graphics as **JPEGs** or embedded objects to avoid quality loss.

- Avoid clutter

- Good visual resources:

  - https://www.biorender.com

  - https://thenounproject.com

  - UW Creative Services: Brand imagery and symbols

White space is your friend

Busy posters overwhelm viewers. Keep it clean, balanced, and breathable.

6. Technical Specifications

Poster size = 48" × 36" (landscape)

Software for Designing your Poster

- PowerPoint (most common)

- Adobe Illustrator

- Canva

- BioRender (for scientific illustrations)

7. Additional Resources

- Fourwaves: *How to Make a Scientific Poster*

- Purdue OWL: *Research Posters Overview*