

# How to Conference

presented by FemPhys

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**Raise your hand: who has been to a conference before?**

**Two conferences?**

**More than two?**

**Did you enjoy yourself?**



**What did you find particularly difficult?**

**Or, if you haven't been to a conference before, what part sounds the most scary?**



## Why would you go to a conference, anyway?

- to present your work
- to learn about other folks' experiences
- to stay up-to-date with a field or learn new things
- to have in-person conversations
- to meet folks who can advise or employ you; to meet folks to advise
- because you are expected to?



# Info: what do conferences look like?

## Types of conferences

**Broad field, broad audience:** many topics, lots of people (300 - 10,000), 3 days - 1 week, lots of short talks and a few big keynote speakers. overwhelming.

**Broad field, niche audience:** many topics, targeted at a population like women or undergrads (or both), 50 - 200 people, 1 - 3 days, a mix of shorter talks, workshops, keynotes.

**Niche field:** a narrow range of topics, attended by grad students and profs in the field, 20 - 200 people, 3 days - 1 week, lots of talks.

**Workshops:** like a little camp for working on open projects with other researchers. 1 week - 2 months, 5 - 20 people, format varies.



# Info: what do conferences look like?

## Activities at conferences

**Student talks:** 5 - 20 minute lecture-style presentations, with questions.

**Invited and keynote talks:** 30 min - 1 hour lecture-style presentations, from professors.

**Poster sessions:** mostly students and sometimes postdocs stand in front of their posters and describe their work to 1-5 people at a time. about 2 hours. very unstructured.

**Workshops and panels:** more common at targeted audience conferences, with a topic that is usually not just physics.


**Food and social time:** is a conference activity! spending time with new folk is not down time! some conferences schedule activities like city or lab tours and pub crawls.



# Info: what do conferences look like?

## The point of conferences

- depends on what kind of conference you are attending!
- a niche field conference aims to share information between researchers and help people make themselves known in their field
- a workshop aims to help people collaborate and solve open problems in a nice setting



The Canadian Conference for Undergraduate Women in Physics is coming up!



What's the point of a targeted audience conference like CCUWIP?

- meeting folks with similar experiences or who can advise on them
- making space for discussion of topics like discrimination
- presenting your work in a less intimidating environment
- to build community





# A process for well-designed conference attendance

For each event, identify

1. your own conference goals
2. your physical, mental, emotional limitations
3. what is happening at the conference - which events help you meet your goals? which are beyond your limits?
4. questions for post-conference reflection - and then answer them afterwards!

**Exercise: we're going to practice this process!**



## **0. Identify a particular conference**

If you're attending CCUWiP, perfect - think about that conference.

If you don't have one coming up, think about a conference format you're likely to experience soon.

Have a conference in mind? Okay.



# 1. Your conference goals

Think about what you want to accomplish by going to this conference. Write your goals down. Be specific.

some examples:

- meet senior professors in my field and talk about grad school opportunities
- ask someone i know will be there about their research
- still have energy when this conference is done
- participate and feel like i tried my best
- give a good presentation and receive helpful feedback



## 2. Your limitations

A limitation is something you find difficult/tiring or don't want to do.

What are your limitations in attending a conference? Write some down. Again, be specific.

some examples:

- don't usually work more than 6 hours a day
- talking to new people is tiring
- can't pay attention to talks for more than half an hour at a time
- have difficulty sleeping when travelling
- alcohol is difficult to be around



### 3. What is happening at the conference

Here's the biggest tip nobody ever tells you about conferences:

***you don't have to go to the whole thing***

Attend 60 - 80% of events. Go to things which are going to be useful for you! Use your goals and limitations to think about what you want to attend.



### 3. What is happening at the conference

When you get to a conference, mark things on the schedule you do and don't want to attend.

Right now, think about what events will help you meet your goals, or what boundaries you should set on your schedule to respect your limitations. Check any tentative schedules for details.

for instance:

- a panel on entrepreneurship is not worth your time if you are there to meet academics
- if you can't handle late nights then don't go to a pub crawl!!!



## 4. Questions for post-conference reflection

Reflecting is critical for growth!

Think right now about what you want to observe during the conference. Write down questions to check in on afterwards.

some examples:

- were the social time limitations you set appropriate? did you follow them?
- did you enjoy your travel experience? how can you improve it next time?
- what did you like? what felt hard or unnecessary?

# break time!

five minutes

or let's stretch, you decide





# that dipshit, social anxiety

lbr, this is the reason most of us are afraid of conferences. a lot of the anxiety, for many, is the kind that will reduce as you experience more conferences. so, let's talk about the situations we're scared of now.

for example: lunchtime. it's terrifying, but you'll be fine. here's maybe the worst that can happen:

- you sit with folks you don't know. nobody quite knows what to say.

what you can do:

- come prepared with small conversation topics!
  - “have you been to [conference location] before? any plans to see the city?”
- sit in silence! nobody is going to be mad!



## **that dipshit, social anxiety**

What are you scared of? Let's group brainstorm solutions.



# that dipshit, social anxiety

The best conference anxiety management is your best regular anxiety management. How do you manage anxiety?

some examples:

- bring your fave comfort objects, like a fidget cube or a nice rock
- bring activities you can do while listening to folks talk, like doodling or knitting. it's not rude to doodle while you listen!
- take breaks! change scenes! moderate your sensory input. bring earplugs and/or headphones.
- have folks available via text or phone, especially for panic support
- let any folks you're going with know about your anxiety. chat about mutual support strategies.



# a note on shitty experiences

what if something shitty happens? if someone oversteps your boundaries?

- check the code of conduct, if there is one, for suggested procedures.
- talk to someone you trust.
- record details of the incident.
- use grounding strategies: go to a place you know, sit with a friend, meditate, trust yourself.
- remember that you can leave the conference if you need to. in fact, it's a good idea to take a break from difficult activities.



## a note on effective breaks

Did you know there are different kinds of breaks? To be effective, a break has to be a break from the thing that is tiring you.

- identify why you're tired or overwhelmed. maybe there's too much information. or the fluorescent lights exhaust your eyes. or you really need to stretch your tummy out.
- take measures specifically to address these things!
  - still want to pay attention but need to move? go to the back of the lecture hall and stretch.
  - take a content break: walk around the building and listen to a podcast.
  - too much passivity? find someone to chat with. move to the lunch room and write.
  - too much body anxiety? sit in a quiet space and practice breathing.
  - go outside!!!



# **your experience is not all your responsibility!**

Conferences are hard for a lot of fucking people and they don't need to be!

Whose responsibility could it be to make conferences pleasant?

What would make conferences easier?



# info: lightning round how-to

- can I go to a conference as an undergrad? yes
  - even if it's not for undergrads? yes
- conferences cost money? how does that work?
  - supervisors and/or departments should pay for you! even when you don't have a supervisor, ask people for money!!
- booking travel
  - do it early, don't try to save your supervisor money by taking flights with ten hour layovers
- going places with people
  - travelling together is nice and can be hard. set boundaries and discuss trip goals before you go
- food
  - should be covered by whoever is funding your trip. alcohol is not.
- receipts
  - keep them all in one place! note the day and meal, especially if it's in a foreign language
- poster sessions
  - take a break from these too, even if you are giving a poster! walk around, talk to other folks, walk outside. you might miss a few folk but that's ok! being at your best is more important!



## final notes

- having fun is totally possible at conferences! it's not necessary, but it is possible!
- as you grow more experienced and capable, some of you will become the people who are comfortable at conferences.
  - when you feel like you can, you should try to lighten the load for someone else---invite someone who looks uncertain to sit with you.