

# On Postering Princeton

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## Abstract

A brief discussion of the design and logistical issues involved in on-campus poster advertising.

## 0.1 Assumptions

This document is intended to appeal to groups with the following characteristics:

- Limited time, whether by approaching deadlines, approaching events, or the general lack of time of all Princeton students.
- Adequate, but not unlimited financing for advertising.

Groups with unlimited time or funds may find this guide useful, but it was intended to maximize limited quantities of both, so it may not be the best guide for you.

## 0.2 Objectives

Every postering campaign has a target audience and a message to convey. In general campaigns, the target audience is the undergraduate student body and the message is the time and place of an event. This being an applied, rather than theoretical guide, the rest will focus on that possibility, with the application to other left as an exercise to the reader.

Given a target audience and a specific message, one now needs a poster design and the locations in which it should be displayed.

## 0.3 Design principles

### 0.3.1 Size

Whenever possible, use 11x17 (Tabloid) sized paper for your posters. 8.5x14 (Legal) has slight advantages over 8.5x11 (Letter). If you must conduct a Letter-sized campaign, make up for the small size with high coverage.

### 0.3.2 Typography

Unless you're advertising for a play or musical whose official title uses one, never, *ever*, use a script, handwriting, or other novelty font. They're impossible to read and look unprofessional. Never. Not even if you're advertising for a children's play hour — keep the Kids with Crayolas font where it belongs: gathering dust in the Monotype catalog.

Select one large sans-serif font for the headlines and a smaller serif font for the more detailed information. Try to limit it to two fonts. I recommend Arial Black for the sans-serif and Times New Roman for the serif, simply because most every campus computer has them. Impact is also a good sans-serif font, but I've had some trouble getting it to reproduce or print properly.<sup>1</sup>

The most important words on the poster should be huge — at least twice as large as everything else. If possible, make them arresting, but not gimmicky. “OPEN HOUSE SENATE DEBATE” (in huge letters) was the opening shot in the Senate this year. “ALCOHOL” followed, a panel discussion advertised once again on large, bright, Tabloid-sized paper. I can't speak for the Alcohol panel, (I was ironically at a forum I saw advertised on a lamppost) but the open-house debate was well-attended.

Minimize the information on the poster, but don't leave out the important facts. Note the sponsoring organization. If it's a debate, put the resolution on it. If it's a panel, put the names of the speakers on it. Always write the date and time prominently, the numeric date (so people know it wasn't *last* Wednesday), and the place on the poster. If it's in a lesser-known campus venue or you're appealing to freshmen, add a small note explaining where they can find “Taplin Auditorium” or the “Wilcox Black Box.” If refreshments are served, make a note of that. All of this text should be large enough to be readable, but about half the size of the big headline.

A word about logos, seals, and other non-text items: leave them off. Whig-Clio had a tradition of putting the society seals on every poster and advertisement. Except for people who were obligated to be at the events, I doubt that anyone on campus recognized them, much less attached any significance to them. They just took up valuable paper real estate. If your group has a logo, leave it off. If your group uses the Princeton shield, then *really* leave it off. It's redundant.

A good test for a readable poster involves walking by it. If the banner headline doesn't jump out at you, then redesign it so that it does. When you lean in for a closer look, if the details don't present themselves immediately, then redesign it so that they do.

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<sup>1</sup>Make sure to include a text version of your message if you submit it to a printer electronically. Then call them and make sure everything looks right. If they don't know what it's supposed to look like, they're not responsible if it doesn't reproduce due to font issues. Consider submitting a small raster graphic (a jpeg, for example) along with the image as a guide — just make sure they know it's the guide and not an image you want reproduced! That goes doubly for photographic images where color-correction is an issue.

### 0.3.3 Color

Every poster should use color. I recommend a two-color approach: standard black for the type, and a bright background: a hot color such as light orange, light red, pink, or bright yellow. Never use a cool or dark color such as deep purple or blue, unless you have a strongly contrasting type color (such as white). The poster will blend in to its surroundings, and no one will see it. Prefer white paper to blue paper. This goes doubly for small posters. Colored paper is generally the same price as white at copying establishments, so be sure to use it.

