Features of effective 3-Ideas posters and pitches

The elements of your presentation are twofold: your poster and your 40-second “elevator pitch.”

1. POSTER
Your poster needs to be informative and engaging. While it must include the information stipulated on the 2.009 website, the trick is to make that information easy to take in and compelling to the audience.

The poster should first grab the audience’s attention, and then draw them deeper in. Figure out what you want your audience to focus on immediately, and make that information jump off the page. Remember that you want everything on the poster to be legible from 50 feet away.

What elements can make an idea jump off the poster?

• Well-drawn sketch (not necessarily super-detailed!)
• Striking use of color (exploiting and/or complementing team color)
• Great name
• Great logo or catchy tagline
• Really key information visually highlighted in some way
• An element that suggests context (e.g., the ghost of a human hand if your product idea is a device worn on the wrist)

What doesn’t work?

• Overload/clutter, not simple enough
• Sketch too light – lines not bold enough
• Absence of focal point
• Overload of color, or no color scheme
• Text too small or too fancy – keep it clear and crisp

After you sketch out a poster design, make sure your supporting information is understandable, to the point, and easy to read. Keep the text on your poster to a minimum, but don’t cut it down so much that it would mystify a casual reader. (Abbreviations often fall into this trap.) TEST before final printing and mounting.

2. PRESENTATION TALK
Your presentation should be clear and informative, and it should convince the audience that there is a genuine need for the product. We should understand both the problem the product solves or need it meets, and the particular technical approach you might be using to solve it.

Organization
A 40-second presentation needs to be even more organized, if possible, than a longer one: your time is so short that you can’t afford any dead weight, but you also shouldn’t leave useful material out.

Make sure that each segment of the presentation has a beginning, middle and end – that is, an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.
• **The introduction** is where you hook the audience’s attention (some of the many ways to do this include giving them a particularly impressive statistic that demonstrates the need for your product; relating a compelling – but brief! – anecdote; or posing a question to the audience). **Here, at the outset**, you should introduce them to your product concept.

• In the **body**, give the details of the idea. Talk the audience through the material on your poster, and flesh out as necessary.

• In the **conclusion**, you sum up what the audience should remember about the product.

**Delivery**
To make your talk persuasive as well as informative, practice the following aspects of communication in mind:

**Connection**: Speak directly to the audience: relax and try to be natural, not stiff. During rehearsals and in the presentation itself, imagine that you’re addressing yourself to audience members at the front, back, left, and right of the room. Don’t just talk to the video camera or the instructors! You should draw the audience’s attention to your poster (certainly don’t ignore it!) but your own focus should always be on them.

It’s wonderful to use humor, but keep it in the service of the presentation. Test it out, critically, during rehearsals: if a joke distracts in any way from the product information, it is better omitted.

**Honesty**: Avoid coming across like an infomercial spokesperson. The audience should feel as though the presenter is giving a fair evaluation of the merits of the project, not trying to sell them a bill of goods. Stay away from insubstantial praise (“This product is AMAZING and REVOLUTIONARY!”), and gravitate toward the concrete and specific (“This product should reduce CO2 emissions in large cities by at least 10%”).

**Posture**: Physically orient yourself toward the audience (rather than the poster). Stand straight, with weight firmly centered over both feet, to promote steadiness and good vocal control.

**Voice**: It is the presenter’s responsibility to make sure the audience doesn’t miss anything. Be sensitive to issues of volume (project your voice so as to be easily audible, but don’t yell), speed (don’t zip through so quickly that you can’t be understood), and articulation (make sure each word is distinctly enunciated). The presenter should also avoid “up talk” (ending declarative sentences on a rising pitch, as though asking a question) while speaking through each sentence to the end.

**3. REHEARSE AND REVISE**
As with any planned communication event, preparation, rehearsal, and revision are critical for your success. Prior to the 3-Ideas presentation, it will be helpful for your team to conduct a full rehearsal (complete with a draft poster) in front of an actual audience. The 2.009 communication instructors will be hosting a structured rehearsal on Sunday, September 24 (the day before the 3-Ideas presentation), and the presenters and their teammates are encouraged to attend. The rehearsal will enable you to hear your own words and receive important feedback from instructors and your teammates to revise and improve your presentation content and delivery.