

Tips for Presenting a Paper at a Conference

If you have never presented a paper at a conference before, you have a good experience ahead of you. Your audience will be mostly other community college students, with a smattering of teachers, and they will be friendly. They will be interested in what you have to say, and will want you to succeed. Do not be afraid of them. When you are not presenting your own paper, visit the other sessions and listen to other students presenting theirs. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet new people and learn new things.

I. Preparation: The Dry Run

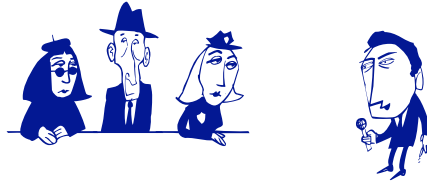
Two weeks before the conference date, do a complete “dry run” of your presentation in front of someone who can critique you. Use your full written text and all your props, charts, illustrations or audio-visual materials.

A. Written Text: Write out everything you will say in your presentation. Do not rely on notes or on extemporizing as you go along; write out your presentation—in large print.

B. Time: Pay careful attention to your time-limit (12 minutes in most cases), and time your oral presentation to make sure it is inside the limit. Going over your limit would mean infringing on another speaker’s time. So plan carefully, and do not rush your reading. Everyone hates a rushed delivery, because no one can understand what you’re saying. One full page of double-spaced text takes about two minutes to read at a comfortable speed. So for a 12-minute limit, your absolute maximum is six pages. BUT:

- You should take a minute to introduce yourself, so shorten your text by a page.
- If you have any charts or pictures or A-V material to explain, you must shorten your text accordingly.
- If you want to pause to give examples or explain anything further, you must also shorten your text.
- You should leave time for a question or two, so you must shorten your text by another page or two—unless time has been set aside for questions, as we have done.

C. Organization: When you are standing in front of an audience, you don't think as freely as you do when you are alone at your desk, so organize ahead of time all the materials you will use, and set them out in the order in which you will need them. Make sure that any passages in books are bookmarked so you can find them instantly. Arrange your transparencies or charts in the correct order. If you need to use any kind of machine, practice using it ahead of time.



II. The Presentation Itself

A. Dress: At conferences *business interview* (or *academic interview*!) attire is often worn. Some men will be wearing jackets and ties; some women will be wearing dresses or suits. Others may be dressed more casually. Unless told otherwise, dress style is up to you. But remember, this is an academic conference: *casual* should mean “*business casual*”—dress shirt and jacket, not jeans and baseball cap. Also, avoid the extremes of very baggy or very tight. It doesn’t hurt to dress up and start getting used to professional life. In fact, it can be good for you. Looking sharp signals to your listeners that you just might *be* sharp! And it may well do wonders for your confidence, too. . . .

B. Scouting: Arrive early and locate your room. Take a look at how it is set up and where you will be speaking. Decide where you will put your papers, visual aids, flyers, etc. Check to see if your audio-visual (AV) equipment is in the room. If it’s not, figure out how you will go ahead without it (or initiate your back-up plan, if you’ve arranged to share equipment with another presenter).

C. Introduction: A moderator will probably introduce you. Still, it’s a good idea to recap and expand a bit on the formal introduction. Make sure your name and school come across to your audience. If you think your neighborhood or national/cultural origin would be of interest, you could mention that, along with your major. Tell the origin of your paper: is it a project for a biology class, a paper for English, part of a group project, or just something you wanted to investigate? What methodology did you use? To what school do you hope to transfer? You might also want to thank your mentor, and thank UCI for hosting this conference—especially if you notice a UCI representative among your listeners! Do not take more than a minute for this introduction (time yourself) but *do* say something about yourself.

D. Courtesy: Please turn off your cell phone. Be considerate in other ways, too. When another person is presenting, avoid whispering, crumpling paper or scurrying about from room to room. As you might imagine, that distracts everyone, not least of all your fellow presenter(s). So we prefer that you stay in the room for all presentations. Now, if a dire need requires your presence elsewhere and you absolutely *must* leave or enter a room, at least wait until the presentation has been completed. But for everyone’s sake, plan to remain in the room until *all* presentations are completed. On behalf of the presenters—plus everyone else in the room—we thank you.

