

Best Practices for Conferences

CBI “Pizza Talk” 11/1/2021




Reasons to attend?

- Collab
- Exposure to new research
- Networking!
- Reconnecting
- Humanize yourself to potential reviewers
- Travel



Benefits to Conferences

- Share your work and get feedback
 - Meet those who have written the papers you read/cite on a regular basis
 - Develop relationships with those in your field
 - Find out what others are working on
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Good rules of thumb?

Advice to optimizing your conference experience?

- Plan talks to attend
- Getting to venue early to network
- Be courageous to ask to meet/discuss*
 - Small talk; making an impression will facilitate an organic relationship
 - Refer to fascination on their work
- Consider size of conference
 - Smaller; try to attend all talks if possible
- Make notes on business cards to recall and est connection
 - Write names down (or you'll forget!)
- Follow up: emails sent afterwards are great!
- Try to make multiple interactions when you connect with (especially new) colleagues
- Attend the conference activities (ice-breaker, networking panels, social activities)



Things You Should Never Do at a Conference


- Over indulge
- Act unprofessionally
- Act arrogant/condescending (listening or presenting)
 - Telling someone else what to do rather than asking sincere questions that encourage new research
- Show up unprepared

General Rules

- Pick Appropriate Conference
 - Topic of interest
 - Model system
 - Make sure conference is legitimate
- Get funding for registration/related expenses
 - CBI
 - GSA
- Logistics (Prepare in advance)



Preparation

- Submit your abstract and coordinate dates for submission, registration, and funding reimbursement
 - Programs are often posted online in advance
 - Depending on conference, concurrent sessions make it impossible to attend every talk
 - Abstracts are posted in advance too!
 - For all of these, begin contemplating questions
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Attending

- Get to early sessions
 - Chance to start conversations with people you have identified from program/abstracts you want to meet/ask questions
- Take as many opportunities as possible to get to know new people
 - Ask those at table about their projects and share with them what you work on
 - Try to sit with different table for each meal
- Prioritize certain sessions
 - If not concurrent, attending as many sessions as possible will be beneficial
 - Good impression
 - You may learn some useful information unexpectedly


Presenting

- Not only your work but yourself
 - You may meet your future post-doc mentor
- Elevator speeches***
 - Aim for 90-second summary of your work
- Apply early and often
 - First time presenters *might not* get the talk spotlight
 - Late submissions will ***definitely not*** get the talk spotlight

Networking

- Introduce self; help others make introductions
- Student volunteer for organizing conference
- Thoughtful questions
- “Buddy system”
 - Ideally travel with one other close colleague, but not in a pack with entire lab
- Don’t stay with your lab (less than half of the people you surround yourself with should be new to you)
- Advisor may even help with introductions
- Older grad students should help new grad students make new connections
- If comfortable, random roommate assignment can help with meeting others

Suggestions For Following Up?

- Send a brief email following the conference to establish and reinforce the positive communications
 - LinkedIn*
 - Remember to make notes on business cards
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References

- <https://homes.cs.washington.edu/~mernst/advice/conference-attendance.html>
- Leininger E, Shaw K, Moshiri N, Neiles K, Onsongo G, et al. (2021) Ten simple rules for attending your first conference. PLOS Computational Biology 17(7): e1009133. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1009133>