

Chapter 2

Before the Conference: General Planning Strategies

At an international conference in East Africa, a doctoral student invited one of her professors to attend her session and critique her performance. After the doctoral student was introduced, she announced that it was her first presentation ever and that she was terribly nervous. She then proceeded to talk rapidly and pace back and forth, stopping periodically to grab a bottle of water and take huge gulps from it. Several problems were evident here. First, talking very rapidly is ill-advised, particularly for an international audience who may be listening in a language other than their first. Secondly, by referring to her inexperience, she undermined her own expertise with the participants when she was very knowledgeable about the topic. Third, by calling attention to her nervousness, she put the entire audience on watch for outward signs of anxiety and raised their level of discomfort. Fourth, the pacing and water drinking were a distraction.

This chapter guides readers through the planning processes that are essential to prevent such beginners' mistakes and conduct an effective conference session. With regard to session planning, the emphasis is on being participant-oriented and being clear about appropriate outcomes for those attending the session. Templates for a presenter's introduction, a brief session description, and a minute-by-minute session schedule are supplied. Criteria for self- and peer-evaluation of conference presentations are included. Finally, volunteer service as a reviewer of conference proposals is recommended as a way to more fully internalize expectations for presentation proposals. The first step is understanding your role.

Understanding the Presenter's Role

Rather than thinking of a conference presentation it as an event and a date on the calendar, treat it as a project. There are decades of research to suggest that adult learners approach important tasks as self-directed, informal projects (Merriam and Bierema 2013). When adults pursue learning projects, they tend to seek out all available resources in an effort to master the task, such as working with mentors and consulting resources. If, for instance, a person wants to acquire proficiency with language, it would be common to enrol in a class, talk with native speakers, read in

the target language, watch captioned text videos, and listen to language instruction tapes with headphones. The same kinds of strategies can and should be applied in order to master the skills of presenting at conferences.

Put Your Audience First

At an education conference, one of the events was the national field directors forum at the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE)—a group that focuses on teacher preparation programs. This forum group consists of people who are responsible for arranging, managing, and evaluating student teaching placements throughout the United States. The first presenter was affiliated with a university in an urban setting and she had decided to do the “all about me” presentation. Because she focused entirely on her specific context and program, participants started to question how her recommendations applied to their situations. For example, her university was in an urban setting and student teachers were within walking distance of several public schools. How did this apply to the person in a rural area? Within a few minutes, the participants’ attention appeared to wane; their questions had to do with what Hoff (1992) refers to as the WIIFM variable— “what’s in it for me?” This is a common error of presenters. They find their own program so fascinating that they neglect to step back from it and talk about the more general lessons learned so that a diverse audience can glean something from it. Generally speaking, it is inappropriate to give exactly the same presentation to a national or international audience that you would give to local colleagues. Treat those who attend your session as you would honored guests at your home: attend to their needs, respect their wishes, help them to feel welcomed, and accommodate to their tastes and interests.

Introducing Yourself

Before planning any presentation, accept that your audience will be wondering:

- Who are you and how did you become knowledgeable about this?
- What is your topic and purpose?
- What facts, ideas, and skills will I acquire from participating?
- How does this topic relate to me?
- How can I apply this new information to my situation?
- What is in this for me? (Hoff 1992)

Activity: Write a Three-Sentence Introduction for Yourself

At many conferences, members of the organization volunteer to introduce speakers. The person introducing you will appreciate it if you have a *brief, easy to read* introduction prepared in advance. Some suggestions are:

1. Type it in 18-point print, double-spaced for ease of reading.
2. Keep the length to not more than 3 or 4 short sentences (approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ page). (Note: for keynote speakers, more detail can be added—about one page is sufficient).
3. Provide some cues on the correct pronunciation of the first and last name (e.g., phonetic pronunciation, a common word that is pronounced that way, or “rhymes with”).
4. Describe your work experience in a *very concise* fashion.
5. Vary the sentence structure (e.g., do not begin every sentence with the presenter’s name or a pronoun).
6. Mention the presenter’s current position (e.g., doctoral candidate, faculty member)
7. Conclude with the area of interest that led to making this presentation.

