Tips for Creating Traditional Posters

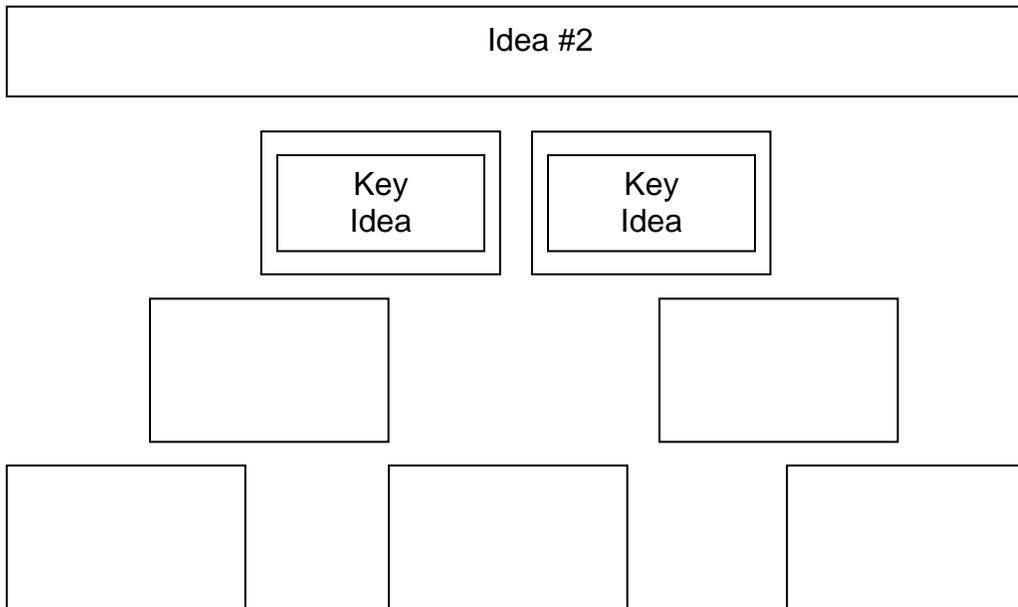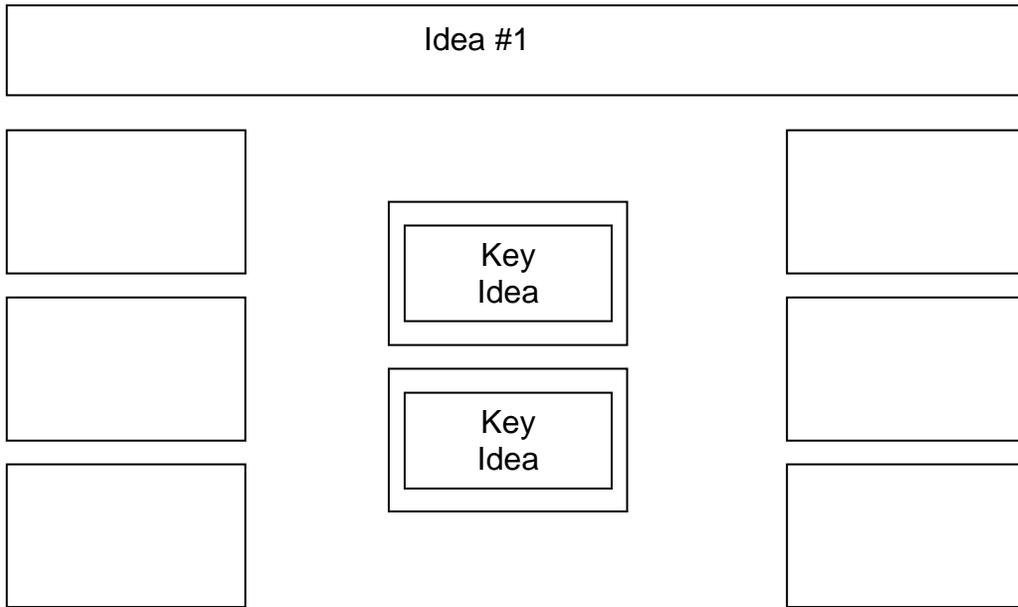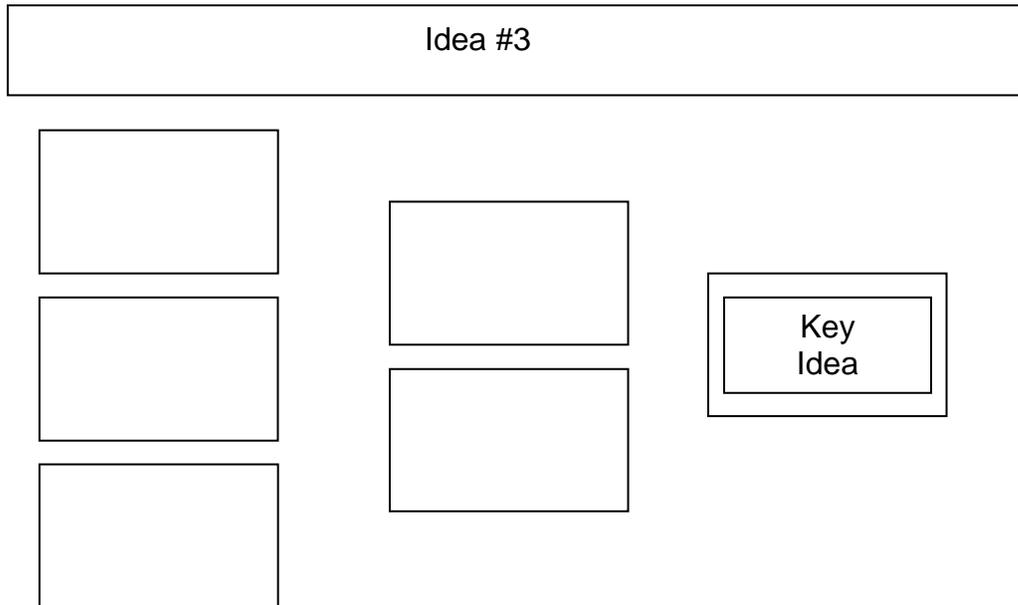Scientific posters, regardless of format and aesthetics, need to be driven by a clear, concise message in order to deliver the greatest impact. (For a broader discussion of message-driven posters, please click here. [link to Creating a Message-Driven Poster pdf])

