

# THINK IT, DRAFT IT, POST IT: CREATING LEGAL POSTER PRESENTATIONS

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, law professors share their scholarship or other ideas with their peers at conferences via oral presentations.<sup>1</sup> While oral presentations are the traditional mode of conveying one's ideas in this venue, there is another approach that is underutilized—poster presentations. In essence, a poster presentation is a visual display of a presenter's idea along with an opportunity for a verbal interchange between the presenter and the audience.<sup>2</sup> Poster presentations—a relatively new form of presentation at academic law conferences—provide a terrific medium for presenters to share their research or innovative teaching ideas in an informal manner.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the benefits of a poster presentation, there is little information available about poster presentations to an audience of law professors.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in my experience,<sup>5</sup> there are a rela-

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1. See e.g. Leg. Writing Inst. (LWI), *14th Biennial Conference of the Legal Writing Institute, 2010 Conference Schedule*, <http://indylaw.indiana.edu/LWIconference/2010/schedule.cfm> (accessed Sept. 4, 2012); Assn. Am. L. Schs. (AALS), *Program, 2012 Annual Meeting*, [https://memberaccess.aals.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Site=AALS&WebKey=1350716a-7a12-4aad-9740-c98d014e272e&RegPath=EventRegFees&REg\\_evt\\_key=d4a06b1f-994e-4ffe-b5ea-548f57898594](https://memberaccess.aals.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Site=AALS&WebKey=1350716a-7a12-4aad-9740-c98d014e272e&RegPath=EventRegFees&REg_evt_key=d4a06b1f-994e-4ffe-b5ea-548f57898594) (accessed Sept. 4, 2012).

2. See Martha Davis, *Scientific Papers and Presentations* 173 (Academic Press 1997); Anu MacIntosh-Murray, *Poster Presentations as a Genre in Knowledge Communication: A Case Study of Form, Norms, and Values*, 28 *Sci. Comm.* 347, 352 (2007) ("The poster presentation is a multimodal communicative event, with writing, graphics, color, speech, and even gesture used to convey meaning.").

3. See *infra* pt. III (discussing benefits of poster presentations).

4. The Author was able to locate one piece written by Nancy Soonpaa in 2007. Nancy Soonpaa, *Exploring New Formats for Presenting Academic Work: Poster Presentations at AALS*, AALS Leg. Writing, Reasoning, & Research Sec. Newsl. 9 (Winter/Spring 2007)

tively small number of poster proposals submitted every year.<sup>6</sup> This Article seeks to fill this void and encourage law professors to submit posters for display at conferences.<sup>7</sup> Part II of this article discusses some background information about poster presentations, addressing what a poster is and providing a brief history of poster presentations. Part III then discusses the numerous benefits of creating a poster presentation. Next, Part IV sets forth three steps to creating a poster presentation: Planning, Production, and Presentation. Finally, Part V provides a short conclusion.

## II. BACKGROUND

While poster presentations are a relatively new mode of presentation at academic law conferences,<sup>8</sup> they are a standard

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(available at <http://faculty.law.lsu.edu/aals/new%20newsletter%20FINAL2.pdf>). In contrast, there are abundant resources available that discuss the creation of scientific posters. See generally e.g. Steven M. Block, *Teaching Biophysics: Do's and Don'ts of Poster Presentation*, 71 *Biophysical J.* 3527 (1996) (available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1233841/pdf/biophysj00042-0617.pdf>); Jan Van Dalen et al., *Effective Poster Design*, 1 *Educ. for Health* 79, 79 (2002) (available at <http://www.brown.edu/academics/medical/sites/brown.edu/academics/medical/files/uploads/Poster-design.pdf>); Carol Waite Connor, *The Poster Session: A Guide for Preparation* (USGS Open File Report 88-667, U.S. Geological Survey 1988) (available at <http://www.sou.edu/AAASPD/PosterPrep.html>).

5. Over the last few years, the Author has had considerable experience with poster presentations. In 2008–2009 and 2010–2011, she served as the Chair of the Poster Committee for the AALS Section on Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research. The Author also served as the Chair of the Poster Committee for the AALS Section on Teaching Methods in 2010–2011. In addition to serving on AALS Poster Committees, the Author had a poster accepted for display at the 2010 and 2013 AALS Conferences in New Orleans, Louisiana. Finally, the Author was a member of the Program Committee for the 2012 Legal Writing Institute (“LWI”) Conference in Desert Springs, California, and co-chaired the subcommittee charged with coordinating the poster presentations.

6. For example, when the Author served as Chair of the Poster Committee for the AALS Section on Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research, the Section received nine poster proposals for the 2009 conference in San Diego and thirteen proposals for the 2011 conference in San Francisco. Similarly, when the Author served as Chair of the Poster Committee for the AALS Section on Teaching Methods, the Section received eight proposals for the 2011 conference. In the same vein, the AALS Section on Academic Support received nine posters for the 2011 conference. Email from Herbert Ramy, Dir. & Prof. of Academic Support, Suffolk U. L. Sch., to Author (May 23, 2011, 11:30 EST) (on file with Author). In addition, the AALS Section on Animal Law received a single proposal.

