Making a Simple Poster
with
Microsoft PowerPoint 2007
or
Adobe Illustrator CS4

Questions and Comments can be directed to:

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Making a very simple poster only requires the use of three basic tools in either
Microsoft PowerPoint or Adobe Illustrator. In both programs, you only need to
set the size of the poster, create text boxes, and insert your illustrations. With
this in mind, I have listed the bare essential commands that you can use in each
program.

There are many other ways to use these programs to create posters in a more
efficient and artistic manner. However, if your goal is to create a poster with the
least likely risk of formatting problems, these few commands will generate a
useful product in a very simple manner.

For any poster, keep in mind that there are two paper sizes that are available:
36” and 44” wide. Each one is on a roll so the length can be varied according to
your needs. However, PowerPoint has a maximum printable length of 90 inches
and Illustrator has a maximum of 50 feet.
General Concepts

1. Format the size of your poster and plan its layout
   a. Know what size poster you need before you start formatting it.
   b. Select a white background.
   c. Decide on a general color scheme. It is generally best to use no more than three main colors. Also, be careful of contrast between colors. Some colors don’t work well together and can make reading the poster very difficult.
   d. On paper, draw a general sketch of your poster to evaluate its structure and flow.
   e. Generally, restrict the amount of text in your poster. Present the essential concepts and avoid a lot of detail.

2. Create text boxes
   a. Whenever possible, type the text directly into each text box. Cutting and pasting often works but can be problematic at times depending on the program from which the text came. Also, with the cut and paste method you may have to reformat some parts.
   b. Use section headings for the text boxes such as “Abstract”, “Introduction”, “Conclusion”, and “References”.
   c. Be sure to use font sizes that are easily read from at least 3 to 5 feet away. Recommended fonts sizes are listed later in this guide.
   d. Leave some space between major sections of text, indent as needed to create a sense of flow, and/or use an outline format to guide the reader. Long, symmetrical columns of text that stream together can be difficult and time consuming to read. Be sure that your key points stand out from the details.
3. Place images into the poster

a. In general, use images that are 300 dots per inch (dpi) and sized to the dimensions you want printed. For instance, if you need a 5” x 5” image in your poster, start with a picture that was originally created as a 5” x 5”, 300 dpi image. Resizing a much smaller image often results in a poor quality print. Also, images taken from the Web generally do not print very well because of their low resolution.

b. Many image file formats can be used for the pictures in your poster, however, if possible, use uncompressed “.tif” format images. “.jpg” format images can be used but avoid highly compressed files – keep the setting in the “high” range.

c. Be very careful with charts, graphs and tables. If at all possible, save them as “.tif” or “.jpg” images and place them into the poster just like any other image. Copying and pasting charts and graphs from their original applications can work quite often but can also create unforeseen problems, especially with formatting.

Note: Occasionally, objects that are invisible on your computer monitor can appear on your final print. Conversely, objects that are clearly visible on your computer can be omitted or partially covered in the final print. Fortunately, this happens very infrequently. One way to avoid this is to remove all unnecessary objects at the time they are edited. Don’t leave empty text boxes, empty image frames, or other apparently invisible objects in the poster layout. They can interfere with the print process and detract from your poster.
PowerPoint 2007 on the PC

(Instructions for other versions of PowerPoint are similar or identical)

NOTE: A poster created in PowerPoint consists of only ONE “Slide”. All of your illustrations and text should be placed on a single “Slide”. The printer cannot assemble a poster from two or more slides in a PowerPoint presentation.

1. Open PowerPoint by double clicking on the icon
   a. Upon opening PowerPoint, select a “Blank Presentation” in the first selection window and select the empty format in the “AutoLayout” selection window that pops up next.

2. Set the size of your poster
   a. In the main menu at the top of the program window, click on “File” and then “Page Setup”.
   b. Set the “Width” and “Height” of your poster in inches.
   c. Click “OK”

NOTE: The maximum allowable size for a PowerPoint slide (poster) is 56” x 56”. If you want to create a larger poster, simply scale the poster down while keeping the aspect ratio the same. For instance, if you would like to print a 72” x 44” poster, simple create a 36” x 22” format in “Page Setup”. At the time of printing, the poster will be “scaled to fit the paper” and printed to a final size of 72” x 44”. Please note that if you use this scaling technique, scale the font sizes accordingly since they will be enlarged upon printing. Also, this scaling technique can cause some loss of quality in the illustrations that are incorporated into the poster.
3. Place a text box in your poster

   a. In the main menu at the top of the program window, click on “Insert” and then “Text Box”.