Differentiate Between Speeches and Presentations

Many people who are new to making conference presentations base their expectations on the speeches that they have heard at various community events. Even after they begin attending conferences, they may erroneously assume that their slot on the conference program is supposed to be more like the keynote address than the smaller group sessions. As a first step, presenters need to differentiate between speeches and presentations. This is outlined in Fig. [2.1](#).

Locating Suitable Venues

When seeking an outlet for a session presentation, there are several strategies for identifying possible groups and meetings.

- Think about cost associated with presenting at a conference. Be certain that you understand eligibility requirements and rules governing travel reimbursement. Many conferences have reduced registration fees for students or have a block of hotel rooms at reduced rates for those who register early. If funding is a concern, plan ways to reduce costs, such as carpooling to the site if feasible, sharing a room, or bringing some easily transportable, pre-packaged food rather than buying every meal at a restaurant.

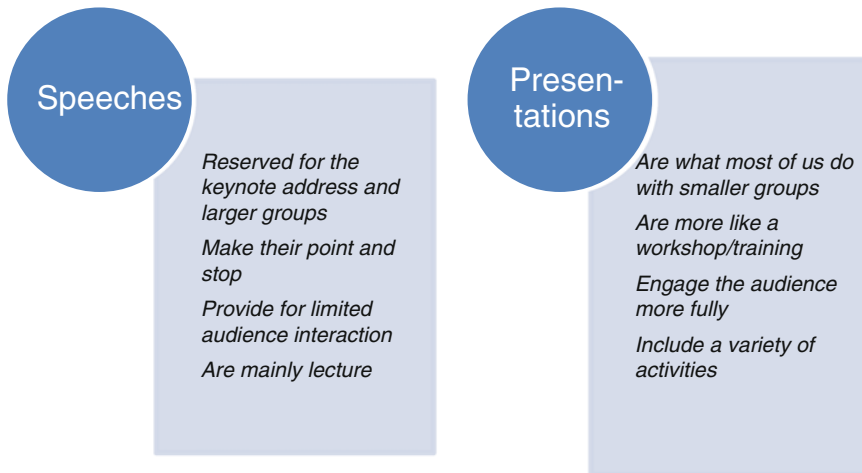


Fig. 2.1 The Difference between speeches and presentations

- Read the call for proposals very carefully to determine if your topic and approach is a match. For example, if a meeting for a group of counselors has the theme of family-centered practices, any session proposed needs to mesh with this goal.
- Begin with the professional organizations in which you hold membership. If you are relatively new to the field, talk with accomplished faculty members about the organizations in which they are active members or officers. Visit their websites to view a calendar of their national, regional, state, and local meetings. The publications of these organizations often publish calls for conference proposals and papers, so that is another place to look.
- From a professional development perspective, it is good to “stretch” and try to advance to the next level. So, after being accepted for a local conference is no longer a challenge, consider submitting a proposal at the state or regional level and, after presentations at the state and regional level are easy to accomplish, try for a national or international venue.
- Graduate students should check the postings in their academic departments because calls for conference proposals frequently are shared in this informal way. While you are attending a conference plan for the subsequent year. Usually, there are bulletin boards or tables with information that advertise other professional meetings, so be certain to peruse those materials.
- Faculty members seldom are fully funded for travel to professional conferences by their employers and usually, only featured speakers—such as invited keynote speakers—have their expenses paid by the sponsoring organization. Given this situation, presenters are free to choose whatever conference themes, formats, and locales, they find appealing. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* publishes a

conference calendar of different professional meetings in various disciplines in the October issue that can be a valuable resource for planning conference travel.

Selecting the Topic

How should you go about selecting a topic? Use the “Four Cs” in Table 2.1 to guide you through topic selection.

