

Designing a Viewer-Friendly Research Poster

Poster sessions are a great venue for sharing your research with a wide group of people. When you create a poster to showcase your work, it can be difficult to know what information to include, how much, and how to best organize it. A confusing, distracting, or unprofessional poster can turn viewers away before they even learn the topic of your research.

This handout details some of these common problems researchers face when designing a research poster, and offers simple solutions to these problems. We do so by comparing three posters: two where the elements are effectively applied (**Readable Research Posters 1 and 2**) and one where the elements are not applied (**The Unreadable Research Poster**).

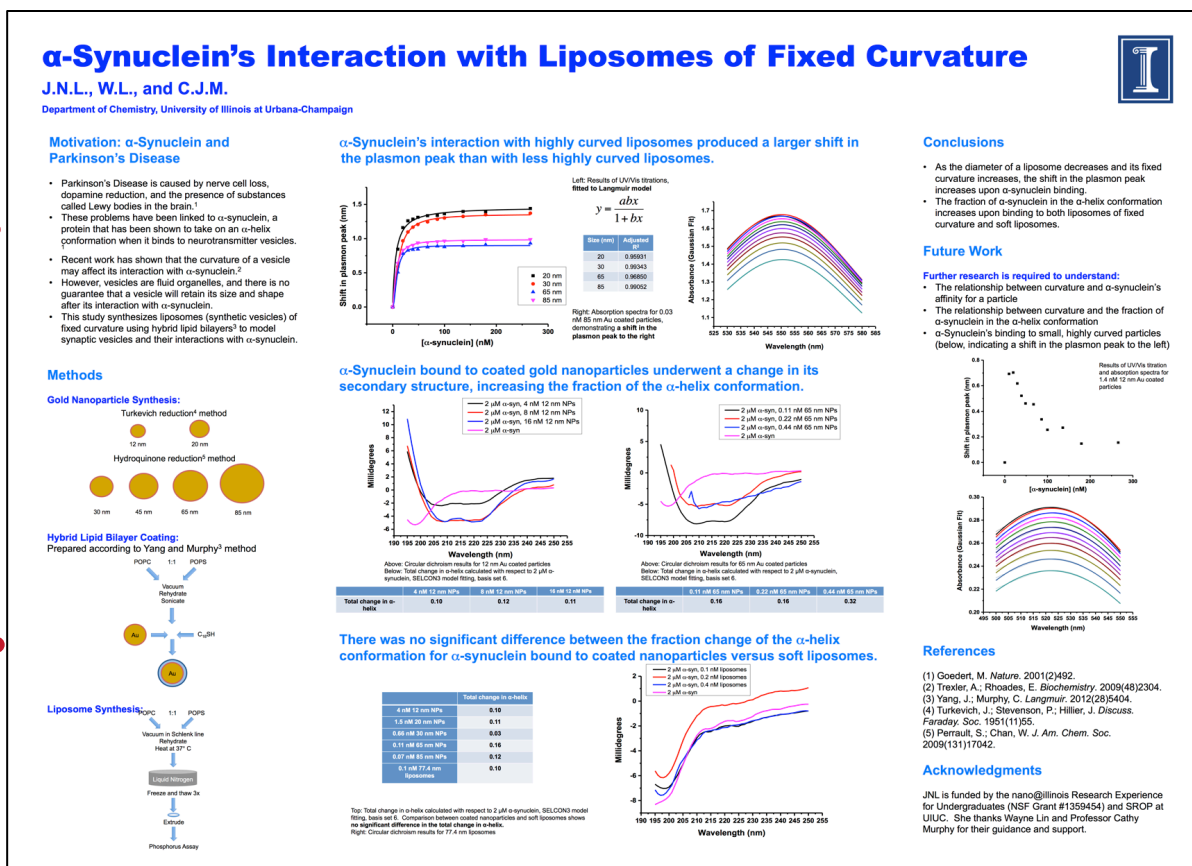
Readable Research Poster 1

Visual Hierarchy

The most important information (the results) occupies the most space and has been placed at the center of the poster. Visual elements not relevant to the main points (e.g. the logo) are smaller than the visuals that are relevant (e.g. the figures).

Use of Figures

This poster has carefully chosen figures that best represent the most important parts of their research. Additionally, the headings provide viewers with accessible interpretations of the figures. These figures aid rather than distract viewers.



Text

Because details are best discussed verbally with interested viewers, this poster uses text to stick to explaining the “big picture,” or the core ideas, of the research. The text is also chunked into bullet points, which helps readers quickly scan the information.

