

Posters as a Resource for Learning and Research

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Introduction

As teachers we are responsible for the education and general development of our students. Including the preparation and presentation of posters in a teacher training course (or even in a language classroom) can be a valuable and important educational tool.

As the creation of posters was yet to be covered as part of the students' academic program, I decided to incorporate this activity into the upcoming Regional MEXTESOL Convention, which of course also served as a motivating factor for the students training to become better qualified teachers. I knew that it was going to be a gratifying experience and leave a mark on my BA students' future professional lives.

In this paper I will mention how my students went through the process of creating the posters, meeting the requirements of the organizing committee, and presenting their posters to those attending the conference. I will also point out some of the advantages of using posters.

What Is a Poster?

A poster is very different from a paper or a talk, and so different techniques need to be used in its preparation. A poster is not a conference paper—it is a visual presentation comprising whatever the contributor wishes to display on the poster board, wall, tripod etc. The purpose of a poster is to outline a piece of work in a form that is easily assimilated and stimulates interest and discussion. The ultimate aim is a fruitful exchange of ideas between the presenter and the people viewing the poster. By using posters students have the opportunity to process and reproduce the information they have learned about a particular subject, thus being able to include influence of their own culture or other cultures, in addition to content and ideas expressed through the target language. Posters can be a great source of information, simply because the more exposed students are to the written material they are handling, the greater their understanding of the topic presented in the poster's content. Posters can be made in many styles: roll-up single piece units, individual boards (which is the option my students chose), or hinged boards that fold together. The style of poster is left up to each individual presenter or to the organizing committee.

SAMPLE OF A POSTER LAYOUT.



**MORELIA'S MEXTESOL REGIONAL
CONVENTION MARCH 5TH, 2004
BA STUDENTS**

People Learn Through Reading

Posters can be an eye-catching valuable tool to introduce any given topic. For those who are not familiar with a certain academic subject, for example chemistry, sociology, linguistics, etc. it can be introduced in a condensed and imaginative way through a poster. According to Paul Sanderson (1999) this in turn can play an important role in the process of motivating the viewers of the posters to read of their own accord outside of the classroom, thereby extending their contact with English and with the subject matter presented.

Organization And Presentation

Nowadays, the conventional structure of any scientific congress, workshop, symposium, seminar, etc. includes a poster session. Some schools which have continuously used poster exhibitions in our university, are the Instituto de Investigación en Educación de la Universidad de Guanajuato, in which I had the opportunity to participate with two posters on different occasions "Multiple Intelligences" and "Abortion", the School of Environmental Engineering, and the Chemistry School to mention a few. Therefore many scientific societies reserve big spaces for their presentations. (Search for "poster presentations" on the web.)

It is the organizers' duty to facilitate and establish the minimum requirements and limitations for the poster presentation itself, which requires the participants to demonstrate their creativity in the design and presentation of their work.

The layout of a poster must generally include the following parts:

The Introduction presents the problem/topic/subject matter as understandably as possible; the poster will fail in its objective if the theme is not stated clearly from the beginning.

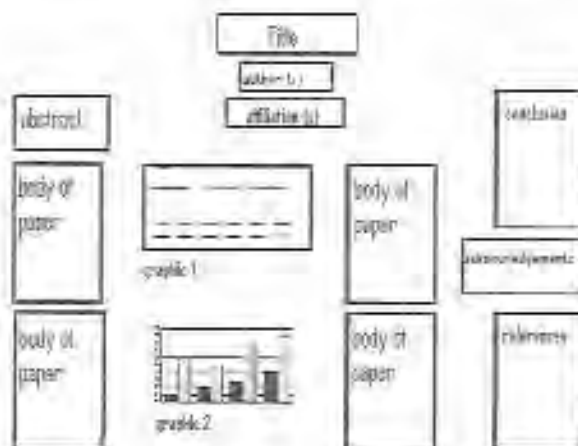
The main body should be brief, maybe one paragraph or possibly two.

The results will be the key point of a well-designed poster.

In addition, a reference section, if required, should be reduced to a minimum.

- The title must be short and visually attractive.
- Radel (1999) advises that it must be legible from a distance of one meter (around three feet). According to Mandoli (2004) when your ideas are presented clearly, they will flow from one line to the other; avoid misspelled words.
- Printed characters must be thick and black (about 3 cms. high).
- Each illustration must have a short title or explanation.
- The diagrams, drawings and similar visual elements must be clear and concise without unnecessary details. Mandoli further states that spatial organization makes the difference in reaching ninety five percent instead of five percent of your audience.
- The sequence of the presentation must be from left to right, and it must orient the reader with either numbers or arrows to show the sequential order they have to follow upon reading. The poster must have a visually pleasant flow to it.
- When preparing the text of a poster, use an informal or colloquial register in order to suit any type of potential reader. Avoid unknown abbreviations (or if they are truly necessary, explain them at the very beginning).