If you're short on time or budget to create a professionally printed large-format poster you can still develop an effective poster using 8 ½" x 11" sheets of paper and PowerPoint slides. Doing so gives you the added benefits of easily modifying your poster and carrying it on airplanes hassle-free!

There are several tips for formatting an interesting and effective poster using good, old-fashioned copy paper:

1. **Use PowerPoint to create slides with a simple, consistent background for each sheet of paper**. Softer pastels and grays will generally work better as a background. You can also use different colored paper to create frames around the sheets you most want to emphasize/highlight.

2. **Use legal-sized paper or larger for the title of your poster**. Use a short, interesting, or catchy title with a big typeface, at least 108 pt. For example, "Swallowing A Bitter Pill: Tough Medication Management Issues Facing Nursing Homes" has more appeal than "High Risk Medications and Nursing Home Error."

3. **Try to have your main points toward the top of the poster**, also in big type (72 pt. +) to enable people to view "big picture" of your poster from a distance.

4. **Use headlines to differentiate different aspects of your poster**: We recommend that you use section headlines that further carry your message, although the traditional "Abstract," "Methods," "Data/Results," "Implications," "Conclusions," can also be used.

5. In general, **avoid typefaces below 20 pt.**, which are difficult to read from a distance of four feet or more. Try to use 24 pt at least.

6. **Justify the left margin, but not the right.** Justifying both margins makes the text harder to read and with bigger typefaces produces strange spacing between letters and words.

7. **Arrange the sheets creatively to draw viewers in**. Here are some ideas:

Idea #1

Key
Idea

Key
Idea

Idea #2

Key
Idea

Key
Idea

Idea #3

Key
Idea

And last, if you feel lost or confused about these kinds of design decisions, get help (sooner, rather than later). Just as you are able to identify a scientific issue and then develop methods for testing a hypothesis, graphic designers (or one of your colleagues who has a flair for this kind of thing) can take one look at your poster and figure out how to make it beautiful. There is no extra credit for struggling when help is close by.