7. While this Article focuses on posters submitted for display at the annual AALS conference, most of the information in the Article is equally applicable to other conferences that host posters. For example, the LWI now hosts poster presentations at its biennial conference. See *infra* n. 15.

8. See *infra* nn. 14–15 and accompanying text.

feature in the sciences.<sup>9</sup> Scientific conferences in the United States began hosting poster presentations in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> The commercial exhibits at biomedical conferences may have inspired the growth of poster presentations at scientific meetings.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, poster presentations may have emerged “out of elements of the research paper and conference visuals or handouts.”<sup>12</sup> Generally, these posters convey the author’s completed work or work in progress.

The legal field has only recently adopted the concept from the sciences and health-related fields.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, the American Association of Law Schools (“AALS”) first introduced posters at its Annual Meeting in San Francisco.<sup>14</sup> Since then, a growing number of AALS Sections have sponsored poster presentations.<sup>15</sup>

Poster presentations have two purposes. The first purpose is to catch the audience’s attention and convey information to an audience of peers.<sup>16</sup> A poster consists of a visual display of re-

9. See Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 173; Peter J. Gosling, *Scientist’s Guide to Poster Presentations* 1 (Kluwer Academic 1999); Victoria E. McMillan, *Writing Papers in the Biological Sciences* 226 (4th ed., Bedford/St. Martin’s 2006); MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 347.

10. Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 173; Gosling, *supra* n. 9, at 1.

11. MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 351; see Betty Lou Dubois, *Popularization at the Highest Level: Poster Sessions at Biomedical Meetings*, 56 *Intl. J. Sociology Lang.* 67, 76–77 (1985) (discussing origin of poster presentations in the sciences).

12. John M. Swales, *Research Genres: Explorations and Applications* 21 (Cambridge U. Press 2004).

13. See *infra* nn. 14–15.

14. AALS Annual Meeting, *Posters*, <http://www.aals.org/am2006/posters.html> (accessed Sept. 4, 2012). The first Section to sponsor posters at the Annual AALS Meeting was the AALS Section on Professional Responsibility. *Id.* Following this, the AALS Committee on Sections and the Annual Meeting decided to provide all AALS Sections with an opportunity to sponsor posters at the 2006 Annual Meeting. *Id.* The AALS Conference on Clinical Education also sponsors posters at its annual meeting. See *e.g.* AALS, *2012 Conference on Clinical Legal Education*, [https://memberaccess.aals.org/eweb//DynamicPage.aspx?Site=AALS&WebKey=b5373b80-92b9-44e6-aff8-e92b7def6edb&RegPath=EventRegFees&REG\\_evt\\_key=ca1f5b22-481c-47c5-8d17-f44654915c4f](https://memberaccess.aals.org/eweb//DynamicPage.aspx?Site=AALS&WebKey=b5373b80-92b9-44e6-aff8-e92b7def6edb&RegPath=EventRegFees&REG_evt_key=ca1f5b22-481c-47c5-8d17-f44654915c4f) (accessed Sept. 4, 2012); AALS, *Events, 2006 Conference on Clinical Legal Education*, [http://aals.org/events\\_2006clinicalprogramposters.php](http://aals.org/events_2006clinicalprogramposters.php) (accessed Sept. 4, 2012).

15. For the 2012 conference, the following Sections sought proposals for poster presentations: Academic Support; Africa; Balance in Legal Education; Biolaw; Clinical Legal Education; International Human Rights; Law, Medicine and Health Care; Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research; Teaching Methods; and Women in Legal Education. AALS, *Posters*, [https://memberaccess.aals.org/eweb//DynamicPage.aspx?Site=AALS&WebKey=f6bbea07-2239-4c59-b241-e069aab1b279&RegPath=EventRegFees&REG\\_evt\\_key=d4a06b1f-994e-4ffe-b5ea-548f57898594](https://memberaccess.aals.org/eweb//DynamicPage.aspx?Site=AALS&WebKey=f6bbea07-2239-4c59-b241-e069aab1b279&RegPath=EventRegFees&REG_evt_key=d4a06b1f-994e-4ffe-b5ea-548f57898594) (last visited July 11, 2011) [hereinafter 2012 AALS Posters]. Following this trend, LWI began sponsoring posters in 2008 at the 13th Biennial Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana. LWI also sponsored posters at the 2010 Biennial Conference at Marco Island, Florida and at the 2012 Biennial Conference in Desert Springs, California.

16. See Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 174–176 (categorizing different audiences for poster

search highlights or teaching innovations that, in contrast to an oral presentation, “stand[s] on its own” and speaks for itself.<sup>17</sup> It provides “a visual combination of bold design, color, and message intended to catch and hold the attention of the passerby long enough to implant a significant idea in the mind.”<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, a poster is not simply the pasting of an article or abstract onto a poster board.<sup>19</sup>

The second purpose is to initiate and encourage conversation.<sup>20</sup> This interpersonal, one-on-one interaction with the audience that goes along with the visual display also makes the poster presentation distinct from an oral presentation.<sup>21</sup>

### III. BENEFITS

There are numerous benefits to creating a poster presentation. One benefit of poster presentations, as compared to oral presentations, is that the audience has as long as it wants to absorb the information.<sup>22</sup> In fact, audience retention levels more than double when presenters use visuals to augment their spoken message.<sup>23</sup> A related benefit is that the poster presentation, unlike an oral presentation, encourages informal, one-one-one com-

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presentations).

