**Conferencing 101**

**What is out there?**

* ASA — American Sociological Association meetings
  + usually held in mid-August
  + <http://www.asanet.org/meetings/meetings.cfm>
  + Honor’s Program for students: http://www.asanet.org/students/honors.cfm
* Society for the Study of Social Problems
  + always overlaps with ASA
  + great for all papers about social justice issues
  + <http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/23/annual_meetings/>
* PSA – Pacific Sociological Association meetings
  + usually held late March / early April
  + <http://pacificsoc.org/meetings.html>
* CSA — California Sociology Association meetings
  + usually held in early November and alternates between Riverside and Berkeley
  + great for students to present
  + <http://www.cal-soc.org/conference.html>
* ASC — American Society of Criminology meetings
  + always held November between first week and week before Thanksgiving
  + <http://asc41.com/annualmeeting.htm>
* JSA — Justice Studies Association
  + late May early June
  + <http://www.justicestudies.org/Justice-Conf.html>
* IVSA — International Visual Sociological Association meetings
  + usually held in July
  + rarely in the United States
  + <http://visualsociology.org/conference.html>
* SOE — Sociology of Education Association meetings
  + Late February
  + Always in Asilimar (Monterrey / Carmel area)
  + <http://old-www.isber.ucsb.edu/sea/13_conference/index.htm>
* Sub-discipline specific within Sociology (associations and sections)
* Cross-displinary meetings, such as:
  + Advances in Qualitative Methods Conference (summer)
  + <http://www.cvent.com/events/12th-annual-advances-in-qualitative-methods-conference/event-summary-5bae444a05ae44e9bb7d63b0f41d2fa5.aspx>
* Applied or Professional Conferences -- The story of Marion!

**Why should you go?**

* Learn more about Sociology, especially in your general area of Sociology and across theoretical approaches
* Get ideas for your own research
* Meet scholars with similar interests – both faculty and graduate students
* Go to the book rooms / venders to read up on the latest titles
* Bond with your peers and/or faculty members
* Support each other at your talks
* Learn how to ask good questions and notice the “bad” or loaded questions
* Use conference paper submission deadlines as a way to give yourself writing / analysis deadlines
* Network for academic jobs! Make coffee dates before conference begins and avoid job cattle call.

**If you are wanting to submit:**

BE AWARE OF DEADLINES TO SUBMIT (no mercy or wiggle room)

- work closely with your chair / committee members on submission

- quality counts

- be aware of what is being asked for: papers versus abstracts

- research completed or in progress (versus anything else)

- types of presentations

* + Roundtables
  + Posters
  + Talking Circles
  + Formal Presentations

**What do you do when you get there?**

* Check in, pick up badge and tote bag with program.
* Create your schedule for what to attend and when.
* Leave room for lunch / dinner!
* Be alert at meals and in waiting areas – nice way to connect with others.
* Take notes / type notes.
* If you don’t get to ask your question at the session, get a card later to email presenter.

**One Approach / My Approach:**

* download the program or jot down “must see” presentations **before the conference**
* acknowledge that must-see ones might be terrible and have your back up
* plan to be at 3 sessions a day
* go to the sponsored events by a section or the association, especially for graduate students
* attend section or organizational meetings (diversity groups like LGBT, Chicano/Latino, African American caucus; teaching; site decisions; leadership council)
* take the evenings off for dinner
* hotel bar is HOT SPOT ~ many friendships made here!

**Other Approaches:**

* Only go to your own presentation and maybe a friend’s
* Stay in another hotel (not the conference one)
* Despise your “geek badge” – take it off at any chance
* Badge gawk
* Badge discrimination

**Writing Your Talk:**

* Don’t read it
* Treat your thesis as an article – shrink it DOWN!
* Prepare a good handout with your contact information
* Use Power Point slides for the handout / don’t rely on PPT working or your laptop working
* Assume audience has some background knowledge so you don’t have to prove yourself
* Get to the “goods” – your findings and discussion
* Brace yourself for questions! / Hope someone has a question!

**Your Questions Today?**

Chronicle Careers

http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2008/02/2008020401c/careers.html

Monday, February 4, 2008

# The Art of Good Conferencing

By David D. Perlmutter

P&T Confidential

An inside look at hiring, promotion, and tenure issues

The academic conference is stereotyped in popular culture -- not without cause -- as a confluence of the bizarre and the boring. But for faculty members, especially those on the tenure-and-promotion track, learning how to get the most out of those meetings has become an essential skill.

