

# Lost Pet Poster Instructions

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Posters are one of the most successful methods for finding lost dogs and cats, but in order to be effective, they need to be designed correctly. An effective lost pet poster is both eye-catching and easy to read, especially from a distance. You may think that you already have posters up and that "everyone knows" your pet is missing but this is rarely the case. In my 10+ years' experience as a pet detective, I rarely see people create effective posters on their first try.

## Poster Legalities

Please be aware that putting up posters may be against town bylaws in many locations. You may be able to find your town bylaws online or by contacting your Town Clerk. A good indication of how strict your town may be about posting signs is whether other signs are posted, especially tag sale signs, and how many staples are already in utility poles. While it is by far easiest to place posters on utility poles with a staple gun, please be aware that these poles are owned by the utility company and you are not supposed to affix anything to them. Nailing posters to trees is also illegal in some states. If you want to avoid risk of possible warnings or fines, consider attaching posters to a piece of cardboard and staking them into the ground (like a political sign).

## Selecting a Poster Size

In general, bigger posters are better. The larger and more brightly colored your poster, the more likely people are to notice and read it. The only exception is if you live in an area that is averse to posters, in which case, smaller posters may stay up longer. In many cases, it makes sense to use a variety of poster sizes depending on where you put them up.

### Small Posters

Small letter-sized (8.5" x 11") posters are most effective in areas where people walk or cars stop at small intersections. These don't work very well if cars are driving more than 30 mph though you can increase their effectiveness by placing several posters up close together. Small posters are cheaper and may stay up longer in areas that are less tolerant of signage. Place in page protectors, laminate or print on waterproof/rip-proof paper, so they aren't destroyed by the first rain. To make these more visible, attach to fluorescent poster board or use brightly colored tape. Typical cost to print is \$0.50 to \$2.50 per poster.

### Large Posters

Large ledger-size (11" x 17") posters are much more visible. They work best where cars stop at intersections or are driving less than 40 mph. In general, these must be printed at a print shop. Laminate or print on waterproof/rip-proof paper, so they aren't destroyed by the first rain. To make these more visible, attach to fluorescent poster board or use brightly colored tape. Typical cost to print is \$3.50 to \$6.00 per poster.

### Extra-Large Posters

If you live in an area where people are driving more than 45 mph and/or there are mostly busy multi-lane roads, you may need to create some extra-large size posters. I do not yet have templates for these since they can't be easily printed off. However, I suggest watching [this instructional video](#) by The Retrievers. If time rather than money is a primary factor, you could get yard signs designed and printed.

## How to Download and Edit Your Poster

The poster template files are in [Microsoft PowerPoint](#) (PPT). If you don't have PowerPoint, then you have a few options for editing your posters. Purchase Microsoft Office 365. They often offer a free trial. Alternatively, use a free program like [Open Office](#) or [Google Slides](#). To use Google Slides, first download the PPT files to your computer. Then upload to your Google Drive. If you don't already have a Google Drive, all you need to do is create a free Google account.

Each poster template comes with a variety of poster designs to choose from. Select the one that works best for you and replace the text with your information and pet's photo. You can copy and paste elements from any of the poster designs. Once you are done editing, delete all the slides except your poster slide. Then save a copy in PowerPoint or Google slides in case you decide to make future edits. Lastly, download a PDF copy of your poster. A PDF works best for printing and sharing your poster because the format won't get messed up if people use different program versions.

## Poster Design Tips

### Designing Your Poster

No matter what size poster you make, use as few words as possible and make the text as large as possible. Text to include on the poster:

- "Lost Dog", "Lost Cat" or just "Lost"
- A very brief description of your pet. This may not be necessary if you have a clear picture and your pet is an obvious color such as black & white. Include breed if it is well known.
- Date lost or last seen.
- A phone number in the largest text possible. Just use one phone number or the text will be too small. If you need multiple people to receive the calls, consider getting a [Google Number](#).