TAKEN AND ADAPTED FROM: [HTTP://WWW.LCSC.EDU/SS150/POSTER.HTM](http://www.Lcsc.edu/ss150/poster.htm)



A visual disarray of elements will disorient possible readers; it is therefore recommended to visually highlight the key concepts to facilitate the functions of informing, persuading and helping the viewer to remember.

The Right Color: A Must For A Successful Poster

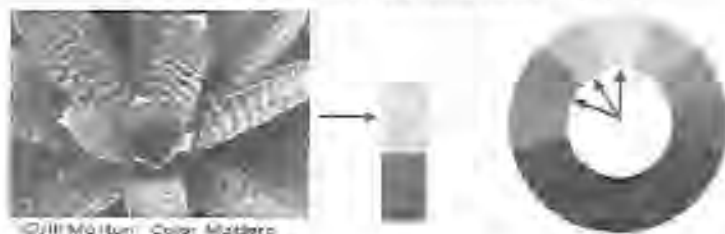
What we see and interact with is in color, and this includes color in both natural and man-made environments. According to Khouw (2004), about 80% of the information which we assimilate through the senses is visual. Moreover, color does more than just give us objective information about our world; it affects how we feel about what we perceive. Color becomes even more important in an interior environment, since most people spend more time indoors than outdoors. The students in my class were advised that color is the most powerful component of all visual imagery and therefore they had to be careful with the combinations of colors they were going to use on their posters. "The right colors communicate meaning and please the eye. The wrong colors can be unpleasant and even unsettling. Color can be a subliminally persuasive force. As a functional component of human vision, color can capture attention, relax or irritate the eyes, and affect the legibility of text. The right colors empower and contribute to the success of a product: a service or even an interior space" or in our case, a poster. The wrong colors could be a costly mistake" (<http://www.colorcom.com/>).

In other words, we must use color harmony, which is defined by Morton (1995-2002) as a pleasing arrangement of the colors one sees and therefore pleasing to the viewer, involving the person plus creating an inner sense of order. The human brain will obviously reject understimulating information and also that which it can not organize nor understand.

Some Formulas for Color Harmony:

There are many theories for harmony. The following illustrations and descriptions present some basic formulas.

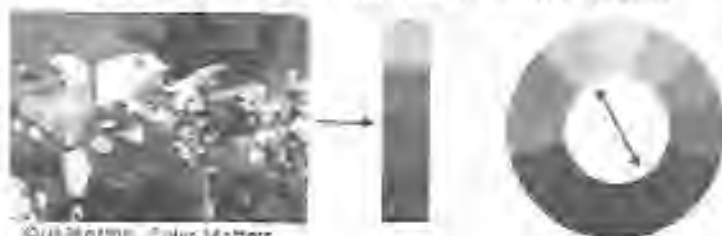
A COLOR SCHEME BASED ON ANALOGOUS COLORS



© Jill Moltun, Color Matters

Analogous colors are any three colors which are side by side on a 12-part color wheel, such as yellow-green, yellow, and yellow-orange. Usually one of the three colors predominates.

A COLOR SCHEME BASED ON COMPLEMENTARY COLORS



© iStockphoto: Color Matters

Complementary colors are any two colors which are directly opposite each other, such as red and green and red-purple and yellow-green. In the illustration above, there are several variations of yellow-green in the leaves and several variations of red-purple in the orchid. These opposing colors create maximum contrast and maximum stability: <http://www.colormatters.com/colortheory.htm>

One more tip on color combinations for posters is given by Radel (1999) when he says that what is generally advised is that softer colors (pastels, greys) work much better as a background, they are easier to view for hours at a time, and offer the best contrast for text, as well as graphic, and photographic elements.

Posters Enhance And Motivate Group Work

As teachers we all know that students are expected to take an active part in their learning process. As Fraida Dubin et al states (1986, p. 56) students are placed in situations in which they must share responsibilities, make decisions, evaluate their own progress, develop individual preferences, learn to do group work, become initiators, etc. It is also worth mentioning Cunningsworth's belief that students need to be encouraged and stimulated as they progress, and course materials can help by using subject matter that is intellectually stimulating and to which the students can relate personally (1984).

While students work at putting their posters together, they will encounter and resolve those variables mentioned above, and more. See the attached students' comments about the outcomes of their posters (Appendix 1).

What We Did

- I organized teams from five to seven students, and they had to come up with one poster on the subject they had already presented in class (or were going to present).