Even for doctoral students who, once upon a time, did not need to be conference-goers and paper presenters, learning the art of conferencing is a vital part of applying for your first teaching job.

Like all promotion-and-tenure matters, this one should not be approached blindly and without planning.

The first issue to consider is which conferences to attend, and how many. Your selection will be guided by many factors, not all of them scholarly -- for example, your department may pay for you to attend just one predetermined conference a year. Conversely, I know one language professor who goes only to meetings held at scenic vacation spots. Ethical considerations aside, it doesn't seem like a good idea for faculty members who want to stay involved in their research to be ruled by the pleasure principle.

In some disciplines, the question of which conference to attend is easily answered. Certain annual meetings are practically required for everyone in that discipline, junior or senior. In all fields, however, there are also additional conferences to consider, built around subspecialties or multidisciplinary groupings.

For maximum benefit toward your career and intellectual growth, always attend the major conference in your field and, if your institution picks up all or part of the tab, go to the "major minors" -- i.e., meetings of groups in your specialty area.

The key consideration in deciding where to go is this: Are the people you most respect in your area going to attend? After all, meeting the big names in your specialty is one reason for conferencing in the first place.

Make sure your conference choices show some overall focus. An important issue for promotion-and-tenure committees is, "Does the candidate show a consistent track record of research?" Seemingly random and scattershot conference-going is no more helpful than haphazard publishing.

You will never have to justify presenting a paper at a major conference or winning a "best paper" award. But quantity is not more important that quality -- whether in the number of conferences you attend, papers you present, or panels on which you participate. Unless your association publishes prestigious "official proceedings," a conference paper is merely a way station toward the eventual goal of peer-reviewed publication in a research journal.

Consult your department's guidelines, but a ratio of more than three-to-one conference papers to publications would be a source of concern to many promotion committees. I've met assistant professors at conferences who boast of having delivered 13 to 14 papers, as if that, in itself, were an achievement separate from publication.

Ideally, every paper you present should one day see print. Otherwise you will appear to lack a quality that is crucial to promotion and tenure: the ability to follow through on what you have started.

So how do you get your paper accepted for a conference? The strategies are similar to those you will use to get the paper published.

First -- and it's amazing how often this needs repeating -- follow instructions. I know it can get quite confusing in this world of electronic submissions and PDF attachments, but I'm still shocked to see how many papers that I review for conferences break basic rules. They contain identifying information on the front page, they are missing sections, or they're saved in some sort of quirky format that does not allow easy reading. Likewise, the hastily written, patched-up paper, full of typos, is only slightly more welcome for a conference competition than for journal publication.

Paying attention to details also means trying to fit your paper into the major theme of the conference. If you're submitting a paper proposal to a particular division of the association sponsoring the meeting, work with people in that division to seek out its interests. Being division-savvy is crucial. I know many colleagues whose papers, turned down by one division, would have had a better shot if submitted to another.

Finally, most divisions consistently feature a recurring cast of characters who judge papers. You don't have to ritually cite all of them, but it may be intellectually justifiable to at least refer to their work.

On a higher plane, keep in mind that the goal of conferencing is not simply to add a line to your CV. You hope to enrich your understanding of your field and to make important contacts with people who are knowledgeable and who may one day sit in judgment of your work. There is no need to put a famous scholar on the spot and ask to meet for lunch or dinner, but only the most churlish senior professor will turn down a 10-minute talk with an eager young scholar. You may learn something and the professor may remember your name.

After the conference, write a thank-you note to those who helped you out -- and mail it the old-fashioned way. Sure, there is a fine line here between collegiality and insincerity, intellectual curiosity and intrusiveness. But conferences are good places to learn the difference.

Volunteering at a conference can also enrich the experience. Associations usually appreciate help with organizing academic meetings, judging papers, sending out mailings, and updating the group's Web site, especially at the divisional level.

Besides doing good for your profession and your particular subfield, the rationale for your participation can be partly careerist. You will get to know the movers and shakers in your division and even in your larger field. Your name will become familiar to people throughout the division. You will learn the protocols and procedures of conferencing.

As is true of any activity that is part of your tenure file, you have to balance the amount of time spent on conference participation versus the gain. Many junior faculty members complain that promotion-and-tenure standards don't sufficiently reward "service to the field." It's best to adopt the stock market's "stop-loss order" approach: Reach an agreement with the conference organizers about the extent of your responsibilities. Be candid about how much time you can give. They will be likely to understand your tenure-track-imposed limitations. Better to impress them with the quality of a lesser amount of work than to disappoint them with a great deal of slipshod labor.