17. Dubois, *supra* n. 11, at 77.

18. MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 352 (quoting Walter Arno Wittich & Charles Francis Schuller, *Instructional Technology: Its Nature and Use* 124 (5th ed., Harper & Row 1973)).

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.* at 364.

21. *Id.*

22. See McMillan, *supra* n. 9, at 226 (noting poster presentations permit the audience to interact with the poster and the presenter for a longer period of time as compared to an oral presentation).

23. P. A. Hazelton & A. P. Gardner, *Posters: A Means for Both Technical and Social Communication* 3, <http://www.sefi.be/wp-content/abstracts2009/Hazelton.pdf> (accessed Sept. 4, 2012) (providing that “audience retention level[s] jump[ ] from 14% to 38%” when presenters augment their arguments with visuals); see Ruth Anne Robbins, *Painting with Print: Incorporating Concepts of Typographical and Layout Design into the Text of Legal Writing Documents*, 2 J. ALWD 108, 111–112 (2004) (noting adults remember best when information is presented visually); see also J. Anthony Blair, *The Rhetoric of Visual Arguments*, in *Defining Visual Rhetorics* 41, 53 (Charles A. Hill & Marguerite Helmers eds., Lawrence Erlbaum Assocs., Publishers 2004) (noting audiences are more likely to remember visuals than they are to remember an oral presentation).

Poster presentations will particularly appeal to visual learners who learn best through pictures and diagrams rather than through text. See M. H. Sam Jacobson, *How Law Students Absorb Information: Determining Modality in Learning Style*, 8 Leg. Writing 175, 180 (2002). This is particularly significant because the number of people who absorb information best visually is increasing. See *e.g. id.* at 178 n. 11.

munication between the audience and the presenter.<sup>24</sup> This, in turn, can result in a more intensive discussion and thus a better exchange of ideas.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to fostering discussion, poster presentations provide access to a larger audience than oral presentations. There is a larger audience for poster presentations because they enable conference attendees to review their peers' scholarship, research, and innovative teaching ideas without committing to a full-length talk.<sup>26</sup> In addition, posters are often displayed for several days following the formal poster session.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, posters are more efficient than a traditional talk because conference attendees can view them even when the presenter is not present.<sup>28</sup>

Not only is there a larger audience for a poster presentation, it is also a presentation method that is particularly accessible to newer faculty. For example, it is less threatening to present a poster than it is to make a formal oral presentation to a large audience.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, a poster presentation provides a great opportunity for a new professor—*anxious about giving a full-length conference presentation to a large audience—to present for the first time.*<sup>30</sup> A related benefit is that, by encouraging new professors to present, the base of potential presenters is expanded.<sup>31</sup>

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24. See e.g. Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 174 (discussing the advantages to individual communication); Cynthia K. Larive & Ewa Bulska, *Tips for Effective Poster Presentations*, 385 *Analytical & Bioanalytical Chemistry* 1347, 1348 (2006); MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 364.

25. See Am. College of Phys., *Preparing a Poster Presentation*, [http://www.acponline.org/residents\\_fellows/competitions/abstract/prepare/pos\\_pres.htm](http://www.acponline.org/residents_fellows/competitions/abstract/prepare/pos_pres.htm) (accessed Sept. 4, 2012); Larive & Bulska, *supra* n. 24, at 1347; MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 364.

26. See Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 174 (noting that “[m]ore papers can be scheduled for the same time with posters than with oral presentations, and those attending meetings have access to more papers in the same amount of time”). Poster presentations also allow conference attendees to skim a vast array of posters and provide the opportunity to return to those that they are the most interested in. See Connor, *supra* n. 4.

These benefits may also present some disadvantages. For example, simply quickly skimming the information presented on a poster may inhibit an individual's ability to fully understand the material presented.

27. See Larive & Bulska, *supra* n. 24, at 1347.

28. See *id.*

29. See *id.*

30. *Id.*

31. Dan Filler, The Faculty Lounge Blog, *The Transformation of the AALS Annual Meeting* (Aug. 23, 2010, 12:25 p.m.) (available at <http://www.thefacultyounge.org/2010/08/the-transformation-of-the-aals-annual-meeting.html>) (noting that poster presentations “open[] the door to many more participants” rather than simply the “insiders”).

Poster presentations also provide several other benefits to professors who are new to the field. First, poster presentations afford the presenter a better opportunity for networking than traditional oral presentations in light of the one-on-one interaction between the audience and the presenter.<sup>32</sup> Second, poster presentations provide presenters with a great opportunity to promote themselves.<sup>33</sup> Third, a new professor need not have completed a law review article to do a poster presentation, as posters can portray an innovative teaching idea or the thesis of an article that the presenter is working on.<sup>34</sup> Finally, poster presentations allow professors whose proposals for oral presentations are not accepted to still present at the conference.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these various benefits, the number of poster submissions to date has been relatively small.<sup>36</sup> In the legal field, this may be because poster presentations are a relative newcomer on the scene. While there may be some trepidation to creating a poster,<sup>37</sup> it is unfounded in light of the numerous benefits of poster presentations.

