How to make a poster and prepare a pitch for a poster presentation

A poster is a relatively new presentation tool that junior scholars such as PhD candidates use to pitch their research project at conferences.

What is a poster presentation?

- At most international conferences, poster presentations are limited to hanging posters in a particular area (e.g., in the hallways or close to the coffee/lunch facilities), so that junior and senior scholars can walk by and look at them during breaks.
- Increasingly, poster presentations consist of putting up posters in combination with short pitches to a small group of colleagues, followed by a brief exchange of views intended for questions, discussion and advice. This is the format we use in the Kick-off meeting of the Huizinga Core Course 1.

How can you design poster practically?

- The easiest way is to create three A3 slides in PowerPoint (adjust the size!), which you then print separately (in color) and hang under each other. In PowerPoint, make use of <insert text> (text boxes) and <insert shapes> (e.g. arrows).
- Another online program you can use is Google Drawings. There you can determine the format and layout yourself.
- Be creative! Do not hesitate to ask more experienced peers for advice and assistance.

How do you shape the poster content?

- There are obviously different ways to lay out your slides. Yet make sure you include at least these elements:
    - Your name and title of your presentation
    - Topic, research question
    - State of the art
    - Sources and methods (source selection, source critique, sub-questions, possibly concepts, etc.)
    - Preliminary results/findings and interpretations.
    - Preliminary conclusion / working hypothesis
    - Possibly: problems and/or dilemmas, questions to fellow researchers
- Try to adopt the viewer's point of view while designing your poster. Make sure your audience can understand the order of your presentation – even without explanations – and is able to quickly digest the content you offer. Provide guidance by using headings, colors, arrows, etc.
- Less is more: limit your presentation to the essentials and make sure everything is clear. Avoid a poster-based essay. Therefore, limit the number of words and longer passages of text.
- Make use of bullets or other graphic devices that help clarifying what you want to communicate.
- Insert (relevant) diagrams, images, tables and figures. Make sure these are readable and of sufficient graphic quality.

How do you structure your pitch?

- Start immediately by simply communicating your topic and your overall research question
    - No rhetorical lead-up needed -> simply: “my project is about xxx” / “the key question I am trying to answer is: xxx”
- Then convince your audience of the scientific relevance.
    - Simply say: “this issue is scientifically relevant because xxx”.
    - Then give a little more information about the state of the art to strengthen your argument
- Next, convince your audience of the quality of your research approach:
    - First, simply inform your audience what sources and methods you are using (also: sub-questions, concepts)
    - Explain why these sources promise to be productive, what limitations they entail (source criticism) and why you expect the chosen methods will help you to effectively answer your question.
- Then present a sample of your materials, to shortly illustrate how you will proceed
- End with preliminary/hypothetical conclusions/answers to your question
- If you have time left: add some open-ended questions you might have/ask your fellow researchers to think along with you

How are we going to handle this logistically during the Kick-Off meeting of the Huizinga CC1?

- You will each bring a poster printed on paper. Make sure you arrive punctually!
- You will each prepare a short pitch of max. 2 minutes
- We will hang approximately 25 posters in the class room, in a random order (we will provide magnets/tape)
- We will have four presentation rounds of about half an hour each
- In each round seven PhDs will be standing next to their posters (the ‘pitchers’), while all other participants will be mingling (the ‘minglers’). At the start of our meeting a detailed schedule will be available.
- Those who mingle make sure they switch every 10 minutes to another pitch. In doing so they need to be aware that every pitch can accommodate an audience of no more than 4 persons.
- The PhDs standing next to their poster (the ‘pitchers’) will deliver their 2-minute pitch every 10 minutes, followed by questions and answers.
- After listening to the pitch by one of their fellow PhDs and engaging in the debate that follows this pitch, the ‘minglers’ will switch to one of the other posters where a pitch is going to be delivered. They may choose themselves which pitch they prefer to attend. In every 30-minutes round, such a ‘petit changement’ happens twice.
- At the end of every round a ‘grand changement’ will occur: seven other PhDs will take their positions next to their posters, and start giving their 2-minute pitches. In this new round all other PhDs will be mingling and attend at least three consecutive pitches (always making sure the audiences are well balanced: no more than 4 persons per pitch).
- This means that in the end every participant will have had the opportunity to present her/his pitch and poster three times, to an audience of some 10 fellow PhDs in total
- It also means that every participant will be able to attend the poster/pitch presentation of some 10 of her/his fellow PhDs

- The posters will remain in place all through the day, which means that also during the breaks and the final drinks people will be able to see and discuss the projects as presented in these posters