Colors

The major design elements on this poster are all one color, unifying the design and keeping viewers focused on the information. When other colors are used (e.g. methods section), they help viewers understand information.

Headings

The heading of each section is a complete sentence. This is a very effective way to communicate each section's main point or “takeaway” and has been shown to increase viewer retention of these points.

Whitespace

Even though this poster has a lot of text and many figures, it does not appear crowded because there is plenty of whitespace that separates each element.

Readable Research Poster 2

Visual Hierarchy

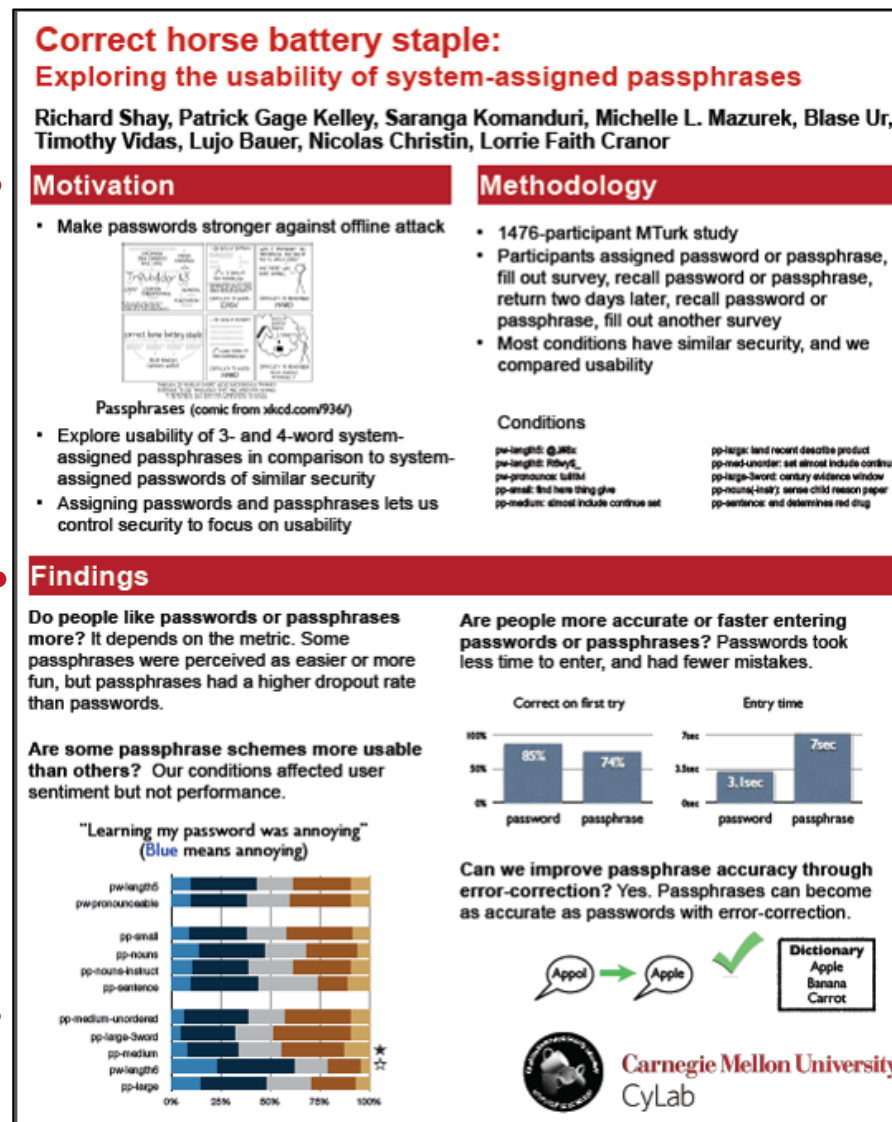
The information on this poster is well organized. Font sizes increase with importance (the title is the largest font size, followed by the headers, then the body text). The category that contain the most general information is at the top, and the category that the researchers want viewers to spend the most time on is the largest.

Headings

The headings are clear and to the point. Viewers know exactly what type of information to expect in each section and because the titles are generalized, viewers can easily recognize the relative importance of each section.

Use of Figures

When viewers look at research posters, their attention quickly moves toward the images and figures. This poster has carefully chosen figures that best represent the most important parts of their research, and has placed each of these important figures next to relevant text. The figures aid rather than distract from a viewer's comprehension of the data.



Text

There is a reasonable amount of text on this poster. The text is in a reader-friendly font and size (36 to 44 pt for headings and 22 pt for body text) and sticks to explaining the "big picture," or the core ideas, of the research. (Details of the research are best discussed verbally, with viewers who want to know more.) The text is also often chunked into bullet points, which helps readers quickly scan the information.