#### IV. CREATING A POSTER

Generally, there are three steps to the poster creation process: (1) Planning, (2) Producing, and (3) Presenting. Therefore, the presenter must first “Think It,” then, “Draft It,” and finally, “Post It.”<sup>38</sup>

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32. See *supra* nn. 24–25 and accompanying text.

33. Poster presentations also afford the presenters opportunities to promote their school by informing the audience of the innovative ideas coming out of the institution.

34. In the sciences, some have posited that posters are not as popular as other forms of presentations because they may be seen as unsophisticated if the presenter tries to appeal to specialists and non-specialists alike. MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 368. The lack of proper peer review of posters is another reason given to explain why oral presentations are preferred. *Id.*

35. See Filler, *supra* n. 31. Conference organizers frequently receive far more quality proposals than can be accommodated in the conference program due to time and space constraints. The opportunity to present a poster is especially helpful in light of the current economic situation. At many schools, faculty members cannot receive funding to attend a conference unless they are presenting.

36. See *supra* n. 6 and accompanying text.

37. The lack of submissions may also result from the impression that legal scholarship is not well-suited to charts and graphs. The increase in empirical research in the legal field, however, lends itself to visual presentation. See *infra* nn. 40–42 and accompanying text.

38. There are numerous universities that provide information on their website about designing a poster presentation. See e.g. The Writing Ctr. @ U. of Wis.–Madison, *Poster*

## A. Planning: Think It

Naturally, the first step of planning a poster is coming up with an idea. Similar to scientific posters, posters setting forth the results of empirical research work well.<sup>39</sup> Posters can also work well to convey a thesis developed in a traditional law review article.<sup>40</sup> In addition, innovative teaching ideas lend themselves well to a poster presentation.<sup>41</sup> Regardless of the type of material covered, when coming up with an idea for a poster, the most important thing to keep in mind is that the idea must be one that can be conveyed visually in a manner that will attract the audience.<sup>42</sup> Finally, the poster must conform to the guidelines provided.<sup>43</sup>

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*Presentations*, [http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/presentations\\_poster.html](http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/presentations_poster.html) (last updated Nov. 5, 2007); UNC: The Graduate Sch., *Poster and Presentation Resources*, <http://gradschool.unc.edu/student/postertips.html> (last updated Nov. 1, 2011). No website exists, however, addressing the creation of legal poster presentations. While material on creating scientific poster presentations is helpful, legal posters should not mirror them in light of the different subject matter and audience.

39. This research may be the basis for a law review article. In the sciences, posters are a medium for conveying research results and generally have four sections: (1) Introduction; (2) Methods; (3) Results; and (4) Discussion or Conclusion. See e.g. Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 177; MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 354.

40. *But see* Soonpaa, *supra* n. 4, at 10 (“A standard law review is typically NOT good poster material.”). When creating a poster based upon a traditional law review article, the author must be particularly cognizant of the recommendations set forth in part IV(B), *infra*, to ensure that the poster is effective. The topic of the law review must be able to be depicted visually. See *infra* n. 41 and accompanying text. Moreover, the author must avoid simply setting forth the abstract or volumes of text. See *supra* n. 19 and accompanying text. Rather, the author should focus on communicating the thesis of the article and some key points.

41. The AALS Call for Posters states that “[p]osters are intended to provide authors an opportunity to present in clear and succinct fashion the thesis and conclusion of their research, to describe teaching innovations or service projects outside formal program presentations.” AALS, *Memorandum Regarding Poster Presentation at 2013 AALS Annual Meeting*, <https://memberaccess.aals.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Site=AALS&WebKey=2933a943-24ca-4abb-8278-c7fb761dbbe5> (July 9, 2012) [hereinafter AALS 2013 Memorandum on Poster Presentations].

42. See e.g. Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 176; Larive & Bulska, *supra* n. 24, at 1347; MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 359. When brainstorming for a poster presentation, consider the overall message to be conveyed, who the audience is, what the audience should remember, the text to include, how the text can be organized, and the visuals that can be used to best convey this information. See e.g. Van Dalen et al., *supra* n. 4, at 79–80.

43. For example, AALS states that “[b]ecause the focus is on the content of the research and innovative teaching, posters that are primarily promoting a book, software or materials or a law school program or project are not eligible for poster display unless it is a collaborative program or project of multiple member law schools.” AALS 2013 Memorandum of Poster Presentations, *supra* n. 41.

Another aspect of the planning stage is determining who will produce the poster. One option is to hire a graphic artist to help design the poster. While this can result in a terrific poster, it can be costly. A more cost effective option is to utilize the graphic services that the law school provides, if available.<sup>44</sup> Finally, with the proliferation of graphic computer applications, presenters can easily design a poster themselves.<sup>45</sup>

The final thing to consider when planning the poster is the timeline. While there are few, if any, deadlines, associated with oral presentations, there are various deadlines to consider when creating a poster. These deadlines relate to when the work of the graphic artist or graphic services department needs to be completed, how long it will take to produce the poster, and when the poster needs to arrive at the venue.<sup>46</sup>

### B. Producing: Draft It

Once an idea has been brainstormed and deadlines have been considered, the next step is drafting the poster. The bottom line when designing a poster is that it needs to attract the audience.<sup>47</sup> This requirement that the poster attract the audience can be analogized to a store window: “You want a nice store window to get people inside, and otherwise, once you are inside, you want to be able to find what you are looking for.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, a poster should draw the audience in and, once drawn in, hold the audience’s attention, clearly and succinctly moving the audience through the thesis and conclusion of the research or innovative teaching idea.

