

Getting the best out of conferences

Conferences are an important part of academic life. Conferences can range from small local meetings to large international events with several thousand participants. Conferences have a dual function, i.e. they offer participants the opportunity to present their work and ideas and learn from and about others, and they are also a social space where people come together and exchange ideas. Attending a conference can be challenging, but it can also bring great personal satisfaction and professional benefits.

Prepare well for the event

Look at the program carefully beforehand and choose what you want to attend before you go. Don't try to attend everything or too many events. Include the most important events in your schedule first and then add less important/optional events. Make appointments in advance via email or social media with people you want to meet.

Take notes

With a day full of speakers and meetings, there's a lot to take in and you probably won't remember everything when you get home. Collect your notes and information so that you can easily access them when you return to the office, e.g. pen and paper, laptop, tablet or smartphone. At the end of each session you have attended, note down the key takeaways and any follow-up you would like to do on the topic or with the speakers. This will help jog your memory and give you tasks to do when you get back to work.

Networking

For most academics, conferences are the main way to network. They are a great way to get in touch with people in your field that you wouldn't normally meet. Sometimes it is very difficult to talk to people you don't know. When you go to a conference for the first time or alone, you should be aware that it is normal to feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, you only need to be brave for a few seconds to start a new conversation with a new person, and in most cases it is more important to listen than to talk. Don't forget to use coffee breaks and conference dinners to get to know your new contacts better.

Social media

Social media is now an integral part of the scientific conference experience. Posting on social media during presentations allows for parallel conversations about the sessions, sharing content with other attendees and those unable to attend, and building new relationships in both the online and physical conference space. Searching by conference hashtag is a convenient way to find out who else is attending the conference, and to learn about panels or sessions you might not otherwise be interested in.

Follow up

When you return from the conference, be sure to contact your new contacts via email or social media to make sure you are still on their minds. And keep in touch with them! If you enjoyed the conference, share your positive experiences and insights with colleagues in your own networks or at your workplace.

Links

- 1) Sousa BJ and Clark AM (2017) Getting the most out of academic conference attendance: Five key strategies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.
- 2) Sarah Willey. 9 Tips For Getting The Most Out Of A Virtual Conference: <https://bloomerang.co/blog/9-tips-for-getting-the-most-out-of-a-virtual-conference/>
- 3) Rebecca Knight . How to Get the Most Out of a Conference. <https://hbr.org/2015/07/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-a-conference>
- 4) Andy Crestodina. 34 Ways to Get The Most From a Conference. <https://www.orbitmedia.com/blog/how-to-get-the-most-from-a-conference/>
- 5) Kate C. Farrar . 10 Ways to Make the Most Out of a Conference. <https://www.themuse.com/advice/10-ways-to-make-the-most-out-of-a-conference>