

Designing Your CWSF Poster – Living Draft

Guided by Effective STEM Communication and #betterSTEMposter

Your STEM fair poster has two purposes:

1. Provide **you** with material to refer to when speaking with judges. Judges will have looked over your ProjectBoard project, and can look through your logbook, so they don't expect all your project information to be on your poster.
2. Engage and inform other STEM fair contestants and public visitors, many of whom will be students in grades 5-10. Your poster should be written using conversational language (nothing too complex), and the content should encourage the type of questions you want people to ask.

When creating your CWSF project poster, here are some suggestions to help you design a poster that is easy for judges and public viewers to read and comprehend. Remember: this template is optional, and while YSC encourages using it and following these tips, your poster design is ultimately up to you!

CWSF poster template:

- This is a PowerPoint file, matching the size of the two CWSF poster backboards. You can learn more about the display dimensions here: [CWSF Project Display policy](#).
- You'll notice some dotted line guides along the edges of the template. These will be used by the printer to guide their layout and trimming, but they will not actually print on your poster. **NOTE:** The template is **bigger** than the display dimensions. This is to allow for the trim and bleed lines. If you do not see the lines on the template edges, go to View and check off the Guides box to make them appear. Ask the printer to trim it to the correct size following these guides:
 - Green lines: Safety lines – keep text within this line to avoid it getting cut off.
 - Blue lines: Trim line – this is where the printer will trim the edges of your poster; anything beyond this line will be cut off.
 - Red lines: Bleed lines – any coloured blocks and images that extend to or beyond this line will go to the edge of the poster, eliminating the white border.
- The template includes the same sections as your ProjectBoard poster (minus the Summary and Video sections), with slightly smaller suggested word limits.
- On your ProjectBoard project, you'll see an "Export" button at the top right. This is an easy way to transfer the text from your online project to your poster – just click the "Export" button to download a single text file of all the content, which you can then use to copy and paste in your poster. The export won't include images, but you can add those in directly as you design your poster, though you may need to create versions at higher resolution (300 ppi is best).
- CWSF poster template #betterSTEMposter video – coming soon!

Do:

- Keep text to a minimum – follow the approximate word limits for each section in our template.
- Tell a story – this is what draws people in and gets them interested. What inspired you to do your project, and why is it important? How did you do your project? What were your results? Why are your results important? And what are your next steps? Answering all these questions is an effective way to share the story of your project with your viewers.
- Use large images, large text, and only the figures that show your key results. If it's not part of your main project storyline, leave it off. Put extra info you might refer to with a judge in your logbook or a separate binder.

- Use images/diagrams that help to tell your project story – make sure each one is labelled (e.g., Figure 1 – Description; Table 1 – Description)
- Use graphs/tables that show key results – your most important data deserves a large graph/table. Graphs of preliminary/trial data can usually be left off and kept in your logbook.
- List your references and thank those who helped you with your project – it is important to acknowledge the support you received – this can be done in a much smaller font size than the rest of the poster.
- Ask friends, family, teachers, and others to look over your poster:
 - Is it clear? Can they identify the key result of your project in 5 seconds?
 - Is there space for your eye to ‘rest’? Or is it too busy with images and text?
 - Are there spelling or grammatical errors?
- Finally, make your poster your own! The template and suggestions provided are optional and provided to help you get started, but feel free to be creative. Use layouts, colours, and images that you think showcase your project in the best way possible.

Don’t:

- Use too much text – it becomes hard to read and comprehend the key points. Extra information or data can always be in your logbook and referred to when speaking with judges.
- Put your title on your poster – the CWSF display unit includes a preprinted header board that includes your project number, title, finalist name(s), and provincial flag. So, save the space on your poster for other things.
- Include raw, unsynthesized data – For example, instead of showing a table with each measurement taken of a growing bean plant and every photo you took, keep that data in your logbook, and instead, show a graph of the overall growth. This synthesizes the data in a way that people can understand more quickly and clearly, see trends, outlier data, etc.
- Use photos or graphics you haven’t cited properly in your references – you **must** give credit for photos or graphics you didn’t create yourself.
 - All your photos, diagrams, tables, and graphs should be labelled and/or include captions
- Forget to proofread – spelling and grammatical errors can be caught if you take the time to carefully look it over.

Additional suggestions:

- Check out examples in My Documents on the registration portal to see how this template can be used. There is a generic sample, along with two examples based on Discovery and Innovation projects from CWSF 2022.
- Looking for images to enhance your poster? Check out these sites with free-to-use images and diagrams:
 - Biological diagrams - biorender.com
 - Chemical diagrams - molview.org
 - Lab tool diagrams - chemix.org
 - Icons (there are lots of sites to choose from!) – e.g., thenounproject.com
 - Photos (there are lots of sites to choose from!) – e.g., pixabay.com
- You may want to display a short video or model of your project to help to illustrate your project. Please review the [CWSF Project Display policy](#) for information on what you can and cannot display, and the space restrictions.
- Large posters can be costly to print, but you don’t have to print two large posters – you can print smaller sections and attach them to the CWSF display unit backboards.

- Shop around when getting your poster printed. Some municipal offices, architects, or smaller print companies will offer better prices for large-format printing than big box stores.
- Past finalists have recommended that putting clear packing tape on the back of their posters before they arrive – especially around the edges and on the diagonals (purple lines in the diagram). This helps with attaching the poster to the CWSF backboards. The adhesive strips that must be used (see the [CWSF Project Display policy](#) for more information) stick to the packing tape instead of the paper directly and allow for easy adjustment or removal at the end of the week, without tearing.



FAQ:

Do I have to follow the YSC-recommended template/design?

No. You are free to design your poster however you'd like, using your choice of colours, images, and layouts. However, we recommend the YSC template for a few reasons. Most importantly, it is a research-driven design that takes advantage of how people absorb information – a big takeaway statement over your hero image to summarizing your findings, limited text overall, and key photos and diagrams. We encourage you to change the colours and pictures and redesign the layout but try to follow the word limits. If you do use the template, consider letting us know by tagging YSC on social media at #cwsf2023 and #betterSTEMposter.

How do I sum up my project in one sentence?

Think about the most important finding in your discovery project, or the key result of your innovation. What is the one thing or the main finding that you want people to learn in five seconds of looking at your poster? This is what you want to share in large text as the big takeaway statement – the largest section on your poster.

How do I know what to put on my poster?

Some good questions to ask yourself about each thing on your poster: Does this help me tell the story of my project? Does this reinforce/explain the most important part of my project? If the answer is a clear "Yes", then add it. If the answer is, "No", keep that information and content in your logbook, but not on your poster. If you're unsure, ask a teacher or mentor for advice, but remember: less is more!

This poster design looks different. Will judges be made aware of this?

Yes, the National Judging Committee, whose members are STEM professionals and researchers, developed the ProjectBoard template and encourages the use of these new poster layouts. The poster is about communicating your findings in the best way possible to STEM fair visitors. Judges look at your ProjectBoard project (which they will have read before even visiting your project), logbook, and learn from their conversation with you during judging. Your poster doesn't need to contain every bit of information – just the most important findings. Judges will look at your logbook if they need more information, and they'll certainly ask questions when they meet with you.