Creating a Poster with Adobe Illustrator

I recommend using Adobe Illustrator to create posters for a number of reasons:
1. It is available on all of our department PCs;
2. It prints quickly and cleanly to our department plotters;
3. It is relatively easy to use at first but can be very advanced;
4. It maintains layers of raster and vector information; and
5. It is a widely used program and useful to learn for the real world.

Other possible formats: PDF, Postscript, Canvas, Photoshop

Step 1. Preparation

Sketch the general appearance of your poster first with pencil and paper, so that you have a general idea of what you wish to accomplish. Take an inventory of what figures you have and how much text you want to display. Gather all of your prepared figures and text in one location. Determine the required dimensions of your finished poster.

Step 2. Launch Adobe Illustrator

You will most often use the following tools on the tool bar.

Selection tool: Lets you select entire objects, resize, delete, move them, etc.

Text tool: Allows you to create and edit text.

Pen tool: Lets you draw straight or curved lines.

Rectangle tool: Lets you create rectangles, which are good for borders and backgrounds

Hand tool: Lets you navigate around on the page.

Zoom tool: Allows you to zoom in and out of the page.
Holding down the ALT key allows you to zoom out.
Step 3. Page Setup

The default page size once you begin Illustrator is 8.5 inches by 11 inches. You want to change these specifications to be the intended size of your poster. Our paper is available in 36 inches or 42 inches high. Check your poster requirements, as for most conferences it is 36 inches high.

To change the page size:

Go to File > Document Setup and change the following information to poster dimensions. Change the Units to inches, set the Height at 36 inches, and set the Width you wish to use. The Size will automatically convert from Letter to Custom.

![Default](image1)

![Poster Dimensions](image2)

Note: There may be a dotted box in the upper left corner of the page you just created. Ignore this box for now. It shows the 8.5 x 11 area that is printable from the current printer. The box is irrelevant because you will eventually be handing off your poster to be printed from a computer that is configured to a large format printer.

Step 4. Creating and Importing Images

Adobe Illustrator can import just about any graphic format. However, if you have several raster images, filesize can become an issue. For digitized pictures, the .tif format is most common; however, pictures in this format take up a tremendous amount of disk space. Consequently, it will take a long time to load, save, and make changes to your poster. I recommended converting your photos from .tif format to .jpg format. JPEG files use significantly less disk space without compromising noticeable quality. 300 dpi is adequate resolution.

To create a graphic:

1. Select the Pen tool from the tool bar. Draw segments by clicking around the page. You can close your polygon by bringing the cursor near your starting point and clicking. Clicking and holding the mouse button allows you to create complex curves.
To import a graphic:

1. Go to **File > Open**. Search for the file that you wish to import into Illustrator. Highlight it and click on **Open**. The graphic will appear on a new page.

2. Type **Ctrl-A** to select all objects. If this is a raster image, only one item is selected. If this is a vector image, all objects are selected.

3. Go to **Window > Filename** to select your poster. Type **Ctrl-V** to paste your image.

4. Using the **Selection Tool** you may move the graphic anywhere on the page by clicking on the graphic and dragging it.

3. You may also resize the graphic by clicking and dragging any of the boxes that outline the selected graphic. To keep the graphic to scale and not distort it in any way, press the **SHIFT** key while dragging the box.

To place a graphic:

Placing a graphic is a more advanced technique in which a placeholder link is created to the original graphic. You can move and modify the placed graphic but the original graphic will remain unaltered. The end result is a poster with a smaller filesize, because it only contains the modifications to the link, not the original graphic. But, if you save the poster and move the file, all placed graphics must be moved with it, maintaining the file structure, or the links will be broken. Unless you are well organized, over time this can create unusable posters because your original graphics have been moved, renamed, or altered.

Step 5. Creating and Importing Text

Illustrator is good for creating text that is short in length (such as figure labels), but it is not recommended for writing long paragraphs. It is easier to create paragraph text in a word processing program and then import it into Illustrator.