- Students were told to prepare well, because each one of them was going to take turns presenting their topic and poster to the English teachers attending the MEXTESOL Regional Convention in Guanajuato on November the 8th 2003.
- The students' posters were graded by a third party and not by their teacher. The third party was conformed by two teachers - one from Dolores, Hidalgo and the other one from our school.
- The posters were exhibited at the MEXTESOL Regional Convention. A classroom was set aside in order to have them displayed all day throughout the convention.
- A winner was selected. This made the whole event more meaningful, and the students' work had the chance to shine in the healthy spirit of competition.
- The main topic of the class was "Applied Linguistics" the sub-topics covered and presented in the posters were the following:
 - a. The origins of language
 - b. The properties of language
 - c. Animal and human language
 - d. The sounds of language / The sound patterns of language
 - e. Words and word-formation processes
 - f. Language history and change

WINNING POSTER

TOPIC: LANGUAGE HISTORY AND CHANGE



What To Do During A Poster Presentation

At least one of the authors must be at the assigned space during the designated time to discuss the work presented. Presenters should be capable of responding to questions concerning all aspects of the poster.

My students were advised to plan carefully what they were going to say and how they were going to say it, so that they would feel more confident when being approached. They also had the initiative to invite passers-by to come and see their work. During our MEXTESOL Regional Convention they were allotted a certain day and time to be present and available--the students took turns answering questions.

How To Evaluate A Poster

The criteria for evaluating a poster can be left up to each individual teacher, according to the level of the students and the aims of the poster sessions.

Tests are not the only instrument teachers have to assess their students' work. They may also use a poster in which students are forced to study a theme from the syllabus more deeply. Furthermore, they acquire the skills of summarizing and putting together the information they have learned in class and in their outside investigation in a visually concise way. I am including a format that I used to evaluate the posters produced in the linguistics class (Appendix 2).

Advantages of a Poster Exhibition

1. As Radel (1999) states a poster helps to show the results of experiments carried out in any kind of research or academic study.
2. The visual stimuli can help visual learners remember the material better than would a simple verbal exposition.
3. It allows for easy reading in a specific event and for the targeted audience.
4. It allows for studying the presentations of images and detailed diagrams at the viewers convenience and time.
5. The author can also distribute, if s/he wishes, handouts or pamphlets with more detailed information.
6. It allows for presenting various types of illustrations: photographs, graphics, drawings, paintings, etc.
7. A poster exhibition can be revisited as many times as the audience attending wishes to do so and according to the program guidelines.
8. Levine (1997) claims that "For many researchers, the poster format is superior for the presentation of their data. Many panel presenters, even those who use overhead transparencies, still do not provide the audience with enough time to assimilate the statistical data or link it with other data. A poster can allow for a clearer and more reflective process of presentation, especially of statistical or visual information. Papers traditionally presented in areas such as geography, demographics, linguistics, economics,

art history among others, can be perhaps better presented in the poster format. In addition, the narrative of every poster, including main points and conclusions can be highlighted and therefore absorbed at every person's own pace as they view the poster" (<http://www.lcsc.edu/ss150/poster.htm>).

Posters can be Used for any Academic Subject

I have mentioned what my BA students did and enjoyed. However, these pedagogical posters can also be applied to a regular English language teaching class at any level. They would be useful for English students in presenting something related to language; for example, how they have learned vocabulary, grammar, listening, giving tips to others on how to read and understand an academic issue, topic, concept, etc.

Here are some ideas pointed out by Sanderson (1999) that one can engage language students (or any student) in when using posters:

- Ask the groups to display their finished posters around the room.
- Ask all your students to circulate and look at each other's work.
- If you teach regularly in the same classroom, you may be able to leave the posters up on permanent display. Of course, you can use the posters with other groups by asking them to come and see the poster display.

Transporting Posters

Transporting a poster can sometimes be a problem. Rolling the paper into a cylinder is the most commonly used method, so that afterwards the poster can be set up on a board, wall, etc. according to the specifications provided by the organizing committee.

My students used different materials to protect their final work: Plastic and brown wrapping paper.

End Results

My students were very excited and frightened at the same time about participating in the poster session, because for the majority of them it was the first time they were going to be speakers at a convention.

It required a lot of team work, patience and perseverance. Ninety five per cent of our student population is already working, so this particular assignment required extra scheduling on their part. Nevertheless they managed to do so.

It gave students more confidence about their roles as teachers, and about their chosen degree. The environment that was created when working as a team was not competitive but rather cooperative; students learned that while helping each other, they were helping themselves as well. As mentioned by one student (Appendix 1) this event in particular;

made the students feel more as part of the Language School and the University of Guanajuato.