When embarking on the journey of converting empirical research, a law review article, or an innovative teaching idea into a poster presentation, it is beneficial to review samples. Luckily,

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44. If the law school is attached to a university, another option is to consider whether there are any art or graphic design students that would be interested in helping to design the poster.

45. Effective applications include: Adobe InDesign, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, and QuarkXPress.

46. Also, presenters must be sure to build in enough time to make any necessary revisions.

47. See Van Dalen et al., *supra* n. 4, at 79 (stating poster presenters “have about three seconds to catch the audience’s attention”); *supra* n. 42 and accompanying text.

48. MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 359. As with any project, it is imperative to discern who the audience is and what level of familiarity the audience has with the poster topic. See e.g. McMillan, *supra* n. 9, at 227; *supra* n. 16 and accompanying text.

numerous samples can be found on the Internet by simply searching for “AALS Poster.”<sup>49</sup>

Below are some tips to ensure that a poster attracts and engages the audience.

1. *Keep It Simple.*

When drafting a poster, limit the poster to a small number of core points that are set forth concisely.<sup>50</sup> Including too much information on a poster leads to visual overload and may discourage the audience from engaging with the poster.<sup>51</sup> In essence, the audience “should be able to walk by a poster and within thirty seconds know what the key messages are and no one should have to be there.”<sup>52</sup> To achieve a clear and concise poster, narrow down and compile a list of the content, language, and visuals that will appear on the poster.<sup>53</sup> Naturally, this list should include the title, the presenter’s name, the presenter’s school, and, if the poster is based on an article, the citation to the article.

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49. For example, samples are available at Tracy Bach, *Poster Committee Selects 2008 Posters for Annual Meeting*, AALS Legal Writing, Reasoning & Research Sec. Newsl. 7 (Fall 2007) (available at <http://faculty.law.lsu.edu/aals/Final%20Version%20Fall%202007%20AALS%20Newsletter.pdf>); AALS *Poster Presentation*, AALS Legal Writing, Reasoning, & Research Sec. Newsl. 5 (Spring 2010) (available at [http://www.aals.org/documents/sections/legalwriting/LWRR\\_Spring2010.pdf](http://www.aals.org/documents/sections/legalwriting/LWRR_Spring2010.pdf)); AALS, *Annual Meeting: Reassessing Our Roles as Scholars and Educators in Light of Change, Posters*, <http://www.aals.org/am2008/posters.html> (accessed Sept. 4, 2012).

Moreover, many posters that have been displayed at the recent AALS Annual Meetings are available through the AALS Poster Project on the EvidenceProf Blog, <http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/evidenceprof/>. For example, see Sabrina DeFabritiis’s poster, “Barking up the Wrong Tree: Companion Animals, Emotional Damages and The Judiciary’s Failure to Keep Pace,” on the January 24, 2011 blog post. As with anything, some samples are better than others.

50. See e.g. Van Dalen et al., *supra* n. 4, at 81 (noting that people can only remember an average of seven things at a time); cf. Eric Markowitz, *How to Create a Winning PowerPoint Presentation*, [http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-02-23/strategy/30040563\\_1\\_presentation-guy-kawasaki-macworld-conference](http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-02-23/strategy/30040563_1_presentation-guy-kawasaki-macworld-conference) (Feb. 23, 2011) (averring PowerPoint slides should focus on presenting the highlights—avoiding the use of too much text and too many visuals—to ensure that the audience pays attention).

51. MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 356.

52. *Id.* at 355. A “poster should be an eye-catcher, containing a brief message, understood at a glance.” Van Dalen et al., *supra* n. 4, at 79.

53. See MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 356.

## 2. *Limit Text.*

Audiences are dissuaded from visiting and examining posters that are primarily comprised of text.<sup>54</sup> When drafting a poster, limit the text to the core ideas and use clear and simple language.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, avoid using long blocks of text, and instead use lists of sentences or phrases.<sup>56</sup>

## 3. *Incorporate Eye-Catching Visuals.*

The goal when drafting a poster is to make the poster as visual as possible to ensure that it catches the audience's eye.<sup>57</sup> In addition to making the poster more appealing, eye-catching visuals such as simple graphs, charts, or pictures<sup>58</sup> allow information to be communicated more efficiently.<sup>59</sup> While the visuals should make the poster engaging, avoid using too many graphics<sup>60</sup> and too many colors,<sup>61</sup> which make the poster visually overwhelming.<sup>62</sup>

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54. See e.g. Am. College of Phys., *supra* n. 25.