   b. Move your mouse cursor to a position on the poster where you want the text box to be created and click-and-hold the left mouse button while you drag it to create a box of the appropriate size. Type your text into the box. Note that if you are creating a large poster and are using a small font, you may not be able to see the typing. You can either change the font by selecting “Format” and then “Font” in the top menu or you can zoom into the poster by using “View” and then “Zoom”.

   c. Using this method, you can create separate text boxes for your title, section headings and bodies of text.

   d. When you click on the text in any single text box, a gray border will appear. If you place the cursor over the border, the cursor will change to a four-way arrow. By clicking and holding (left mouse button) the four-way arrow, you can move the box around to other positions. Also, the box can be resized by placing the cursor over the corner or side “handles” (small squares on the gray border) – the cursor will change to a two-way arrow. Click and hold the two-way arrow and resize the box as needed.

   e. Typical final print font sizes are:

      i. Title:  96 – 180 point
      ii. Author listing below the title:  44 – 90 point
      iii. Section Headings:  36 – 44 point
      iv. Body of the text:  24 – 36 point

   A “point” is approximately equal to 0.01”.

   f. If you need font sizes that are larger than those that can be selected via the “Format”, “Font” commands, simply highlight the desired text and click on the “Increase Font Size” icon in the main menu (Large “A” with a superscript triangle next to it).
g. If you are creating a poster that will be scaled up in size at the time of printing, remember to use font sizes that are proportionately smaller. For example, if you are creating a poster that is 36” x 22” (as in the “Note” above) and intend to have it scaled to 72” x 44” at the time of printing, use fonts that are half of their final intended size. A good way to check your current font size is to view the poster at “100% zoom”. You can select the zoom command by clicking on “View” in the main menu and then clicking on “Zoom”. Select the appropriate value or type it in the window that opens.

4. Place illustrations into your poster

NOTE: If you have charts, graphs, or tables to add to your poster, I suggest that you take the simplest approach and print them out in color from the original application. Scan them at 300 dpi and save them as “.tif” or “.jpg” formatted files. Finally, insert the charts into your poster as images by following the instructions listed below. Although this creates some extra work and is not as elegant as pasting or otherwise importing the original object into the PowerPoint poster, it avoids some troublesome formatting problems that can creep into the image. The poster with its imported or pasted charts and graphs may look fine on your computer, however the formatting can change when you try to print the poster on our machine. Most people use a variety of programs to create parts for their posters. With all of the combinations, it is very difficult to foresee all of the interactions among the programs and the various operating systems.

Inserting an image

a. In the main menu at the top of the program window, click on “Insert” and then “Picture” and then “From a file”.

b. PowerPoint supports several image file formats. For simplicity, stay with either “.tif” or “.jpg” type images. If you use the “.jpg” format, keep the compression quality “Medium to High”.

c. The images can be moved and sized just like the text boxes. To size an image and maintain its proportions, hold down the “Shift” key and resize it using one of the corner “handles” on the border.
Illustrator CS4 on the PC

(Instructions for other versions of Illustrator are similar or identical)

1. Open Adobe Illustrator by double clicking on the icon
   a. Upon opening Illustrator, click on “File” then “Document Setup”.
   b. In the window that opens, be sure that units are set to “Inches”.
   c. Insert values for “Width” and “Height” that match your intended poster size. Note that our available paper sizes are 36” and 44” wide. Both are rolls of paper with a printable length up to 50 feet.
   d. In the same window check that the “View” is “Single Full Page”, the “Path” has “Output Resolution” set to “800 dpi”, and “Options” is set to “Use Printer’s Default Screen”.
   e. Click “O.K.”