Choosing a Title

A good way to begin with writing the title for your session is by referring to a copy of a conference program from the previous year in hard copy or online. This will provide some sense of an appropriate title. In general, some guidelines are:

- Consider the audience and meeting theme
- Emphasize outcomes
- Identify concerns, issues, trends
- Match carefully to the session content
- Avoid cryptic titles that leave the audience wondering what to expect
- Stimulate interest and motivate attendance
- Do not invent forced acronyms

Table 2.1 The “Four Cs” of topic selection

1.	<i>Curiosity.</i> Effective presenters select a topic that they want to know more about. Everyone has attended a session that seems emotionally flat because the presenter’s interest for the topic has waned or never existed. Audiences respond well when the presenter conveys enthusiasm for the topic
2.	<i>Competence.</i> Beginning presenters frequently are daunted by the fact that they are not the leading national expert on the subject. First and foremost, you can—in the words of Sir Issac Newton—“stand on the shoulders of giants”. Figure out who the leading experts are and rely on their work for support. Remember that practical work experience is another type of expertise. When there are doubts about expertise, another helpful approach is to collaborate. Some of the best conference sessions are presented by teams of professionals who represent different types of expertise, such as theory, research, and practice
3.	<i>Commitment.</i> Whatever topic you select, your interest in it will need to be sufficient to sustain you when investing additional time and effort into learning more about it. Avoid selecting a topic purely because it is a “hot topic” in the field. Make it clear why you selected the topic and why it should matter to others
4.	<i>Credibility.</i> Participants in a session should have the sense that they are in capable hands of someone who has plowed deeply into the literature and has direct experience related to the topic. Strive to show that you have something to offer beyond what is already widely available in the literature

Activity: Titles that Mesh with Conference Themes

One major clue to what organizations are seeking is to review their mission statements—often posted on websites as “About Us” or “History”. Doing this provides insight into the group’s goals. For example, The Society for Research in Child Development describes itself as follows:

The Society is a multidisciplinary, not-for-profit, professional association with a membership of approximately 5,500 researchers, practitioners, and human development professionals from over 50 countries. The purposes of the Society are to promote multidisciplinary research in the field of human development, to foster the exchange of information among scientists and other professionals of various disciplines, and to encourage applications of research findings. Our goals are pursued through a variety of programs with the cooperation and service of our governing council, standing committees, and members. www.srcd.org/

Having this background helps prospective presenters to judge whether or not their proposal for a conference session will be a good fit. The second step is to read about the particular conference. Usually, there is a theme set by the conference planners and, if the proposed session meshes with that theme, this increases chances of acceptance. Locate both pieces of information—organizational mission and conference theme—for a conference at which you hope to present.

Identifying Outcomes for Participants

Just as teachers write objectives for learners, presenters need to generate outcomes for the participants. How will the attendees benefit beyond merely getting information? When you think about it, if information is the only outcome, this can be accomplished in a much more cost-effective fashion by staying home and reading. Therefore, try to focus on what is it that those who attend your session will accomplish beyond sitting and listening while you dispense information. This is a particularly important expectation for workshop/training types of sessions. Emphasize the higher-order thinking skills of application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creativity. Even if you are presenting a research paper, shift the emphasis from merely reporting on a study to giving participants an insider’s view of your work: why you pursued it, how it addresses a gap in the extant literature, how your design aligns with the research questions, and ways in which the study findings advance thinking in the field. As you plan, keep in mind the reasons that people take the time and invest the money in traveling to a conference. For example, they want to keep current in their fields, expand their professional repertoires, perform better in their teacher/scholar/researcher roles, have something interesting to talk about, form alliances with like-minded professionals, and advance their careers. The fundamental question to be answered has to do with “value added”: How will participants benefit from spending time with you in your session?

Activity: Writing a Short Description for a Session

The great majority of conferences will require you write a brief description of your session suitable for publication in the conference program. Typically, there is a 50 word limit, so the description must be concise. Sessions that are not presentations of original research can be described using the following “formula”:

1. Opening statement
 - Write a somewhat general (and fairly indisputable) statement about the situation.
2. Your approach, “take” on the issue, stance
 - Give participants a sense of the focus for the session.
3. *Benefits for the Participants*
 - What will they accomplish that they could not achieve by just reading? What will they do besides sit and listen? Begin each item in the list with a verb; list 3 or 4 main outcomes.
 - Write a final sentence about the resources that they will receive, such as an annotated list of websites, a checklist, or a synthesis of the research.