55. See e.g. Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 176; Larive & Bulska, *supra* n. 24, at 1348; McMillan, *supra* n. 9, at 228; cf. Deborah J. Merritt, *Legal Education in the Age of Cognitive Science and Advanced Classroom Technology*, 14 B.U. J. Sci. & Tech. L. 39, 51 (2008) (advocating that PowerPoint presentations use fewer words and more images because graphics “engage the right brain, depicting relationships among concepts more effectively than words alone”).

56. E.g. Colin Purrington, *Designing Conference Posters*, <http://colinpurrington.com/tips/academic/posterdesign> (accessed Sept. 6, 2012).

57. See McMillan, *supra* n. 9, at 226 (asserting that “[a] poster presentation conveys an author’s . . . [ideas] *visually* through a selective assemblage of illustrations . . . that are carefully integrated with a small amount of text” (emphasis in original)); Van Dalen et al., *supra* n. 4, at 79 (“Your poster should be an eye-catcher, containing a brief message, understood at a glance. It is claimed that you have about three seconds to catch the audience’s attention.”); Dubois, *supra* n. 11, at 77 (“Either the information is found interesting, or the visitor passes by.”); Larive & Bulska, *supra* n. 24, at 1348.

58. Eye-catching visuals are available for purchase at iStockphoto, <http://istockphotos.com/>, and flickr, <http://www.flickr.com/>.

59. Am. College of Phys., *supra* n. 25.

60. The AALS Call for Posters states that “[e]xperienced poster presenters suggest 3-6 graphics to mix in with your text to make the posters more engaging.” AALS 2013 Memorandum on Poster Presentations, *supra* n. 41.

61. Cf. Merritt, *supra* n. 55, at 64 (noting that “too many hues [on a PowerPoint slide] make the graphic hard to read from a distance”).

62. E.g. Davis, *supra* n. 2, at 179; Am. College of Phys., *supra* n. 25; see Markowitz, *supra* n. 50 (explaining how “people simply stop paying attention to slides with too much text on them”).

#### 4. *Format with Finesse.*

Once you have determined what text and visuals to include on the poster, one of the keys to an effective poster is organizing the material on the poster in a clear and easy to understand manner.<sup>63</sup> When formatting a poster, the presenter must “juggl[e] text, visual, and white space according to the framework’s structure, while adding elements such as a title, authors, and affiliations.”<sup>64</sup>

When arranging these components, consider the primary facets that graphic designers have identified in a document’s structure<sup>65</sup> to highlight important points and provide the audience with clear cues as to how to move through the poster.<sup>66</sup> For example, use contrasting typefaces,<sup>67</sup> font styles,<sup>68</sup> or font sizes<sup>69</sup> to present a hierarchy in the information.<sup>70</sup> In addition, to convey the hierarchy of information, consider the proximity of the information as proximity provides organization.<sup>71</sup> Finally, keep the design uniform throughout the poster because consistency organizes the material and unifies the hierarchy.<sup>72</sup>

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63. See e.g. Block, *supra* n. 4, at 3528 (discussing the do’s and don’ts of how the content of the poster should be presented).

64. MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 358; cf. Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 124 (discussing impact of white space on legibility on paper).

65. Robin Williams, *The Non-Designers Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice* 13 (2d ed., Peachpit Press 2004). These elements are contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity. *Id.*

66. See McMillan, *supra* n. 9, at 228. For example, keep in mind that readers generally expect the material to read from left to right and from top to bottom. Am. College of Phys., *supra* n. 25. In addition, use lines, boxes, and arrows to highlight important points. *Id.*

67. See *infra* n. 81 and accompanying text.

68. See *infra* nn. 75–78 and accompanying text.

69. See *infra* nn. 73–74 and accompanying text.

70. Linda L. Lohr, *Creating Graphics for Learning and Performance: Lessons in Visual Literacy* 159–162 (Merrill Prentice Hall 2003); Williams, *supra* n. 65, at 63–78; Patrick J. Lynch & Sarah Horton, *Web Style Guide 3rd ed.*, <http://webstyleguide.com/wsg3/index.html> (accessed Sept. 6, 2012). Using different typefaces, font families, and font sizes to vary the appearance of the letters creates contrast, which has been found to help the reader chunk information “because the writer can control where the reader looks first.” Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 128.

71. Williams, *supra* n. 65, at 48; see Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 128. Place items close together to convey a relationship among them. See Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 128 (“Proximity is important because aligning items on the page ‘creates a stronger cohesive unit.’” (quoting Williams, *supra* n. 65, at 31)).

72. Williams, *supra* n. 65, at 55; cf. Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 131.

### 5. *Make It Legible.*

In addition to limiting the amount of text on the poster, carefully consider the type size and style that is used to present the message. Generally, select a type size that can be easily read,<sup>73</sup> and avoid using more than three different font sizes.<sup>74</sup>

As for font style, it is generally a good idea to use a sans-serif font<sup>75</sup> for headings<sup>76</sup> and a serif font<sup>77</sup> for the text.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, avoid using ornate or script font styles that are difficult for the audience to read.<sup>79</sup> Words in all capital letters are also more difficult to read than words in both upper- and lower-case letters.<sup>80</sup>

73. Block, *supra* n. 4, at 3527; MacIntosh-Murray, *supra* n. 2, at 358. One scholar suggests that the font should be a minimum of 24 point to ensure that the audience can easily read the text. Larive & Bulska, *supra* n. 24, at 1348.