Your actual presentation at the conference is, of course, the most important moment for you. It is an exercise not only in offering information but also in what sociologist Erving Goffman called the "presentation of self."

As copious research has uncovered over the years, people judge speeches and presentations not only by the content but also by the delivery and the look, tone, and style of the presenter. You can learn about good presenting from many sources, ancient and modern, from the writings of Cicero to recent articles such as "The Truth Is, You Gave a Lousy Talk" and "Read It and Weep."

Obviously you must prepare, rehearse, time yourself, and choose points of maximum interest to your audience. Avoid the obvious graduate-student gaffes of filling up your presentation with a literature review and leaving only seconds for the actual study. Speak clearly and confidently but not stridently or arrogantly. In short, exude professionalism.

Which brings me to the philosophy of feedback. Intellectual growth is impossible if people are unwilling to listen to criticism, or if they assume "paper presentation" means "stone-tableted declamation." Having an intellectual chip on your shoulder makes it very difficult to hear critiques that might be useful in your march toward eventual publication.

At one conference where I moderated a panel, a graduate student presented his research and I asked a few innocuous questions about his choice of a survey sampling strategy. He became defensive and so flustered that he looked to be on the verge of tears. I moved the discussion on to another topic, but afterward I bought him a beer and offered the following advice (in paraphrase here): "You might be wrong about your research; I might be wrong; but we are both here to trade ideas. People will think more of you if they see you growing and learning than if they assume you consider your work indisputable. And maybe you will pick up tips that will help get this paper published. What do you have to lose by listening?"

I'm not sure that advice had any effect, but the next year I sat in on a panel in which the young man presented, and he was much calmer. He also seemed to take his role seriously: He had obviously read the reviews of his work, and he listened to the moderator and the respondent and wrote down the comments from the audience.

My final piece of advice on conferencing: Enjoy yourself. Sign up for the group sightseeing tours, stay late at the parties, explore local cultural and culinary attractions with pals. I know I have made the academic conference sound like a load of work. But you have two reasons to have a good time as well.

The first is self-conditioning: The more you associate going to conferences with pleasure, the less trepidation you will have about them.

Second is external conditioning. You will make friends, not just work partners, who will sustain you throughout your career. You want them to look forward to talking with you about topics of mutual intellectual interest and enrichment as well as about children and sports.

Academic conferences have aspects of tedium and confusion, but for all of us, from doctoral students just beginning the long tenure trek to the emerita professor refining her legacy, the experience can be rewarding. The key is to classify scholarly meetings as opportunities not just for camaraderie but also for constructive advancement of your research agenda.

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Monday, March 27, 2006

**The Conference Paper, Reconsidered**

By WILLIAM MAJOR

**FIRST PERSON**

Academics share their personal experiences

With something like an unholy feeling deep inside, I spent part of the morning in the bathroom the first time I presented a paper at a literary conference.

But I need not have worried. Only four people showed up at my session, and one of them was a friend I badgered into going. Two others in the audience were there in support of a fellow panelist. The last attendee, poor woman, was probably too embarrassed to leave early. Or she felt sorry for the five of us sitting forlornly in a room meant to hold 75.

Somewhere in the middle of the third paper the "moderator" of the panel fell asleep (who could blame him?) and only roused himself in time to introduce the last panelist. Truly an auspicious beginning to my academic career.

Even with the paltry attendance, however, we were all quite serious that morning. Five young scholars hellbent on making our marks in the world. We read every word of our papers -- carefully, ponderously -- each syllable thudding the dead air.

What could we have done differently? We might have noted that our isolation presented interesting possibilities. For example, we could have sat in a circle and *talked* to each other, explaining and defending our ideas, collaborating and communicating. But that would have required someone to say, "Hey, there's no one here. Let's bag the formalities and parse this thing out!"

No dice. We didn't want to face the inadequacy of who we were and what we were doing. Our premature obsolescence seemed too dreadful.

Most of my friends in the humanities have similar stories. At one time or another, we have all been confronted with the empty room, the monotonous papers, the intellectual onanism (done best in an empty room), the awful sincerity. And yet, we keep coming back, like the proverbial dog to its vomit.

