

Making the most of conferences

Going to an academic conference is an exciting opportunity to meet new people, hear about new ideas and make new connections. It's also a major investment of time and travel – so a little planning and forethought can help ensure you get the best long-term benefits for your work and build your circle of peers and potential collaborators.

Before you register:

- Do your homework and make sure this is the right conference where you will meet the right people. Is it an academic association conference or is it also attended by policymakers, practitioners or other stakeholders? This will help you decide which parts of your research to present and how to frame it.
- Offer to convene a panel – either with people whose work you already know or an open call. This will give you greater profile than simply presenting your own work – and can be a great way of finding new collaborators.

In advance of the conference:

- Write your presentation with time to spare. This will give you time to ask colleagues for feedback and comments, and help you to clarify the key messages.
- Keep your slides short and simple (particularly any figures or graphs) – and don't forget to acknowledge your team and your funders. Give your contact details (and Twitter handle) at both the beginning and end.
- Also take a look at our Top Tips on writing a poster if you're new to it.
- Upload your presentation to a repository such as SlideShare or your Academia.edu page, and add a DOI. You don't need to tell anyone it's live until you start talking, but it means that people can read and share your slides – and they will tweet it during the session.
- If you are on Twitter, prepare a few tweets in advance, particularly to let people know you will be presenting. Make a note of the conference hashtag and follow the people and organisations you know will be there and who may retweet you.
- Don't forget to take your business cards with you

If you are attending as a team:

- Consider whether it would be better to present as one panel (to draw ideas together) or on different panels (to maximise the potential audience for your work).
- Produce a simple leaflet giving the time and location of all your team presentations – which you can all take and give to people you meet to encourage them to attend your sessions. You can include some general information about your research and a few of your most recent or significant publications. Make sure the design is simple and attractive – and don't forget to include your contact details/website and the University logo.

- If you are on Twitter, prepare a few tweets in advance, particularly to let people know you will be presenting. Make a note of the conference hashtag and follow the people and organisations you know will be there and who may retweet you.
- Don't forget to take your business cards with you.

When you arrive at the conference:

- Look carefully at the programme and participant list to see if there is anyone you particularly want to hear speak or who you would like to meet. Try to set up meetings with them or take time at the end of a session to say how much you have enjoyed their presentation. Hopefully a follow-up conversation will ensue.
- Say hello to people you already know, but use the opportunity as much as possible to meet new people. Give them a business card so they have your contact details – and get theirs. Follow them on Twitter or connect on LinkedIn.
- Make good use of Twitter. Share the presentations you find interesting and follow people whose talks inspired you. This is a great way of ensuring the conference findings reach people who couldn't actually attend, and the organisers will appreciate it.

After the conference:

Follow up quickly with the people you met and those you would have liked to meet. Send an email saying how much you enjoyed their presentation or thanking them for any feedback – and include a link to your paper. Do any actions you said you would (such as sending a paper or putting people in touch).

- Add the people you met to your contact list with a note of when and where you met them. This will help you to reconnect with them later if you wish to.
- Share your presentation and what you have learned with your colleagues – either write a 'back-to-office' note highlighting interesting people and ideas, give a brief presentation of what you learned (particularly if several people from your team attended), or write a post for your departmental or project blog.
- Thank the conference organisers – and share with them your blog post or reflections on what you learned.
- Reflect and learn. Think about what went well and what you might do differently next time.

 For more information, please contact:

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