According to the AALS Guidelines, the “[t]ext should be . . . presented in a font size that allows our aging academics to read it with ease.” AALS 2013 Memorandum on Poster Presentations, *supra* n. 41. The Guidelines specify that the posters should “be easily read from 2–3 feet away.” *Id.* The LWI Guidelines state that the font should be large enough to be easily read from three to four feet and should not use a font of less than 36 point.” Candace Centeno, *Posters: Presentation Tips & Technical Requirements 1* (2010) (on file with Author).

74. Am. College of Phys., *supra* n. 25. Present the title in the largest font, the sub-headings in the second-largest font, and any text in the smallest font. *Id.*

75. A serif is a short decorative line or curve added to the basic form of a character to embellish it. See Matthew Butterick, *Typography for Lawyers: Essential Tools for Polished & Persuasive Documents* 78–79 (Jones McClure Publ. 2010). Hence, a sans-serif font—“sans” meaning “without” in French—refers to a font that does not include this type of embellishment. See *id.* at 78–79. Examples of sans-serif fonts include Avant Garde, Arial, Geneva, and Helvetica.

76. It is easier to read sans-serif fonts versus serif fonts on posters. Cf. Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 127 (noting that sans-serif fonts are easier to read on computer monitors).

77. See *supra* n. 75 (distinguishing serif and sans serif fonts). The most common example of a serif font is Times New Roman. Others include Courier, Garamond, New Century Schoolbook, and Palatino.

78. Purrington, *supra* n. 56; cf. Merritt, *supra* n. 55, at 64 (asserting sans-serif fonts should be used for text on PowerPoint slides because they are easier to read on slides); Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 127 (noting “serif fonts are easier to read when dealing with large amounts of text” in legal writing documents). Serif fonts are easier to read at smaller font sizes. Purrington, *supra* n. 56. That being said, in light of the minimal amount of text that should be incorporated on a poster and that the font size should be easily readable, it may be permissible to use sans-serif fonts for the text as well.

In addition, avoid using monospaced type fonts because they are more difficult to read than fonts that are proportionally spaced. See Butterick, *supra* n. 75, at 81; Block, *supra* n. 4, at 3527. Monospaced fonts are fonts in which all of the characters are the same width. Butterick, *supra* n. 75, at 80. Courier, Monaco, and Consolas are some examples of monospaced fonts. *Id.* In contrast, with proportionally spaced fonts, such as Times New Roman, the width of the characters is not the same. *Id.*

79. Cf. Block, *supra* n. 4, at 79–80.

80. Purrington, *supra* n. 56; Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 115–118; see Butterick, *supra* n. 75, at 86. Sentences written in all caps (“ALL CAPS”) and title case (“Title Case”) “require

Finally, emphasize words with boldface or italics, rather than underlining them,<sup>81</sup> and avoid using bullets to punctuate section headers.<sup>82</sup>

6. *Proofread.*<sup>83</sup>

7. *Respect the Rules.*

While this should go without saying, review and closely follow the guidelines provided. Frequently, posters are rejected because they do not adhere to the guidelines regarding the physical specifications,<sup>84</sup> design,<sup>85</sup> or content.<sup>86</sup>

### C. Presenting: Post It

Once the poster has been drafted, the author can submit it for review.<sup>87</sup> According to the AALS Guidelines, the proposal must

a few extra milliseconds for brains to interpret.” Purrington, *supra* n. 56; *see also* Miles A. Tinker, *Basis for Effective Reading* 136 (U. Minn. Press 1965); Miles A. Tinker & Donald G. Paterson, *The Effect of Typographical Variations upon Eye Movement in Reading*, 49 *J. Educ. Research* 171, 181 (1955).

81. Purrington, *supra* n. 56; *see* Butterick, *supra* n. 75, at 78–79. Similar to words in all capitals, underlining slows reading rates. *See* Robbins, *supra* n. 23, at 118. While text in italics also slows reading rates, the decrease is not as significant as that with underlining. *See id.* In contrast, boldface does not slow an individual’s reading speed. *See id.* at 119.

82. Purrington, *supra* n. 56.

83. While this should go without saying, the Author has reviewed numerous posters with glaring errors. The existence of an error is particularly troublesome when it is not discovered until the poster has gone through the time-consuming and costly production process. To assist in locating errors, have a peer review of the poster prior to production. *See* Larive & Bulska, *supra* n. 24, at 1348.

84. For example, AALS limits posters to three feet by four feet. AALS 2013 Memorandum on Poster Presentations, *supra* n. 41. In 2010, LWI required that the posters not exceed eight feet by four feet. Centeno, *supra* n. 73, at 2.

85. *See supra* nn. 60, 73.

86. *See supra* n. 42.

87. In the AALS Section on Legal Writing, Reasoning and Research and the Section on Teaching Methods, the Poster Committee reviews and selects the posters to be displayed at the Annual Meeting.