Even if your group can underwrite the cost of color copying, think hard before you use it. Unless you have a particularly striking photo that will reproduce well, go with two-tone. Most color signs on campus are hard to read with ill-chosen colors and blurry photographs.

### 0.3.4 Orientation

Tabloid and legal-size posters generally look best when displayed vertically. Letter-size posters are a toss-up — use whatever suits your design.

## 0.4 Display principles

### 0.4.1 Displays to avoid

The limiting factor for design options is generally pecuniary, while the limiting factor for display options is almost always temporal. Given a set of posters, the idea is to obtain maximum coverage in minimum time.

Initial guidelines include places to avoid. Unless your posters are 11x17 or greater, do not bother with lampposts or bollards. You may notice, as you travel the campus, that the combined work of wind and rain destroy lamppost- and bollard- mounted posters faster than any others. Bollards have the particular disadvantage of being at eye level of young children, who do not compose most of the Undergraduate Student Body. Given good weather, bollards and lampposts still carry the disadvantage of being round, while your posters are flat. Curving of the posters destroys their visual appeal.

Finally, attaching a poster to a bollard or lamppost requires a good deal more time than attaching one to a bulletin board or wall.

In an earlier version of this paper, I directed harsh words at the practice of postering lampposts. Conversations with classmates, namely members of the Princeton Committee Against Terrorism, have convinced me that time spent postering lampposts is not wasted, as long as one accounts for the distortion of posters stapled to lampposts. One member of the group suggested stapling the edges of posters together prior to hanging them; a time-saver if one adopts the paired-poster method.

While it is gauche to mention it, some poster campaigns have appeared in campus washrooms. While this author is able to comment only on one-half of Princeton's facilities, at least two campaigns appeared in dormitory restrooms during the Fall of 2001. Depending on the event, one may wish to take advantage of the temporarily captive audience afforded by restroom stall-doors.

## 0.4.2 Displays to use

Get every bulletin board in every entryway at least once. Get the bulletin boards in the residential colleges, too. Get the boards in Frist, but notice that since Frist emphasizes north-south movement and the bulletin boards are on east-west walls, they're easily missed.

If you have extra posters, add multiple posters at every location. This is especially important if you have small posters. Cover any poster whose event has passed. If you can't find any, try to minimize the number of posters that you block when you put up your poster. Consider stabling

If your event is happening the following day, consider placing the posters on entryway doors. They'll probably be torn down in 24 hours, but that's more than you need. The half-second or so that one spends looking at the door as it is pushed open is coverage that no other poster gets. Note that this may be a violation of the fire code.

Attaching posters to non-bulletin board surfaces is much slower than attaching them to bulletin boards, simply because of the number of motions involved. Unless you have a one-handed reel of tape (a tape gun might work well for this purpose), the action of unwinding the tape necessarily takes two hands. When stapling posters, you should generally work alone, or in pairs, but cover each entryway separately. When taping, working in pairs may be faster, since the slowdown incurred because you have two people entering each entryway is made up by the fact that you have four hands instead of two.

Some departments insist that you use tacks to attach posters, and will have prominently posted signs announcing this. Indulge them. They usually have tacks on the board. If not, remove them from posters for events that have passed, or tack your poster using the tacks from the bottom of another poster.

## 0.5 Closing

Poster design is straightforward, and poster production takes less than a day. A dedicated group of ten may be able to poster the entire campus in an hour, if they work quickly and have enough staplers. With organization, your group will reduce the time and effort necessary to advertise on campus.

## 0.6 Administrivia

The above are merely suggestions as to how to conduct a poster-based advertising campaign. They do not carry the endorsement of any campus groups. The author, Joseph Barillari, urges advertisers to comply with all relevant campus regulations when launching a poster campaign

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