

How to Conference

A FemPhys Workshop | Nov 16 | 2 - 3:30 pm

Top Tips: the shit they don't tell you

you don't have to go to the whole thing

- keep your nametag on!!! near the top of your chest! so folks can read it!
- make conversation with new people by using a few easy topics, like asking, “what are your favourite conference anxiety management strategies?”
- eat lunch with new people, if you feel able. pick a table and ask, “can I join y'all?”
- for some academics, conferences are always hard. you're not alone. but things can definitely get easier.
- bad conference experiences are not your fault! conference design is important!
- *pro tip*: make notes of the conversations you have with people, with their name and institution, especially if you talk about grad school or specific research.
- *pro tip*: make notes about the quality of speakers so you can make more informed decisions about whether to attend their talks in the future!

Exercise

1. Write down three (or more) conference goals.
2. Write down three limitations.
3. What kinds of conference events will help you meet your goals? Which will not?
4. Write down some questions for reflection after the conference, or some aspects of conference attendance that you would like to focus on.

A Step-by-Step Guide for Optimal Conference Attendance

1. What are your goals for this particular conference? Think about sharing your research, learning new things, meeting specific folk, asking for specific or general mentorship, developing conference skills, visiting the city etc.
2. What are your limitations? Think about how much energy you can expend on a daily basis or at that time of year (maybe you're attending multiple conferences in a row!), your ability to pay attention or sit still, typical social anxiety, etc.
3. With the schedule in front of you (perhaps at registration or during the first talk), circle presentations and events that you really want to attend (including your own), might want to attend, and don't want to.
 - a. Aim to attend 60 - 80% of conference events, even if you feel really interested in everything, *especially* if the conference is longer than a couple days.
 - b. Unless meeting new people is exclusively energizing to you, count social events and food time as a conference event. You can, for instance, plan to take your lunch alone as a management strategy.
 - c. Schedule a break before you present.

Do your best to stick to your modified schedule, but adjust it as necessary. If you really wanted to go to a talk but can't pay attention, *don't go anyway*. It'll be more productive for you to take a break and go to the next talk than to become more exhausted in the lecture hall.

4. At the end of the conference, perhaps on transit back home, reflect on your time. Did you meet your goals? Respect your limitations? Were you energized by your breaks? What was unexpected? What can you change for next time?

Giving a Talk

The point of your talk depends on the conference. Design a talk for your audience. For many audiences, this means writing a talk which is mostly background information for your actual research. Conferences are already information overloads, so try to give only the necessary details to communicate one or two take-home messages. Avoid jargon and math. Use high-contrast text (like black on white or yellow on black; never red or purple on black), large fonts, and avoid overly dense text. Pause between phrases. Acknowledge when you aren't sure about something. Practice!! Take deep breaths! You're gonna be great!

Giving a Poster

Your poster should serve as a backdrop to you during the poster session. Make sure it has visuals which will support your explanation. Follow style suggestions above. Practice an explanation which takes a minute or less. During the poster session, stay by your poster---if someone slows down to look at your poster, ask them if they would like to hear about it. If yes, give them your spiel and ask if they have questions. The poster should also be able to speak for itself, so that when you take breaks (which you should!), folks can still learn about your work. *Pro tip:* when you care about feedback and potential collaborations, take notes on who says what about your work!