In contrast, for LWI poster presentations, the presenter need not submit a copy of the poster. *See Call for Proposals for the 15th Biennial Conference of the Legal Writing Institute* 4, [http://law.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/final\\_2012\\_cfp.pdf](http://law.uoregon.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/final_2012_cfp.pdf) (accessed Sept. 6, 2012). In fact, in the Call for Proposals for the Biennial Conference, a prospective oral presenter can indicate that he or she would be willing to do a poster presentation if his or her oral presentation is not selected. *Id.* at 3. If a presenter agrees to do a poster, unlike AALS, LWI does not see the actual poster until it is presented. *See id.* at 4. Nevertheless, the LWI Program Committee highly recommends that presenters send drafts of their posters to an assigned mentor once their poster has been accepted. *Id.*

state the presenter's name, law school, Section for which the presenter is submitting, the title of the poster, description of what will be presented, and an electronic copy of the poster.<sup>88</sup> AALS then sends the proposals to the Section Chair and Chair Elect.<sup>89</sup>

If the poster is accepted for display, the next step is to print and deliver the poster to the venue. While this may sound simple, it is costly<sup>90</sup> and the logistics can be the most challenging part of the entire process.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, take the time to read the detailed instructions regarding how the poster should be produced and the methods of delivering the poster to the conference venue.<sup>92</sup>

Once the poster has successfully arrived, the next step is to set up the poster.<sup>93</sup> First, confirm when and where the poster can be set up.<sup>94</sup> In addition to the poster, it is a good idea to provide handouts of the poster or, if the poster is based on an article, copies of the article or the abstract.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, the author can incorporate a QR code in the poster or display a QR code alongside the poster.<sup>96</sup> Finally, do not forget to bring along some business cards.<sup>97</sup>

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88. AALS 2013 Memorandum on Poster Presentations, *supra* n. 41.

89. *Id.*

90. For example, for the 2010 Annual Meeting, it cost \$160 to have the poster printed on the foam board backing and another \$110 to have it shipped to the conference hotel in New Orleans.

91. These logistics can include, among other things, creating a poster file that is the correct resolution and file type to be printed as a large poster, arranging for the delivery of the poster to the venue, and confirming the delivery of the poster.

92. According to the AALS Call for Posters, the posters must be on foam board because the posters are displayed on easels that are provided. AALS 2013 memorandum on Poster Presentations, *supra* n. 41. In contrast, LWI recommends laminating the poster and not placing it on foam board because the posters are posted on bulletin boards provided in the exhibit hall. Centeno, *supra* n. 73, at 2.

The poster can be produced beforehand and shipped to the venue, produced beforehand and hand-carried by the poster presenter to the venue, or produced once the poster presenter has arrived at the venue city. Regardless of the method chosen, it is always a good idea to bring a copy of the poster on a thumb drive just in case there are complications. If the poster is printed beforehand and mailed to the venue, take into consideration that it will take twenty-four to forty-eight hours for the poster to be printed.

93. If the presenter cannot attend the conference, the presenter must arrange to have someone set up the poster and to stand by the poster during the presentation period.

94. Although AALS provides an easel and LWI provides push pins, it is always a good idea to bring some basic equipment just in case—tape, scissors, push pins, and a stapler.

95. The handout of the poster or abstract should include the presenter's name, address, and phone number. It is also a good idea to bring a folder to attach to the easel or a box to place on the floor to hold the handouts.

96. A QR—or Quick Response—code consists of black modules arranged in a square pattern on a white background. In essence, these codes are paper-based hyperlinks that link the user directly to a website containing the relevant material posted there. To read

While the poster will be displayed throughout the conference, poster presenters are scheduled to stand by their poster at a particular time during the conference. It is generally a good idea to prepare a quick summary of the poster that succinctly sets forth its message.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, poster presentations are not oral presentations and should allow for an exchange between the presenter and the audience.<sup>99</sup> Keep in mind that the goal is to provide the audience with sufficient information so that they understand the concept behind the poster, and therefore, feel comfortable asking questions.

On a final note, at the end of the conference, if the presenter wants to keep the poster, he or she must make sure to remove the poster before the deadline.<sup>100</sup> In light of the time, money, and effort placed into the project, it is a good idea to send it back to the law school. Posters that are not removed are discarded.

## V. CONCLUSION

Poster presentations are a newcomer in the legal field. Faculty members should capitalize on this exciting new form of scholarship for conveying their ideas to their peers. While the process of creating a poster is relatively straightforward, the benefits of creating a poster are vast.

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the QR code, the user needs to simply install a QR code reader onto his or her smartphone. As co-chair of the LWI committee in charge of poster presentations at the 2012 LWI Conference in Desert Springs, California, the Author arranged—for the first time—to have QR Codes created for all of the posters. These QR codes provide attendees with access to a website that contains the posters and related materials.

97. Just as with the handouts, it is a good idea to bring something to hold the business cards so that they are available even when the presenter is not at the poster. For example, attach an envelope to the easel or board to hold the cards and adhere a business card to the outside of the envelope.

98. Purrington, *supra* n. 56. That being said, be careful of long-winded introductions that hinder the interaction with the audience.

99. See *supra* nn. 21, 24–25 and accompanying text.

100. When AALS accepts a poster for display, it provides the presenter with extensive instructions on how to have the poster shipped back to the presenter at the close of the Annual Meeting.