

Poster guidelines

General: A poster is like a tightly focused research paper, presented in a very condensed form, generally with illustrations. It should be visually and/or intellectually interesting, so people will want to examine it. For this class, the content should be comparable to that of a 10-12 page research paper, boiled down to concise points.

Topic: Since there is not much space, you have to pick a specific point, argument, debate, comparison, etc. that you want your readers to learn about. Don't try to cover too much. Cover one issue well. Get right to the point. The poster should explain something. It should ask and answer a question, or make an argument, or present a debate or comparison. It should present the evidence that supports (or contradicts) the argument. Keep your readers in mind. It is more interesting to read an argument that comes to a conclusion than a collection of random facts. It is also easier to remember an argument or a logical story than a bunch of unrelated details. An argument, moving from a question or a problem, through evidence and explanations, to a conclusion, makes it easier to see why the facts presented are relevant, and how they fit together into a coherent whole.

Title: The title should grab the reader's attention and clearly specify the point or theme of the poster. "Andean roads" is too vague. "How the Inka built suspension bridges" or "Were Inka roads designed for travelers or for soldiers?" are much better.

Author and year: Include your name and this year.

Text: Be concise. Bullet points are often good. Blocks of text more than a few lines long are probably too wordy. Remember, you want people to actually read your poster and get your point.

Background: Give any background information that is necessary to understand the main point and why it is relevant to larger issues. Don't throw in irrelevant details.

Content: Stick to facts and arguments. Avoid quality judgments like "it is the most impressive site in the New World". These do not convey much information. Give the specifics ("It is three miles long and estimated to have taken 45 million person-years to build") and illustrations, and let the reader decide that it is impressive. Occasionally, quality judgments may be OK as shorthand in support of another, more substantive point, like "The masterful stonework suggests that Inka masons were trained specialists".

Illustrations: Use them as specific background to your argument, or to make specific points. Write your own captions that make the purpose or relevance of the illustration clear. Indicate the source of the illustration, which should be included in the bibliography.

Conclusion: Include a brief conclusion that makes the point of the poster clear. If the poster asked a question, the conclusion should answer it. If it presented a debate, comparison, etc., it should briefly sum it up. The conclusion should help the reader understand what he or she should have learned from the poster, why it is relevant, and/or what its larger implications are. It should say something substantive, even if that is partially recapping what went before. Conclusions like "Yet the true answers may be lost in the mists of time..." do not add anything.

Citations: Indicate the source of specific arguments or evidence, just as you would in a research paper. Credit the sources of all illustrations, too. If you use information or images from my class presentations, you can cite them as "Owen 2006", and list the source in the bibliography as "Owen, Bruce, 2006. Anthropology 326 lectures" (adjusted to whatever reference format you use). All information, arguments, illustrations, etc. must have citations indicating their source, and all cited sources must be in the bibliography.

Bibliography: Must include at least six academic sources, as you would use for a research paper, plus other sources as necessary. Textbooks may provide useful information, and you may cite them and put them in the bibliography, but they do not count towards the six academic sources. My lecture presentations also do not count towards the six, although you may cite them. Academic sources are serious books, papers in edited volumes, journal articles, dissertations, and some web sites. Some such sources may be available online, but you should cite them as they originally appeared, that is, as journal articles, papers, etc. Newspapers and popular magazines (including National Geographic) are not academic sources, although in some cases you may cite them for news or illustrations. Be wary of sources written by journalists, as opposed to researchers, because they often misunderstand the experts. Be especially careful of web sites, since many are posted by people with questionable qualifications or unstated agendas. Look for web sites tied to universities, respectable institutions like major museums, or to researchers whose names you know from other sources. You may use any standard academic format for the bibliography. Very small type is OK. Every source in the bibliography must be cited at least once on the poster.

Format: 22" x 28" poster board, available at any office supply store, or something comparable. This is slightly more than six 8½" x 11" pages. The poster may be vertically or horizontally oriented. The presentation should be neat, but it need not be elaborate or expensive. Text should be computer printed. Good xeroxes of illustrations are acceptable. Computer graphics or scans may look better. Color is nice, but not necessary. Don't use anything irreplaceable, since the posters will be hung in an unprotected public space.

Citation format for websites: Make sure the website is a legitimate, academic source. One acceptable format is shown below. If you use a different bibliography style, you should find or invent a corresponding format that includes all of the same information.

Morlan, R. (editor)

1999 "Canadian Archaeological Radiocarbon Database."

<<http://www.canadianarchaeology.com/radiocarbon/card/card.htm>> May 12, 1999.

In this case, the author is an editor of a project. In many cases, there are one or several authors who should be listed as you would for a book or article. Always try to find the author of the material. If absolutely necessary, the author may be an institution, like "Field Museum of Natural History". The year at the beginning is the year that the site was last modified, as best you can tell. The date at the end is the date on which you accessed it. The title is either one clearly indicated on the web page itself, or what appears in the top bar of your browser as you view the page. The complete URL must be included.

Evaluation and grading: I will grade the posters on the following points. You may want to keep these in mind while preparing your poster.

- Title, author, year
- Background, context, relevance of the subject are clear (why is this subject interesting; how does it relate to some larger issue; how does it fit into Andean prehistory?)
- The subject, point, debate, etc. is clear and appropriate
- Argument(s) are logical, clear, and well presented
- Facts and claims are correct or reasonable (no serious factual errors or wildly outdated or outlandish theories. I need not agree with all claims, but stay in the ballpark.)
- Sufficient specific evidence, data, facts, examples are presented and explained to support or illustrate the arguments
- Conclusion is clear and supported by the argument and evidence
- Creativity, insight, thoroughness, other qualities
- Illustrations are appropriate, informative, explained with captions, with sources indicated
- Information in text, bullet points, captions, etc. has citations to sources in the bibliography
- Bibliography is in a reasonable format, with at least 6 academic sources (not counting lectures, textbooks, popular sources, etc.). All sources cited in the poster are in the bibliography, and all sources in the bibliography are cited at least once on the poster