By the end of my many years in graduate school I was still a conference greenhorn, though I had attended a number of lectures by some of the top scholars in my field. The reading series at Indiana University at Bloomington often attracted the leading minds. That's not to imply that I could always follow what was being said -- or, should I say, read. I just took it on faith that the ideas were important.

I can vividly remember, for instance, when two giants in the field of American studies presented their work to full houses. I left both lectures baffled. I was well into my doctoral studies, master's degree in hand, but I might as well have been back in my college chemistry class daydreaming about the girl sitting next to me. So I resolved to buckle down.

It never occurred to me during those tedious nights that it might actually be worth my while to confuse an audience when my time came.

Yet it was during one such sleepy lecture that I witnessed a moment of intellectual honesty as an undergraduate at the University of Kentucky. The late eminent Guy Davenport -- writer, scholar, Renaissance man -- was in attendance at a reading and made his presence known by sprinting from the room in the middle of the proceedings, an exit so conspicuous and theatrical as to overshadow all that the poor lector had to say that evening. It was a night that I am certain lives on in the audience's memory, though the lecture itself has long been forgotten.

Out of a misplaced sense of manners, I have never emulated Professor Davenport, yet there are more times than not when it does seem the appropriate response.

I have presented roughly a dozen papers at conferences. For at least half of those sessions, I never saw more than five people in the audience.

Now it's entirely possible that I attend unpopular gatherings or work in an area that's not terribly sexy. Granted, my writing isn't on the greatest-hits list. I haven't yet published a book, and I'll bet that no more than 100 people have read my journal articles. To be honest, I am sure that I also have sent people sprinting for the exit.

But, in my defense, I have always been acutely aware of what was happening. It didn't take me long to figure out that in simply reading my paper aloud, I'm apt to lose a few people immediately. Even worse is when the turgid prose and high theory sets in, when I lose the humor, bury my head, and forget the presence of others. I have been guilty on all counts. I trust that those who couldn't take it found a quiet place to achieve the respite they richly deserved.

I think that our bombast keeps some of us from remembering one of the basic mantras of the freshman composition class: Don't forget the audience. I am continuously astonished at the inability of people in our profession -- students of the humanities who are supposed to know something about communication -- to connect with a conference audience. I suspect that if I were to run my classroom the way most conference panels are run, I would be hounded out of teaching.

What are the solutions? First, we might clarify and strengthen the criteria for getting into conferences in the first place by requiring that completed papers rather than abstracts be submitted to conference organizers. At the very least, that approach would cut down on those papers "written" the night before, at the wee hours and long into the bottle.

And why can't we be clear as professionals about what constitutes an acceptable presentation? A perfect place for practice is in the seminar room. On many occasions, I had to "present" my work as a graduate student, but rarely if ever was the artistry of the occasion ever discussed.

Finally, we might well ask: Do we really need all of these gatherings?

Perhaps that is the wrong question; after all, necessity isn't the most appropriate criterion to apply to work in the humanities. But we do have to take a serious look at how the proliferation of conferences can be squared with the diminution of certain professional and, perhaps more important, natural resources. In the age of fewer tenure-track positions, fewer places to publish, less and less respect outside of academe, each conference seems more and more benighted, insular, lacking in true engagement. These gatherings should not simply be places where we get an extra entry on the curriculum vitae.

Does that mean that I won't be giving any papers in the future? Not yet. When I see an appealing conference in a place I want to visit, I'll give it a go. Call it unwarranted optimism.

While I'm there I trust that my presentation will strike a few chords, that someone will ask a thoughtful question or two. I therefore pledge to do what I can to be clear, to remember my audience, to communicate. And I won't be offended if I hear doors slamming. I understand.

*William Major is an assistant professor of English at Hillyer College of the University of Hartford.*

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2006/03/2006032701c/careers.html>

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**The Unbearable Uselessness of Conferencing?**

November 19, 2010, 8:26 am

By [John L. Jackson Jr.](http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/author/jjackson)

The last time I blogged about attending an academic conference, I found myself mercilessly pummeled by several very upset *Chronicle* readers. They used my post as an excuse to rail against professors who (irresponsibly!) skip out on their classes in order to attend such “conferences,” a practice dismissed as little more than a scam, the kind of racket that allows academics to go off gallivanting in exotic locales under the trumped-up auspices of professional development and research dissemination.