Optional text to include (only include these if you are using a large enough poster that you have room):

- Area lost from or last seen. For personal safety, only put an area, town or intersection and do not include your address. If posting online or for an animal that might travel far, be sure to include your state too.
- An email address, Facebook page or website for more information. Offering more ways to get in touch such as texting, email or Facebook can increase the number of potential sightings that you receive. A Facebook page or website can also allow you to provide additional information (such as more photos) and updates on the search.
- Include a note if your pet is shy or afraid such as "Shy! Do Not Chase!"
- State if your cat is an indoor-only cat.
- Note any noticeable characteristics, especially those visible from a distance. e.g. red collar or white tail tip or may be dragging leash.
- Include a specific call-to-action such as "Call or Text If Seen" or "Call Immediately Anytime". This may seem unnecessary, but sometimes people do not feel that they should call unless they actually have the lost pet in their possession.

## Selecting a Photo

One of the most important parts of your poster is the photo of your pet. Like the text on your poster, the photo needs to be easily visible and recognizable from a distance.

- If possible, select a photo that shows your pet's entire body. Standing in profile is best but these can be hard to find. You want people to easily see the size and shape of your pet as they would look from a distance.
- Try not to use photos from unusual angles such as pointing down from above or your pet rolling over on their back. Likewise, try to avoid photos of your pet wearing clothes or being held by a person.
- Crop out as much background as possible. You can use a program like Adobe Photoshop or Microsoft Paint (a free program on many PCs). If you prefer you could pay someone else to do this by hiring someone on [Fiverr](#), which starts at just \$5 for many projects. Just search for "remove photo background" and make sure the person you hire has a fast turnaround time.
- If you don't have a good photo of your pet, you could try searching for photos online that look similar. Only use these if they look very similar to your missing pet.

### Example Photos



Fig 1. All unnecessary background has been removed



Fig 2. All background removed with Photoshop.

## Offering a Reward

Rewards are most important if your lost cat or dog is very outgoing and friendly, a puppy or kitten or a high-value purebred. However, rewards are NEVER recommended for dogs if they are likely running loose because this can encourage people to chase the dog to try and catch them. This can result in the

lost dog running even farther away or worst case running into traffic and being killed. Many people are willing to help or call without a reward.

Offering a reward has potential positive and negative effects for lost cats. People are accustomed to seeing loose cats, so they don't often notice them or assume they are lost. A reward can provide an extra incentive for people to actually pay attention to roaming cats and maybe even check their own yard thoroughly for any cats. If someone does attempt to approach or catch the lost cat, the cat may run but probably won't go very far before they hide. If your signs without rewards are not generating any sightings after a week or two, then you could always add a reward later.

On the negative side, people may try and chase or catch your pet and NOT tell you about sightings because they want to make sure that they get the reward and not someone else. To reduce the chance of people attempting to catch your lost pet themselves, include the following text "Reward for information leading to return" and "Shy - Do Not Chase!" If multiple people provide information that leads to the capture of your lost pet, then best practice is to divide the reward among them.

Whether or not you include a specific reward amount on the poster is up to you, but if you do not put an amount, people will either call you asking what the reward is or they will probably assume the reward is not very much - unless you put something like "large cash reward". I generally recommend reward amounts between \$100-\$500. Larger rewards can attract the attention of scammers.

If you strongly believe that someone has your dog or cat, you might consider offering a very large reward "for their safe return" and "no questions asked." However, I generally do not recommend including the word "stolen" on your poster. People are less inclined to get involved when they believe a pet was stolen unless it is something high profile like a car theft with a pet inside.

## Printing Your Poster

Small posters may be printed off at home if your printer will accommodate 0.25" margins. Larger posters often require printing at a copy or print shop. Some like [Staples](#) allow you to upload your poster and then pick it up in store. Otherwise, you may be able to email your poster file or bring it to them on a thumb drive.

## Making Your Posters More Visible

Posters work best if placed where people walk, or cars slow down or stop. Make sure to face posters toward on-coming traffic or face people as they walk. Do not place posters so that they face across the street or very few people will see them.

If posters are placed in page protectors, laminated or printed on waterproof or rip-proof paper they will last longer. Attach posters to florescent poster board or use brightly colored tape to make them more visible.

Large posters should not be wrapped around a pole. This makes them very difficult to read. However, this is often okay with smaller posters and they may stay up longer.

Example Large (11 x 17) Poster

# LOST CAT



10/31

**Call  
or  
Text  
if  
Seen**

**Gray & White Tabby  
413-367-7171**