Organizing the Session

Psychologists refer to a phenomenon called the primacy and recency effect where human memory is concerned. As applied to a conference session, this means that participants are more likely to remember what happened first and last than what was in the middle. Effective presenters know this and pay particular attention to effective introductions and conclusions. So, when the only introduction is “Today I’m going to talk about...” and the conclusion is something such as “Okay, we are running out of time, so...”, two very important opportunities to get the message across have been squandered.

Engaging Introductions

Begin with a thought-provoking experience that focuses attention. Some strategies for a strong introduction are:

- A set of questions
- A real life account or a case

- A show of hands survey
- Startling statistics or surprising facts
- A paradox
- A list of concerns generated by the group
- A concrete object or prop
- A simulation or “test.”

Effective Conclusions

Some ways to arrive at effective conclusions are:

- *Alert participants to the conclusion.* When participants hear words such as “Finally...”, “In conclusion...” or “To summarize...” this tends to refocus attention.
- *Restate the main thesis.* Remind participants of the “take away” message that was their primary purpose for the session. For example, at the end of a presentation on writing for professional publication for novices conducted by five author/editors, the panel moderator said, “Our goal here today was to demystify the process of writing for publication so that ‘new voices’ can join the ongoing professional dialogue. We look forward to receiving the new and improved manuscripts you have developed after following the recommendations we’ve shared. If your schedule permits, we also hope to see you at our editor roundtables tomorrow to discuss specific ideas for journal articles.”
- *Reflection.* Everything that you have shared will not be equally useful to all, so plan a concluding activity that encourages participants to think about what they have learned and plan to implement it. During a workshop you might ask participants to list three strategies that they will implement immediately and three that they plan to try later on. For a longer session, you might invite participants to write the questions that they still have at the midpoint on note cards, quickly review/categorize them, and respond to each one.
- *Evaluation.* Many times, a session will conclude with a request for participants to complete a short evaluation form that is collected by a member of the conference committee. Be certain to allocate sufficient time for attendees to do this before the next presenter and group is waiting out in the hallway. Ask if you are permitted to review the evaluations before they are whisked away because few conferences take the time to compile and share the results. If no evaluation is planned, do your own so that you can improve (Rogoschewski 2011).

Activity: Basic Evaluation of a Conference Session

Try presenting your session to a group prior to the conference, such as a college class. Ask them to evaluate the presentation using the Likert scale below or adapt the scale to suit your situation.

1. The presenter was well prepared				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. The session was well organized				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
3. The presentation held my interest				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
4. I learned something of value from the session				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5. I would attend other sessions conducted by this presenter or recommend this one to a colleague interested in this topic				
Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Comments:				

Writing the Proposal

Many people learn how to write conference proposals primarily through trial and error. Others have the advantage of support from an experienced, successful presenter to orient them to the process, collaborate with them, and/or supply them with examples to follow. Still others approach making presentations as they would conducting a review of the literature; they search for published resources that will provide them with guidance.

A faculty member arrived at a doctoral seminar and shared a call for proposals to present at the state-level conference of a leading professional organization in their field. After several students inquired about how to write the proposal, their advisor posted two examples of her own successful proposals and, with the permission of former students from the class, two additional session proposals. Because the main purpose of the conference was professional development for practitioners in the field, the typical session format was a one-hour workshop/training on a timely topic. The current students pored over these examples as if they were maps that showed the way to buried treasure. What did they notice? First, the language was surprisingly direct; the proposal was not written in the same style as their class papers or dissertations. It was evident that clear communication of ideas was the goal. Second, that the writing was more like writing a grant in that it was focused on benefits for the participants. As a result, the conference guidelines required that

prospective presenters include 3–5 outcomes for participants. Third, the activities were varied and engaging; all four of the sample proposals that students reviewed were interesting and persuaded the reader that the session merited a place on the program. In many ways, the proposal was more like a lesson plan in that it reflected elements of good teaching, such as including individual, small group, and total group activities. Finally, the sample proposals followed the required format exactly and were so carefully crafted and proofread that they were error free.

Mapping Out the Session

Consider the following points as you plan:

- How much time do I have?
- How formal/informal is the event?
- What is the room set up?
- What has been particularly successful with this audience in the past?
- What kinds of visual aids are acceptable?
- What types of technology are available?
- Who is paying for and responsible for what?
- What criteria will be used to evaluate my performance?