“How many classes did you have to cancel to attend your little conference?” It started something like that. One reader asked me the equivalent of that very question several different times, trying to determine if my conference attendance was at the expense of my teaching obligations. Even after I explained that the conference didn’t require me to miss any of my scheduled class sessions, not one, said reader refused to register my response, asking that selfsame question (about how many of my classes I canceled for the conference) at least two more times.

Several more unhappy readers decided that they were going to use the opportunity to make a larger argument about the complete uselessness (and pseudo-intellectualism) of academia’s self-indulgent tradition of conferencing. Some of them argued that scholars should exclusively teleconference or deploy other new-media options in their would-be efforts to forge and maintain potentially powerful inter-institutional links with peers. Why, they asked, make a fetish of the face-to-face?

Both those who anonymously posted their anti-conference comments online (and the many more who emailed me or called my office phone to express their displeasure over my uncritical celebration of academic conferences) seemed to get particularly upset about the post’s characterization of conference attendance as a mixture of informal chats with other academics in packed conference lobbies and laughter-laced drinking atop cushy stools at fancy hotel bars.

I only ponder that previous debate now because I am currently in New Orleans at the 109th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. It is my first trip back to New Orleans since Katrina, which almost seems like a scandalous thing to admit. And coming to hang out in such a mystical town was clearly an added bonus of attending this year’s AAA conference.

I just got in Wednesday night, but I’ve already gone to several panels, one of which included an absolutely fantastic presentation by one of Penn’s anthropology graduate students. And I even checked out the first half of a rather hypnotic ethnographic film, *Movement (R)evolution Africa*, which examines the evocative links between contemporary African choreography and newfangled understandings of African subjectivity and embodiment.

Still, most of my day consisted of hallway-talk with colleagues I haven’t seen in a while and getting the word out about some new scholarly initiatives that I am helping to launch: a book series on the intersections between race and religion and an ambitious and expansive online bibliography for the discipline of anthropology. So, I’ll spend a lot of time in New Orleans leaving panels early, getting to panels late, and sipping cocktails well into the night. (Well, maybe not so late. Even as an undergrad, I got tired by about 10 p.m.) But I don’t buy the claim that any of this isn’t a legitimate way to make sure that I stay tied to disciplinary conversations.

I realize that many of those aforementioned anti-conference readers will scoff at my claim, but at least I didn’t have to cancel class. Again, maybe that’s some consolation.

Not that that would have been a huge issue, either. Several students from my graduate class this semester arrived in New Orleans even before I did, which means that we could have engineered an impromptu seminar discussion in the hotel lobby if we absolutely had to. Drinks optional.

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/the-unbearable-uselessness-of-conferencing/28926>

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**How to Deliver an Effective Conference Paper**

December 22, 2010, 3:00 pm

By [Erin E. Templeton](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/author/etempleton)

Last week, Mark wrote about “[Getting Ready for Conferences](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/getting-ready-for-conferences/29530" \l "comments" \t "_blank),” and among the many helpful suggestions in the comments section, one of our readers, *ruthieo*, asked for tips on how to prepare a presentation.  Here at ProfHacker, your wish is our command.  In what follows, I will share some tips for giving an effective paper at a conference.  Please note that this advice is from the perspective of a literary scholar; in MLA fields it is customary for presenters to read their papers.  Not all disciplines share this convention, so this advice may be less relevant for readers in other fields.

Whether you are headed to the MLA, the AHA, or some other conference in the next few weeks, there are several things that you can do to deliver an effective conference paper.

**Timing is everything**

Do not expect to deliver a twenty-five page article in the space of twenty minutes.  Trying to do so typically leads to one of two outcomes, both negative.  The first of these–the “speed-reading” option–guarantees that your audience will not understand more than the first twenty seconds of your paper before giving up in frustration.  While it might be physically possible for you to read that fast (I have seen it happen), your listeners won’t be able to keep up with you.  This is a waste of both your time and theirs.

The second alternative is arguably worse: the “I’m-just-going-to-read-the-whole-paper-because-I-can” option, also known as the “Other-Panelists-be-Damned” option.  If you have twenty minutes to deliver your paper, make sure that your paper is no longer than twenty minutes when read at a reasonable pace.  That includes any off-the-cuff remarks you might want to throw in as you go.  Planning to read your entire essay, all twenty-five pages of it, is quite possibly the absolute worst thing you can do if your goal is to deliver an effective paper.  Not only will you be robbing your fellow panelists of their share of the time allotted for your panel, but you will also force the panel moderator into the uncomfortable position of interrupting you when you have gone over the time limit.  Lastly, you will be depriving everyone, panelists and audience members alike, of the time dedicated for discussion after the papers have finished, and this space for conversation can be very productive otherwise.