2. Navigating Illustrator Layouts
   a. Check to see if one of the small open windows has a tab for the “Navigator”. This tool allows you to easily move around your Illustrator layout.
   b. If the “Navigator” is not already open, click on “Window” and then click on “Show Navigator” in the main menu at the top of the screen. In the window that opens, you can drag the red box around with the “Hand” icon by placing the cursor over the red box, holding the left mouse button down, and then dragging the red box to any position.
   c. Note the value at the bottom of the “Navigator” window in the lower left corner. This is the current poster magnification as it appears on screen. To increase the magnification, click on the button with two large “Triangles” on the bottom right side of the “Navigator” window. To reduce the magnification, click on the button with the two small “Triangles” near the bottom center of the “Navigator” window.
3. Place a text box in your poster

   a. In the long “Tools” menu containing twenty selection buttons, click on the “Text” tool. Use the “Text” tool consisting of a capital “T” with an empty background. If the button has another version of the text tool showing, place the cursor over the text tool button then click and hold the left mouse button. A row of other tools will appear, select the plain capital “T”. Also, if the “Tools” menu is not visible, click on “Window” in the main menu and then click on “Show Tools”.

   b. Move your cursor to a position on the poster where you want the text box to be created and click-and-hold the left mouse button while you drag it to create a box of the appropriate size. Type your text into the box. Note that if you are creating a large poster and are using a small font, you may not be able to see the typing. You can either change the font and its size by selecting “Type” and either “Font” or “Size” in the top menu or you can zoom into the poster by using the zoom features discussed earlier.

   c. Using this method, you can create separate text boxes for your title, section headings and bodies of text.

   d. Text alignment in the boxes can be set with the “Paragraph” tool. Click on “Type” in the main menu and select “Paragraph”. A window will open that has paragraph alignment tools that let you center the text, place it with left justification, right justification, etc. Using the text tool, simply highlight the text of interest and click on the appropriate button in the “Paragraph” tool window. Note that the “Paragraph” tool window has a “Character” tab. Click on that tab to reveal a set of tools that allow control of the position and print characteristics of each character relative to the others – for creating such things as superscripts and subscripts. You can also select a font size in the “Character” window. Simply use the pull down menu next to the large black “T” that has a smaller gray “T” next to it. If you need a font size larger than 72 points, simply type in a value in the window next to the pull down menu. Any text alterations that you make will apply to any highlighted text you have selected.
e. Typical font sizes for posters are:

   i. Title:  96 – 180 point  
   ii. Author listing below the title:  44 – 90 point  
   iii. Section Headings:  36 – 44 point  
   iv. Body of the text:  24 – 36 point

A “point” is approximately equal to 0.01”.

Note that font sizes in Illustrator can be varied between 0.1 and 1296 points (0.001 to 12.96 inches).

f. To finish working with the text tool in a particular text box, click on the “Black Arrow” in the “Tools” menu. Note that the text box will change to one with small squares on its sides. The small squares (handles) can be used to resize the text box. Be careful when resizing because you can easily cover text at the bottom of the box. If the length of your text exceeds the capacity of the text box, a small square with a “plus sign” in it will appear towards the lower right side of the text box. In this case, simply resize the box until the “plus sign” disappears.

g. To completely finish working with the text box, be sure to have the “Black Arrow” in the “Tools” menu selected and then just click on a blank part of the poster. The “Black Arrow” is a selection tool. So be careful that you haven’t accidentally selected another object in your poster. If you created a color background in your poster with the rectangle tool (see “Adding Color Boxes and Backgrounds” below), clicking on a blank part of the poster can result in selecting the background rectangle. In this case, click outside of the poster boundaries.

h. The “Black” arrow selection tool can be used to select and move objects. To select an object, place the arrow over the top of an unselected item in the poster (an item without a bounding box around it) and move the arrow around until a black square appears next to the arrow’s tail, then click the left mouse button. The object will have a bounding box around it that defines its domain. To move the selected object, move the arrow over or around the object until the arrow’s tail disappears, then hold down the left mouse button and drag the box to another position.
i. If you are creating a poster that will be scaled up in size at the time of printing, use font sizes that are proportionately smaller. For example, if you are creating a poster that is 36” x 22” and intend to have it scaled to 72” x 44” at the time of printing, use fonts that are half of their final intended size. A good way to check your current font size is to view the poster with the rulers on screen. (To place the rulers on screen, click on “View” in the main menu and then “Show Rulers”.) Adjust the screen magnification until one inch on the rulers actually measures about one inch. To see how it will look rescaled as in our example, scaling a 36” x 22” poster to 72” x 44”, set the zoom so that one inch on the rulers actually measures about 2 inches.

4. Place illustrations into your poster

NOTE: If you have charts, graphs, or tables to add to your poster, I suggest that you take the simplest approach and print them out in color from the original application. Scan them at 300 dpi and save them as “.tif” or “.jpg” formatted files. Finally, insert the charts into your poster as images by following the instructions listed below. Although this creates some extra work and is not as elegant as pasting or otherwise importing the original object into the Illustrator poster, it avoids some troublesome formatting problems that can creep into the image. The poster with its imported or pasted charts and graphs may look fine on your computer, however the formatting can change when you try to print the poster on our machine. Most people use a variety of programs to create parts for their posters. With all of the combinations, it is very difficult to foresee all of the possible interactions among the programs and the various operating systems.