Mapping out a session will require you to:

- State the purpose for the session in audience-centered terms.
- Prepare a minute-by-minute schedule of activities
- Form a plan to immediately grab the audience's interest
- Identify a list of benefits for participants that go beyond the knowledge level to analysis, application, synthesis, evaluation and creative responses.
- Design an activity to attain each outcome.
- Consider the four audiences: those who want facts, to be creative, to interact with others, and to work with ideas (Garmston 2005).
- Develop a strategy to ascertain if the intended outcomes were achieved
- Plan an effective conclusion that underscores the purpose for the session (Table 2.2)

Activity: Review of a Minute-by-Minute Plan for a Conference Session

Use this set of criteria to self-evaluate your minute-by-minute session plan or ask a peer to evaluate your proposal with this set of questions.

Table 2.2 Example of minute-by-minute session plan***Creating and sharing video lessons:******improving student math achievement with a “flipped classroom” approach***

Theresa McQuaide

Session description:

Creating and sharing video lessons that learners can use to practice outside of classroom time is one way to support student achievement in mathematics. Participants in this session will observe examples of the “flipped classroom” approach while being introduced to some Web 2.0 tools that will allow them to create and share their own resources for the classroom. Each participant will use the free software presented to create a short video.

Time allocated (min)	Goals for participants	Presenter’s activity
5	Technology check at work station	Introduce and distribute handouts. Seat participants at computer work stations; verify that the shortcuts are accessible
3	Understand the flipped classroom and its potential as a teaching tool	Use research to identify the features and uses of a flipped classroom
3	Observe a flipped classroom in action	Demonstrate Henrico County public school math site. http://teachers.henrico.k12.va.us/math/HCPAlgebra1/module4-4.html
10	Review a major repository of resources for teaching mathematics	Demonstrate www.Kahnacademy.org . Show the concept map, practice and video library. Participants will try a practice exercise, using the hint and video lesson features to identify homework suitable for their students
5	Learn how to create and share video files	A handout on how to use the free site Edmodo.com will guide in uploading their videos or links. Participants will create a login at tappedin.org and a link to Kahn Academy
5	Use software to create instructional videos	Show how to use Camstudio, Paint and Geogebra to record a video
20	Create a 1 minute video	Attendees will create a video, save the file on the desktop and save it at the Edmodo site.
4	Make a plan to implement what was learned and evaluate the workshop	Participants will complete an online survey at Zoomerang on how they will apply what they have learned during the session to their teaching of mathematics

Instructions for the Author of the Proposal:

Please write this information on your conference proposal copies if you have not done so already:

Who is the intended audience? What professional organization are you considering as the venue for sharing this material? What particular type of session do you have in mind (e.g., workshop, panel discussion, research report, and so forth)?

Reviewer's Criteria

- Does the title accurately reflect the content? Does it set participants' expectations appropriately? If you can think of a way to improve the title, suggest it.
- Is the brief description clear? Does it sound interesting and worthwhile? What suggestions do you have for improving the brief description? Please feel free to edit it right on the copy or offer specific suggestions.
- Is there a clear sense of how participants will benefit from investing their conference time in this session? Please make a list of at least 3 benefits you would expect as a participant in this session.
- **VERY IMPORTANT:** What will participants do besides sit and listen? Please offer some ideas for making the session interactive.
- What questions would you expect to have answered in a session with this title and description? Please list several.
- What understandings and skills might you hope to acquire? Please identify some realistic outcomes, given the time constraints.
- What types of discussion, experiences, activities, simulations, cases, or examples might you hope to engage in during the session? Please provide some examples.
- What resources would be helpful? What would you hope the presenter might distribute in a handout? Please list some suggestions.
- What would be your worst fear about a session on this topic? Explain what the presenter could do to avert this.