But how can you tell if your paper is going to be twenty minutes long?  This is an easy one: **PRACTICE READING IT OUT LOUD**.  The general rule of thumb is that it takes an average reader two minutes to read one page of double-spaced, Times New Roman font, but don’t rely on the rule of averages.  Read the paper out loud all the way through without stopping, and use a stopwatch to time the delivery.  This can be tricky to do because many of us (and by “many of us,” I mean “me”) have a tendency to want to stop and tinker with our prose along the way.  But when timing your talk, it is important to resist the urge to edit: just see how long it takes you to read the paper from the first to the very last word.

Once you have timed the paper, if it is too long **make the necessary cuts.** Be ruthless with yourself and with your words.  It is much better to edit the text yourself than for the panel moderator to do it for you by cutting you off in the middle of a paragraph or even mid-sentence.  It is also worth noting that it is perfectly acceptable to say, “In the longer version of this paper, I talk about X” to indicate the missing piece(s).  In fact, such a gesture can give audience members an opening for questions during the time dedicated for discussion.  But do not shirk the responsibility of fitting your paper within the time limits.  Not only is this a sign of respect for your other panelists, it is also a sign of respect for your audience.

In addition to helping sort through timing issues, reading a paper out loud serves other important purposes.  Vocalizing your text is a useful exercise because it enables you to work through the moments when you might otherwise stumble over wording.  It can also call attention to moments where you might need to take a breath.  It can also highlight words that might be easy to read on the page but tricky to pronounce when speaking.

**Prepare a reading copy**

When I am preparing to deliver a paper at a conference, I create a dedicated reading copy (DRC).  Note: it’s generally easiest to do this once you have gotten the paper within time limits.  In the DRC, not only do I **increase the font size** of my text, making it easier to see without squinting, but I also **manipulate page breaks** so that they come at natural pause points in the text rather than in other less convenient places like the middle of a sentence.  I learned this trick as a musician where turning the page at the wrong moment can completely shatter the mood of a piece.  To prevent such disruptions, musicians will often choreograph precisely when they will turn a page so that it is not intrusive or distracting for the audience.  The same idea can be very useful for readers.  Good page breaks come at the end of paragraphs, the end of sentences, or before block quotes.  They come at places where you would otherwise pause to breathe rather than in the middle of sentences where they can wreck the carefully-crafted momentum of a sentence.

Annotating the DRC is another musician trick that I have adopted.  Just as musicians write in crescendos and bowings, speakers can add their own notations to their DRC.  In addition to manipulating the page breaks, I often also make notes to myself and **gloss the text with visual cues** to remind myself of where the stress falls in a particular name, for example, or by underlining a particular word in a sentence that I want to remember to emphasize.  It’s important not to over-annotate the DRC since, after all, you still need to be able read it, but a few these cues can be very helpful.

Remember that reading a paper is like telling a story or playing a sonata.  A monotone style is not your friend.  **Varying your dynamics and vocal inflection** can help your listeners engage your argument.  Pacing your speech also makes it easier for your audience to understand your claims.  I’m not saying that you should dumb down your presentation, but it is worth bearing in mind that sitting and listening to three or four academic papers can be a challenge for even the most committed audience members, especially as the day goes on. A lively delivery style can make a dramatic difference.

**Check your technology**

If you plan to use technology in your presentation, be sure to **practice your talk with technology**, be it PowerPoint, YouTube, or a [recording of Ezra Pound reading “Sestina Alta Forte.](http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Pound/1939/Pound-Ezra_01_Sestina-Altaforte_Harvard_1939.mp3" \t "_blank)“  Also **be prepared for malfunctions**. Get to the room early enough to make sure that the equipment is all present and in working order, and make whatever adjustments you need before the panel begins so that when it is your turn comes, everything is cued to the proper spot.  If the visual element is an essential part of your argument, you might consider bringing a handout as a backup just in case the projector bulb burns out or the adaptor doesn’t work with your laptop.

**A few other miscellaneous tips:**

I always carry my DRC in my carry-on in the event that my luggage gets lost on the way to the conference.  I also make sure that I have the paper saved to my hard-drive, that I have also emailed the file to myself, and that I have saved it somewhere in the cloud ([Dropbox](http://www.dropbox.com" \t "_blank) is great for this purpose).

