Quick Start to Creating Posters in PowerPoint

Note that this guide is for Office 2013 for Windows. Some of the items are placed differently in other versions. (I have no idea what to do when using Office for Mac.) The principles remain the same.

1. Open PowerPoint
2. In the Design tab, select Slide Size.
3. Select Custom Slide Size…
4. Set you width and height appropriately. (Most scientific posters are 48” wide × 36” tall.)
5. Select any and all automatically generated text boxes by left-clicking and dragging a box around them and then tapping the Delete key.

At this point, you may begin with whatever part of the poster you like. For this tutorial, let’s start with:

Placing Titles

1. In the Insert tab, click Text Box.
2. Near the top left region of your poster, click to insert the text box.
3. In the Drawing Tools Format tab, click the small arrow icon in the Size ribbon. A sidebar on the right will appear for you to edit the shape.
4. You can change the height, width, and position of your title text box here. Change the position so that it is a round number of inches (1” is good) away from the top and left. Set the width so that the text box is the same distance from the right as it is from the left. (For 48” wide posters with 1 inch margins, the width should be 46”.)
5. Select the Text Box pulldown and then select the Wrap Text.
6. In the Home tab, select your font and size.
7. In the Home tab, find and click the center text button in the Paragraph ribbon.
8. Write a title. If you need a pretend one, try, “Here is my title. Isn’t it wonderful? Let’s see what else I can write, shall we?” This will take up a bunch of space, and you’ll need to go back and adjust your font and size.
9. You can put the authors in this same text box or include a separate one. Remember that you are probably the first author, your mentor is the last author, and anyone else who deserves to be on the poster should appear in between. Also, the author list should be to the font size of the title.

Three-Column Poster Outline

There are multiple ways to layout posters, but the most common one is the 3-column format. The reader knows to follow the content starting in the top left of the leftmost column and then work his or her way from column to column. It may or may not work for your own poster, and being unconventional is a great way to make a poster stand out. That said, nothing succeeds like success, so here is a quick guide to making a 3-column poster.

* Start by creating boxes that will define the columns. (Note that these boxes may or may not be left in the final version of the poster.) In the Insert tab, select shapes and find the rectangle.
1. Draw it but don’t worry about the details of its size or placement yet.
2. In the Drawing Tools Format tab, select Shape Fill and then select No Fill. This is better than white, because it will be clear.
3. Select Shape Outline and pick a color. If you are unsure, just pick black.
4. Click the small button with an arrow next to Size. The options for size will appear in a pane on the right.
5. The following assume that you want to use 1” margins and a 48” × 36” poster. In the horizontal field, fill in 1.0.
6. Adjust the vertical field so that the box does not overlap with the features at the top of your poster. 8” is a good temporary value.
7. Go to Size in the menu on the left. Set the width to 15.33. (Because you have 1” margins, you have 48”-1”-1”=46” in width. Divide that by 3 to get 15.33.)
8. Set your height such that your box will be 1” from the bottom. If you used 8” for the position relative to the top, then the height should 36”-8”-1”=27”.
9. Copy and paste the shape. Use your mouse to align the new shape to the right of the leftmost shape. PowerPoint will allow the shape to snap into place. Repeat for the right column.

You can go on to put all sorts of other things inside of those boxes, and the PowerPoint snap feature will keep all of the objects aligned with those boxes.