Choosing and Using Examples

A professor of education was invited to give a keynote address on teaching children to read. The concept behind the conference was that experts on early literacy would share their divergent perspectives on the most effective ways to maximize literacy growth. First on the agenda was a proponent of intensive phonics instruction. She set forth the argument that, if only teachers would emphasize the sound structure of language earlier and lead children in “cracking the code”, many reading problems would be averted. The next person to speak was a proponent of more balanced approaches and contended that this was a more effective way to reach and teach diverse groups of children because not all of them would have strength in listening

to and interpreting the sound structure of language. She shared an example taken directly from the written work of a child who had failed kindergarten and failed again in first grade due to poor reading scores. In the child's handwriting, there was this word: flicewatur. She asked the audience of teachers to analyze the word from a phonics perspective. This child who had been unsuccessful with reading used a blend, (fl) a silent e (ice), and a r—controlled vowel (ur) but she still did not spell the word she had in mind—flyswatter—in a conventional way. A picture from the child's journal truly was, as the old saying goes, worth 1000 words.

When choosing examples to illustrate key concepts, realize that the human brain responds most strongly to powerful visual images, seeks patterns in complexity, and “runs” on stories (Jensen 2006). Long after the session is over, these are the things that people will still remember, so harness the power of these tools as you plan. Sometimes speakers attempt to use some of the tired, old ways of connecting with an audience—telling a joke, describing what happened to them on the trip there, showing a bunch of cartoons, or a silly “icebreaker”. These strategies can backfire. The joke can fall flat or offend someone. The trip there may have been uneventful, the cartoons copyrighted, and the icebreaker may set an inappropriate tone and expectations for the session. Any examples that you choose must, at the very least, be suitable for the occasion, of interest to the audience, and relevant to the topic of the presentation. Gimmicks are to be avoided. For instance, one presenter began a session with a series of true/false questions about herself, such as “Was Dr. X named Pennsylvania's Teacher of the Year?” This did not have the intended effect of establishing credibility, however. It came across as ego because it used several minutes of the session.

Teaching with Cases

The case method originated in the teaching of law and medicine, was extended to business, and is now used in a wide range of disciplines. Cases bring real world situations into the session, provide a shared experience to stimulate discussion, raise interesting questions without simple answers, encourage professionals to reflect on actions, and demand decisions that rely on professional wisdom (Davis 2009). In general, it is preferable to invent your own cases rather than “borrow” someone else's. There are at least three reasons for this. First of all, a published case may be familiar to some participants already. Secondly, you may not be qualified to answer questions that surface about someone else's case. Third, by writing your own cases from your experiences, you build credibility with an audience.

Activity: Creating Your Own Cases

- Review the published cases of others before attempting to write your own.
- Identify cases that engage participants intellectually and emotionally.

- Set outcomes for the participants and decide how and when the cases will be used.
- Protect the confidentiality of the people in the case.
- Keep the cases engaging but brief so that they can be read in few minutes' time.
- Try out, revise, and try again.

Each case will need:

1. Setting—describe the who, what, when, and where of the situation. Include only those things that are essential to understanding the point of the story.
2. Beginning—Start with something that will get the reader interested in reading the case. It is not necessary to arrange things chronologically; you can begin with the most interesting part.
3. Account—Do more than summarize the event. Carefully select some details that made the incident memorable, such as a verbatim comment, nonverbal behavior, etc.
4. Reflection—Encourage reflection on the professional's role in the situation using thought-provoking questions.
5. Outcome—Describe the consequences of the incident for the client or learner.
6. Ending—Every story needs to build to a satisfying conclusion. Note that the outcome need not be shared until after the discussion has occurred. The decisions reached and justification for those decisions are important.

Some questions that might be used when discussing cases are:

- What possibilities for action are there?
- What are the consequences of each for the various stakeholders?
- What should ___ do at the first decision point?
- How did ___ get into this predicament?
- If you were a friend of ___, what advice might you have given?
- What actions should be taken?
- What concepts, principles, or theories seem to follow from this analysis?

Activity: Evaluation of a Case Study

Use the following checklist to assess a case that you have written or one written by a peer.