If you need to print out a copy of your paper on the road, bear in mind that printing at hotel business centers can be expensive (at my last conference, the price was $.50/page), so you want to be sure that you don’t have to print more than once.  Also, hotel business centers are at least as prone to technological malfunctions as other technology centers, so give yourself time to locate the room and deal with any equipment issues.  Do not, in other words, wait until twenty minutes before you are slated to give your talk to find the printer.

It is a good idea to have a glass or bottle of water handy in case your mouth gets dry during your paper.

Also, be sure to have rehearsed the paper enough so that you are comfortable looking up at your audience.  If you are too nervous to make eye contact with members of your audience, then you might look at their foreheads or even at back wall of the room.  Looking up is also helpful because your voice will project more clearly when not aimed at the table or podium.

Lastly, if appropriate, feel free to make connections between your paper and the work of your fellow panelists. Of course, this doesn’t generally work if you are first on the docket, but if you are later in the line up, mentioning connections as an aside can be an effective way to create cohesion between papers.

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/delivering-an-effective-conference-paper/29683>

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**Getting Ready for Conferences**

December 14, 2010, 3:00 pm

By [Mark Sample](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/author/msample)

The end of the fall semester is nearly upon us, which means it’s the start of a very special season—the conference season. Several major scholarly organizations hold their annual conferences this time of year, and if you’re a regular ProfHacker reader, the chances are that you or somebody you know will be at one of these conferences. Maybe you’re presenting on a panel. Maybe you’re interviewing for jobs. Maybe you’re conducting interviews. I suppose it’s conceivable—though not enviable—that you’re even doing all three!

We’ve written a great deal about academic conferences on ProfHacker: Erin’s given tips on [writing abstracts](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/the-conference-abstract/23051) for conference papers; Brian’s explained how to [hack a conference](http://www.briancroxall.net/2009/12/21/at-profhacker-how-to-hack-an-academic-conference/); Heather’s helped us [eat well](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/a-few-strategies-for-eating-well-at-conferences/23958) at conferences; and Natalie’s suggested ways to [work in exercise](http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/add-exercise-to-your-conference-schedule/23017) at conferences.

*But what about getting ready for a conference?* Forget the easy stuff like writing a paper or preparing for interviews. What about packing? What do you need to bring? What are you afraid you’ll forget? What odds and ends do you need to take care of before you go?

Here are a few items to consider as you’re getting ready for a conference:

* If you’re receiving travel funding, have you filled out and signed all the necessary forms? Do you understand what’s covered by your funding and what kind of receipts you’ll need for reimbursement?
* If your conference badge and program are being mailed to you, have you received them? Do you need to print your own?
* What sort of tech do you need to bring? Do you have all the correct cables, chargers, and dongles? If you’re presenting, do you have [a backup](http://chronicle.com/blogPost/Back-Up-Your-Essential-File/24765/) of your work in the cloud?
* Have you figured out the most economical way to get from the airport to your hotel?
* Have you checked the weather and packed accordingly?

This list is only a start. And rather than remembering what I forgot when I’m up in the air, halfway to the conference, I’m asking you to help me—and everybody else. **What would you add to this list?** How do you get ready for a conference? What essential items do you pack? What’s the **single most important piece of advice** you’d give somebody preparing for a conference for the first time?

Reader tips here:

<http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/getting-ready-for-conferences/29530#comments>

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**\*\*\*\*FOR THE ACADEMIC JOB SEARCH\*\*\*\***

December 8, 2008

# Conference Rookies

By Julie Miller Vick and Jennifer S. Furlong

**Question:** This is my first year on the job market, and I'll be attending the Modern Language Association convention this month in San Francisco. I'm not sure what to expect. The tales of those who've gone before me have only served to make me nervous. Any tips on how get the most out of a large conference and interview successfully there?

**Jenny:** If the thought of attending a large conference fills you with trepidation — whether it's the annual meeting of the MLA, the American Historical Association, or the American Association for the Advancement of Science — you are not alone. The task of presenting papers and interacting with professionals in your field can be daunting. When first-round interviews for faculty jobs are added to the mix, the atmosphere can be intense. For this month's column, we spoke with several new faculty members who gave us some useful tips about attending conferences.