Inserting an image or other object

a. In the main menu at the top of the program window, click on “File” and then “Place”. In the window that opens, select the file of interest. Be sure to remove the check mark from “Link”, this will embed the image in your poster.

b. PowerPoint supports a number of file formats including Wordperfect, MS Word, tiff, jpg, etc. When it comes to images, try to stay with either “.tif” or “.jpg” for simplicity. If you use the “.jpg” format, keep the compression quality “Medium to High”.
c. The placed objects can be moved and sized just like the text boxes. To size an object and maintain its proportions, hold down the “Shift” key and resize it using one of the corner “handles” on the border.

5. Adding Color Boxes and Backgrounds

a. To create a box with color, select the “Rectangle” tool in the main tool menu. Then click and drag on the poster to create a box.

b. The main box color can be altered in the “Color” window. If the color window cannot be seen, simply select “Window” in the main menu at the top of the program and then select “Show Color”.

c. The “Color” window has sliders for C, M, Y, K (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black) so that a particular color can be defined. Alternatively, you can insert values into the windows to the right of the sliders or directly select a color from the palette of colors displayed in the long rectangular “rainbow of colors”.

d. In the upper left hand corner of the “Color” window, there are two icons. One is a solid square showing the foreground color that will fill your rectangle. The other icon is a “doughnut-like” rectangle that represents the border around the rectangle. If a red line is drawn through the border, no border will be drawn.

e. Click on the border icon to select it and alter its color. To cancel the use of a border, click on the white square with a red line through it.

f. The thickness of the border can be altered with the controls in the “Stroke” window. If the “Stroke” window is not visible, select “Window” in the main menu then select “Show Stroke”.

g. In the “Stroke” window, use “Weight” to control the line thickness, and “Dashed Line” to create a broken line - with values (in inches) entered into the small windows labeled “dash” or “gap”. The style of corner used on the border can be defined with the “Join” buttons.

h. If you would like to create a gradient background in your rectangle, select the “Gradient” tab next to the “Stroke” tab.
i. Select two colors for the gradient. First click on the small square in the lower left part of the “Gradient” window and select one color from the long rectangular “rainbow of colors” in the “Color” window. Then click on the other small square at the lower right of the “Gradient” window and select a color from the “rainbow of colors”. The black diamond can be slid from side to side to define the blending characteristics. Additionally, the small squares used for the selected colors can also be slid from side to side to define the gradient’s characteristics.

j. There are two types of gradients, “Linear” and “Radial”. The angle of the “Linear” gradients can be defined with “Angle” – left to right, top to bottom, corner to corner, etc. Enter the angle in degrees.

**Creating a color background for the entire poster**

k. Zoom out until you can see the entire poster and draw a rectangle over the poster that matches all of its edges. Note that the rectangle will cover all objects on your poster. You need to move the rectangle behind all of the other objects by selecting “Object” in the main menu, then “Arrange”, and “Send to Back”. This will place the color background behind all other objects.

l. If you want to place colored boxes behind text boxes or other objects, create a box above the object and use “Send to Back” to move it behind all objects. If you have a background for the entire poster, the new box is now behind it and no longer visible. You need to bring it forward in front of the poster’s background and behind the object of interest. You can do this by selecting “Object” in the main menu, then “Arrange”, and “Bring Forward”. Occasionally, depending on how many layers of objects you have created, you may need to use “Bring Forward” more than once to get the desired result.

6. **Check your poster for errors**

a. When your poster is done, use the keyboard combination “Ctrl” + “Y” to bring you to the “Artwork” view of your poster. All of the objects in your poster will be reduced to simple boxes that define each of their domains

b. Check to see if there are any objects that are not a necessary part of the poster. Often during the creation process, empty boxes are created and not deleted.
c. Select each suspect object with the “Black Arrow” selection tool in the “Tools” menu and toggle back to a normal view with the “Ctrl” + “Y” key combination to see if the object is a necessary part of the poster.

d. Delete all unnecessary objects with the “Delete” key on the keyboard.

e. Unnecessary objects that are left behind can sometimes appear in the final printed version of the poster even if they appear empty on screen.