YES	NO
Content: the case includes a setting, beginning, account, reflection, outcome, and conclusion	
YES	NO
Purpose: The case identifies how it is linked to session goals	
YES	NO

(continued)

(continued)

Impact: the case tells a real story that is emotionally compelling and memorable; it is rich in characterizations and promotes empathy with the central characters	
YES	NO
Relevance: The case focuses on professional dispositions and appropriate courses of action.	
YES	NO
Challenging: The case lacks an obvious or clear-cut right answer and raises interesting questions and dilemmas; it allows for competing interpretations of motives. It engages professionals intellectually and encourages them to provide a rationale for their point of view	
YES	NO
Clarity: The case is sufficiently clear and concise to prevent readers from becoming lost in extraneous details	
YES	NO
Organization: The case supplies details on how it will be introduced, explains how participants will work on the case, includes thought-provoking discussion questions, and plans how participants will report their responses	
YES	NO
Conclusion: The case provides participants with the actual outcome so that they can compare/contrast it with their own decisions	
YES	NO
Quality of Writing: The case is well written, carefully proofread, and free of mechanical errors	

At the Conference Site

After you have planned your presentation carefully and been accepted to the program, there are several things that you can do to have a successful conference experience.

1. *Check in at the conference desk.* Most conference planners have a separate registration area for presenters. Many require you to be an active member of the organization and wear a badge to enter the conference hall. Be aware that there may have been changes to the preliminary conference program. So, if at all possible, arrive early to get your badge, double-check the time and location of your presentation, and look at the room equipment/set up.
2. *Study the program.* Instead of spending all of your time with colleagues, branch out. Mark the conference program using a 1st/2nd choice strategy for various time slots in case there is a cancellation or the session is closed. Use breaks and meals to meet with key individuals and broaden your network. Large conferences typically have a name index in the back of the program and this can be very helpful in locating other presenters. If your goal is to speak with an acquisitions editor about a possible book, try visiting the booths at a time when they will be less busy, such as during a keynote address that you would not mind

missing. Remember that, if you plan to speak with an editor about a book project, you'll probably have not more than a minute or two to present your concept for the book. Instead of "showing what you know" and barraging the editor with jargon, emphasize how your book would represent a stride forward and be marketable. Think of it as a 1 or 2 min "commercial" for your book idea.

3. *Take time to review.* It is commonplace to have a sleepless night before the day of an important presentation. One worry you can address easily is fear of oversleeping. Take along a small travel alarm, set the alarm on a cellphone, and schedule a hotel wake-up call 10 min after that. Have all of your materials assembled. Place them against the inside of your hotel room door so that you cannot leave without picking them up. Even if you have practiced extensively, you'll want to go over your notes prior to the session, so if you wake up early and cannot go back to sleep, use this time to practice instead of tossing and turning. Use your visual aids, practice out loud (unless you are sharing a room!) and time yourself.
4. *Be considerate.* Arrive early enough to meet the person introducing you and share your brief introduction with that person. If you are on a panel and do not know the other presenters, be certain to introduce yourself to them. Even if someone else is the timekeeper, bring along your own way of monitoring the time. Keep in mind that attendees at your session need time to get to the next scheduled event. The presenters who have the room after you probably are waiting out in the hallway will appreciate it if you do not exceed your time slot. If there are conversations after the session, move away from the front of the room to allow the next presenters to get set up.
5. *Prepare to speak.* Make a deliberate effort to breathe deeply and relax (Hardicre et al. 2007). If you are very tense, your face may show it. One tip is to imagine that you are smelling something wonderful—roses, cookies. This helps to "soften" your facial expression so that you don't look as though you are scowling or disagreeing with the other speakers. Take discreet sips of water prior to beginning to speak because it is common for your throat to become dry when you are nervous. If you are on a panel, do not get so preoccupied with your own presentation that you neglect to listen to what others say. Think about what the others are saying, not only as a way of showing respect but also as a way to avoid the very embarrassing mistake of revealing that you were not listening by repeating something that was discussed already. Jot down notes if there is something that you'd like to comment on later, during the discussion period.
6. *Respond to questions with aplomb.* Many times, it is difficult for everyone to hear a question so one public speaking tip is to repeat or rephrase the question. After you are certain that you understand the question, respond directly to it. If there is no definitive answer to a question and oppositional points of view prevail, make this clear. If there is an answer but you don't know it, ask others to weigh in or offer to look into it further. Try to determine the underlying reason for a question. Sometimes, a person really does not have a question; rather, he or she wants to be acknowledged as a fellow expert. If a person asking a question

knows more about a particular aspect than you do, there is no disgrace in accepting this, thanking them, and moving on. You might try statements such as: “It sounds like you have extensive experience with...” “Thank you for pointing out...”, or, if it is a digression and is taking too long (and you honestly feel this way), “I’d like to talk with you more afterwards if you have the time.”