Colors

The major design elements on this poster are all one color. This helps unify the design and keep the focus on the text and figures, rather than on distracting headings or borders. When other colors are used, they help viewers understand information and do not distract viewers.

Whitespace

Rather than borders and boxes, this poster uses whitespace to organize and de-clutter content. This helps viewers to navigate the poster's information without becoming overwhelmed.

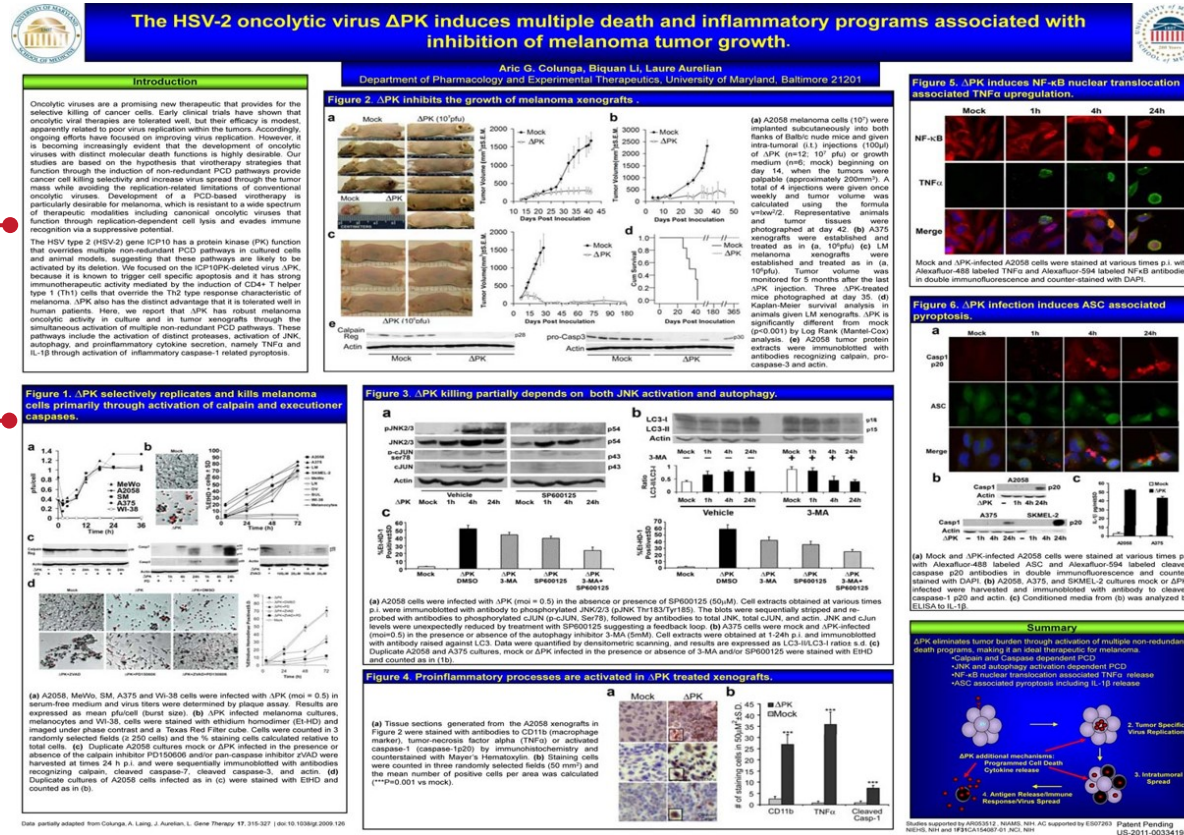
The Unreadable Research Poster

Visual Hierarchy

Visually, it's unclear what information on this poster is most important. All the text is similarly sized, and it is difficult to find the main points or "takeaways" of the research.

Headings

The headings are lengthy, complicated, and in very small text that is difficult to read. These headings do not help viewers find their way around the poster.



Use of Figures

The images, graphs, and other figures used in this poster are visually separated from the text with lines and boxes, and are not referenced within the text. This makes it difficult for viewers to understand how the figures support the conclusions, or otherwise fit into the "story" of the research.

Colors

This poster has many bright, distracting colors that compete for the viewer's attention.

Text

This poster is crowded with text, which discourages viewers from reading it. Much of the text concerns relatively unimportant details of the procedure and results rather than main points or "takeaways"

Whitespace

This poster has almost no whitespace (space with no text or design elements) so it feels very crowded, which is uninviting to viewers. The whitespace is filled by unnecessary elements like borders and solid-color boxes.