Posters require a lot of demanding work not only from the students but also from the teacher; nevertheless, they are well worth all the work and investment of time and energy!

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Appendix 1

Students Feelings And Experiences In Producing A Poster

Posters

All the process required hard work and communication among the members of each team. I would say it showed us, that teamwork requires commitment and responsibility, since nothing can be complete if one part is missing. In my team we understood our topic, but in order to produce something clear and attractive, we had to do more reading. We all came up with ideas that were discussed, negotiated, discarded, accepted, and agreed. We invested a lot of time in the making of our poster, but in the end, we were satisfied with our ideas and our hard work.

When I realized the great variety of ideas and the abundance of creativity that the members of my team had, I thought it would be hard for the other teams to beat our poster. I realized I was wrong the moment I saw the other posters, creativity and hard work were present in all of them.

The day of the presentation of the posters, we were very excited and eager to explain our posters to the visitors, who seemed to be pleased with the work of all the teams. The members of my team took turns explaining our work. We were very proud to present our poster and topic to the visitors, not because our poster was beautiful, but because it was the result of the hard work of our very hands, and because we were satisfied with our working hard.

Some visitors voted and decided that the best poster was the one of "The History of Language". I agreed with their decision. That poster was well thought, neat, original, clear, and beautiful. Another thing that was difficult and that I admire was the fact that the members of that team had not presented their topic in class, which could represent a disadvantage since the rest of us knew more about our theme.

It was the kind of experience that stays with me forever. I hope I do not forget what I learned from it.

—Antonio Navarrete Mosqueda

Making The Poster

It was a very good experience to make a poster about the topics we had seen in class. I think it helped us a lot to understand more clearly what language is in reality.

During the process of making the poster, we had to deal with the importance of having the right perception people would have when they saw it, how understandable it had to be, as well as attractive and clear.

To do so, we had to share all kinds of opinions and disagreements about our topic: "Animal and Human Language."

It became a very attractive topic; we got involved with it and with our poster, we wanted people to feel the same way.

I could say I am pretty comfortable with what we did, maybe we missed some details, but I think it as a well done poster, as well as the rest of my classmates. It was very satisfactory to see the different posters, and everyone making groups. Although, there was a little detail missing: a better organization, at the time of showing the poster. I think the reason of this is that we did not expect it to be such a big event for the school, or just in my opinion. I was surprised by the interest people had in seeing our work.

I also think it has given us more confidence about our role in this career, it is always a little hard to be in the first semester, and with this event, we are becoming part of this institution.

—Paulyna Ducuing Valdépina

Impressions About The Poster Exhibition

I have to tell you that doing this project involved so many things, like effort, team work, money, and the desire of doing a good job.

The first thing we had to do was to understand our topic well, which was easy and all the team agreed. Then we had to think what we were going to write, summarize. The third step was to design it. We were all very excited and nervous at the same time, because we wanted to do an excellent work. When we saw it for the first time we were very proud, we thought that all our work was well worth it.

The day of the MEXTESOL Regional Convention I had to explain the poster several times, and I realized that I had really learned so much in this class. I think that every person that I explained it to understood me very well. The topic was: "The Properties of Language". It is an easy topic, because it is about the properties that humans have when we use language, like arbitrariness, duality, rapid fade, etc. It was such an exciting day.

—Liliana del Carmen Pérez León

APPENDIX 2
UNIVERSIDAD DE GUANAJUATO
ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS
LICENCIATURA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS

LIN-100 Lingüística Aplicada a la Enseñanza del Inglés

Teacher: Ma. Guadalupe Santos Espino

POSTER REQUIREMENTS:

1. You will need a tripod (get together with the rest of the class so that the measurements are exactly the same for everyone). This tripod can be a simple wooden one but sturdy enough to hold your poster upright.
2. Size: 100 cm high x 80 cm wide (1.2 m de ancho x 2.0 m de alto)

YOU WILL BE GRADED ON:

- a. Creativity
- b. Originality
- c. Cleanliness
- d. Eye-catching
- e. Colorfulness
- f. Understandable summary - Please be sure to use your own words, which must include appropriateness, coherence and correct spelling.

The grade awarded as a team will then be reflected on an individual basis.

REMEMBER:

You will be creating an informative poster, not a book nor an article. It will be graded by an outside committee. Which will be conformed by: the local MEXTESOL Chapter miembros de la Mesa Directiva.

With the elaboration of this poster you will get a grade and you will also get an official written document as a speaker in the Local MEXTESOL Guanajuato Chapter.

All posters will have to be turned by **OCTOBER 31st, 2003** so that the committee can evaluate and grade all of them.

Remember the MEXTESOL Regional Convention will take place Saturday November the 8th. We would like to display all the posters on that day.