**Julie:** One of the first worries of many junior scholars attending these meetings is financial — the costs of airfare, meals, and a hotel room add up quickly. One new faculty member said such costs are unavoidable and advised, "Resign yourself to spending more money than you'd like to." You will probably have to make plans to attend a conference long before you'll hear from institutions interested in interviewing you. So what happens if you spend more than you can afford only to find that you have no interviews? Should you cancel your trip?

**Jenny:** Not necessarily. If you've never attended a large conference in your field, it may be worthwhile to go. At the very least, getting a sense of what it's like will make you more comfortable and better prepared the next time around.

If you've attended big conferences in the past and are waiting to hear back from search committees, think carefully about how you can make the meeting useful whether or not you get any interviews. Make plans to meet colleagues at other institutions, ask an adviser to introduce you to other scholars in your field, attend talks that can help you move your own research forward, and talk with the editors of scholarly presses at the book expo about next steps for your work. Devising concrete ways to salvage the meeting can help you cope with the frustrations of the job market.

**Julie:** For those of you who do have interviews lined up, we've heard differing advice as to how much time you should dedicate to conference activities. It can be challenging to know what's right for you, especially if it's your first time attending a major meeting. For some would-be academics, giving a presentation, planning to attend others' talks, and meeting with potential colleagues can be energizing and can enhance their interview performance.

**Jenny:** Other new faculty members felt their performance was stronger when they focused on interviewing and didn't participate in other conference activities. One faculty member told us, "I never gave a paper at the same conference where I was interviewing, and I don't think I ever would. You don't need any extra pressure when you want to concentrate on the interviews. In fact, both times I stayed as far away from the conference itself as I could. I just went to the assigned rooms at the time of the interviews and otherwise kept myself busy in the host city, getting together with friends from grad school for coffee and dinner."

Again, what works for you may not work for someone else. It's important to have a sense of how you respond to stressful situations, and decide which strategy is the best fit for you.

**Julie:** Many new professors said the most useful advice they can offer focuses on the basics — things that junior scholars might forget in their desire to make a good impression. "The most important advice I can think of is kind of mundane," said one faculty member. "Wear comfortable clothing and comfortable shoes. Seriously. And make sure you eat properly."

Another new assistant professor said, "I came with a supply of PowerBars and string cheese, which was very helpful the day I had four interviews in a row and didn't have time for lunch."

We strongly suggest candidates follow that advice. Feeling physically comfortable, in addition to being mentally prepared, is an important factor in successful interviewing. So if you have an interview scheduled, try on your clothes and shoes well beforehand, to make sure you're comfortable. In the weeks leading up to and during the conference, be sure you're taking care of yourself physically, so that you're feeling your best.

**Jenny:** Once you begin hearing from search committees, schedule your interview times at the conference carefully. We've heard from many job candidates who've regretted scheduling six interviews in a day, or not taking into account the time it would take to get from one hotel to another.

That assistant professor who had four interviews in one day said, "I scheduled them with at least an hour between each, which turned out to be a good thing since the conference took place in three different hotels, with a 15-minute walk between them."

As departments start contacting you to set up conference interviews, keep track of the details — the time, the location, the names of your interviewers and your contact person. And if a department doesn't offer any of those details, ask. Keep the information handy during the conference.

**Julie:** At large meetings, many interviews are held in hotel rooms or in the sitting area of hotel suites. Because of that, departments may not be able to give you a precise location in advance. That's why it's so important to clarify the details with your interviewers beforehand. Make sure you know how to contact them before your interview. And make sure you're on time, early even. You don't want to arrive at your interview out of breath and disheveled. We cannot stress enough how important it is to give yourself a nice cushion of time between interviews.

**Jenny:** One candidate who found a job her second time on the market said that she learned a lot that first year, when she had one conference interview followed by a campus interview. The second year she was a stronger candidate and had six conference interviews and one campus interview afterward. During that round of six interviews, she found that having her materials organized and with her made her look like a more serious candidate: "I brought a binder with extra materials I'd selected for each institution, mostly sample syllabi and teaching evaluations. That's a nice thing to have, because it makes you look organized, serious about the job, and it gives you a concrete way to talk about teaching.

**Julie:** That same candidate offered another important piece of advice: She made several gaffes at her first conference interview but was enthusiastic about the position and well informed about the institution, which, she said, was a key reason why it invited her for a campus interview.

**Jenny:** When it comes to interviewing, practice makes perfect. You may have a good deal of success your first time on the market. Or you may find that this year's convention will be one to learn from, in terms of both your interview performance and your ability to handle the stressful atmosphere of an academic conference.

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