To create text:

Select the **Text tool** and click on the page where you wish to have the text. Start typing. You can always change the formatting later. Also using the **Text tool**, you can click and drag, creating a text box. This is useful for forcing text wrap in long passages of text.

To import text:

You can create text in Illustrator, but it is often easier to create paragraph text in a separate word processing program like Microsoft Word. Importing text is almost identical to importing a graphic, using **File > Open**. However, Illustrator doesn’t like to place documents in Microsoft Word (.doc) format. For Word documents, launch Word, and
copy (Ctrl-C) the appropriate text, switch back to Illustrator, use the Text tool to select a location, and paste (Ctrl-V) your text. Basic formatting, like bold, italics, and paragraph structure is usually but not always maintained.

**Step 6. Formatting Text**

Adobe Illustrator has extensive tools for formatting text. It is a good idea to explore many of the options on your own if you want to be creative. Many of the options lie under the *Type* pull down menu and in the *Character* and *Paragraph* categories. As a general rule, you do not want your main body of text smaller than 12 point font. 18 point font is easily readable. Titles and section headers should be large and 24 or 36 point font works well.

**To perform basic text formatting:**

1. Highlight the text you wish to format with the *Text tool*.

2. Go to *Type > Character* or *Paragraph*. This will open the *Character/Paragraph/MM Design Palette*.

3. To toggle between the palettes, just click on the titles.

4. Perform the necessary formatting.

An easy way to change the size of an entire group of text is with the *Selection tool*. Select the text, then click and drag any of the boxes that outline the selected text. Again, holding down the SHIFT key keeps the text in its original scale.

**Paragraph Palette**

![Paragraph Palette Image]

**Character Palette**

![Character Palette Image]
Step 7. Create a border

1. Use the Rectangle tool and create a box that is 1-inch from all sides of the page.

2. Highlight the rectangle you have created using the Selection tool. (You may also use the selection tool to adjust the size of the rectangle at this time.)

3. Click on the Stroke box located on the Tool bar.

4. Then go to the Swatches Menu or the Brushes Menu, for a desired color or pattern you wish to use for a border. If these menus are not on the desktop, then go to Window > Show Swatches or Show Brushes.

5. Go to the Stroke Menu, which should be on the desktop. Again, if this menu is not on the desktop go to Window > Show Stroke. Adjust the Weight, which is the thickness of the border.

Step 8. Adding a layer and using a graphic as a background

Some people like to add to the visual appeal of their poster by adding a background. This is a matter of personal preference. If you have lots of text and images it can make things hard to read. Or if your poster is a little thin on content, it can help fill up space. You can use either a color, or a graphic to create a background.

1. Create a new layer by selecting the small arrow in the top right of the Layer Window and label it “Background”. If the Layer Window is not visible, open it by selecting Window > Layer.

2. Import a graphic by following the directions for Step 4. Creating and Importing Images

3. Then resize the graphic using the Selection tool so it covers the entire page (some distortion of the graphic may occur.)

4. Double click on the Background layer to open the Layer Options window.

5. Adjust the transparency of the layer. 20-40% works well.

Files have a number of other useful features. You can select whether or not the layer is visible, you can lock the layer, and you can reorder the stacking of the layers. If you have a very complicated poster, this become very useful.

Step 9. Printing the poster

1. Check your poster for spelling and grammar in the text and for importing errors (unusual fonts are replaced, symbols may be resized, replaced or missing).
2. Type Ctrl-0 (zero) to zoom out to the full extent of your poster. Check for alignment of text and images and for a logical flow that makes your poster interesting and understandable.

3. Save your poster on an external drive, like a USB key

4. Notify Carlos Montana (when) you are ready to print. Please allow for adequate time to print. Large, visually complex posters can take 30 minutes to an hour to print. Do not wait until the last day before a conference to print as there will likely be a queue of 10 students ahead of you.

**Step 10. Additional Information**

Save often.

Practice using the various tools and menu functions. Do not worry about making mistakes. Remember you have an unlimited amount of Undos using Ctrl-Z.

If you have problems, use the Help menu. It is very informative and gives step by step instructions.