RESEARCH POSTERS

Information from research projects can be displayed (either in the department or at a conference) in the form of a poster (sometimes known as a poster paper). As many scientific conferences are attended by well over 100 delegates, there is often insufficient time in the conference program to allow all delegates to present their work verbally (usually as a 15 minute talk). Delegates may be asked to present their work as a poster paper. Poster papers can be used to present preliminary findings and are often the first way in which postgraduate students participate in a scientific conference. The ability to produce a good poster paper is another valuable skill that a scientist must acquire.

Poster papers contain all the same elements as a written paper: a title (which often incorporates the names of the author/s), introduction, results section and a discussion (see section on scientific writing) and list of references. Because posters have a constraint to their physical size (conference organisers always set some limit to the physical dimensions of a poster - the most common size of a poster is about 1 m x 1.2 m), the amount of information that can be presented is limited. It is therefore very important that before making the poster you decide upon the most important information that needs to be included in all sections. Once information has been selected, design the layout of the poster using rough sketches. Once you are satisfied with the layout of the poster make a full sized model using drafts of the text, graphs and tables. This gives you the opportunity of seeing whether your design will work. It is very important that you check the limits of poster dimensions set by the conference organisers.

A good poster has the following features:-

1. It is eye-catching and colourful (without being garish).
2. It synthsizes important findings in as few words as possible (readers do not want to spend hours trying to read the poster). Uncomplicated graphs (preferably in colour) and tables are therefore very important.
3. It should be possible to read the text at a distance of about 1 m. Text size should therefore be about 10 - 15 mm high. The title should be in larger print.

4. The text and illustrations are neatly trimmed and mounted straight.

One of the simplest ways to make a poster is to produce the text on a good printer (e.g. laser or ink jet).The text is then attached to coloured card. The text cards are in turn mounted on a single large backing panel or a series of panels which fit together to form the poster. Posters made of panels are common because the panels are easier to carry and can often be packed into a suitcase or other travel bag.

Most scientists now make posters using computer software packages (e.g. Powerpoint) and the final poster is printed on a large flat-bed printer, usually on A0 paper. The poster is then often laminated to protect it. The use of such software means that it is possible to experiment with the design of the poster and all students should be encouraged to learn how to produce posters in this way. The disadvantage of this method is that printing the poster is expensive and any errors on the final product are not readily corrected (especially if the poster has been laminated). Computer-generated posters must therefore be checked most thoroughly for errors.

Most science departments have a variety of research posters on display. Take the time to examine these for ideas on design, layout and colour schemes.

Finally, before departing for the conference see if the organisers have provided any information on how the posters are to be mounted. Conference organisers usually provide all mounting materials but it is often a good idea to take your own drawing pins and Prestik with you as well as material to repair your poster in case of damage in transit.