7. *Remember to say thank you.* Be gracious and convey appreciation to those who have participated and facilitated the presentation. Thank the audience, the person who introduced you, co-presenters, and hotel staff who helped you. If, for example, a staff member went above and beyond to help with a technology issue, take the time to fill out a comment card. If the presentation was during a meal and the food was exceptionally good and beautifully presented, let this be known to the management.
8. *Follow up.* As you get ready to leave the conference, review the contacts you made and keep your promises. If, for example, you ran out of handouts and gathered an e-mail list so that participants could get a copy, you need to do this even though your work duties have been piling up in your absence. If you exchanged business cards and agreed to make contact, do this within a few days’ time. If you received constructive criticism on a work-in-progress, take the time to summarize it and make a plan for revising your paper. When papers are to be submitted for consideration as conference proceedings, study the guidelines. Submit the work in the required format and in a timely fashion.

Conclusion

Planning a presentation consists of six action steps: (1) selecting a topic, (2) analyzing and adapting to an audience, (3) conducting effective research and using online resources appropriately, (4) organizing the session with an outline, (4) using presentational aids effectively, (5) making choices about language, and (6) determining the delivery style (Verderber et al. 2014). Neglecting to consider any of these tasks is apt to lead to a less-than-successful outcome.

Online Resources: General Advice on Presenting

Sharp, E. (2014), Make your convention presentation shine. *COAHPERD Journal*, 39(2), 2.

How to Make a Good Presentation—Roger Darlington’s World

<http://www.rogerdarlington.me.uk/Presentation.html>

Practical advice on preparing and presenting a conference session.

Giving a Conference Talk

<http://courses.cs.washington.edu/courses/cse561/02au/notes/goodtalk.pdf>

The basics for those who are new to making presentations.

Tips on Writing Successful Conference Presentation Proposals

<http://blog.tesol.org/tips-on-writing-successful-conference-presentation-proposals/>

McVeigh offers advice on the whole process of generating effective conference presentations.

What's the Difference between Making a Speech and Presenting a Paper?

<https://nicholadgutgold.wordpress.com/2010/03/22/whats-the-difference-between-making-a-speech-and-presenting-a-paper/>

A step-by-step guide to presenting a research paper.

Learn from the Experts

www.dailymotion.com

This compilation of videos offers advice to presenters; just type in “conference presentations” to identify a specific topic.

Florida Reading Association

<http://www.flreads.org/Annual%20Conference/annual.htm>

A good example of guidelines that conference planners develop to assist presenters in generating a successful proposal and conducting an effective session.

What to Expect Presenting at an Academic Conference

<https://ferswriteshoe.wordpress.com/2012/02/13/what-to-expect-presenting-at-an-academic-conference/>

A student presenting at a conference for the first time gives a detailed explanation of the process.

Presenting Your Work to Others: Social Work Career Center

<http://careers.socialworkers.org/documents/Presenting%20Your%20Work%20to%20Others.pdf>

Sage advice for presenters from the National Association of Social Workers.

Writing the Academic Conference Proposal

<http://www.gradhacker.org/2011/06/01/writing-the-academic-conference-proposal/>

Good advice from student Jennifer Sano-Franchini about writing conference proposals, complete with examples. There are many more resources at the GradHacker site.

References

- Davis, B. (2009). *Tools for teaching* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Garmston, R. (2005, 1997). *The presenter's fieldbook: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.
- Hardicre, J., Coad, J., & Devitt, P. (2007). Ten steps to successful conference presentations. *British Journal of Nursing*, 16(7), 402–404.
- Hoff, R. (1992). *I can see you naked: The fearless guide to presenting*. Kansas City, MO: Andrews McMeel Publishing.
- Jensen, E. (2006). *Enriching the brain: How to maximize every learner's potential*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Bierema, L. L. (2013). *Adult learning: Linking theory and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Rogoschewski, T. L. (2011). Developing a conference presentation: A primer for new library professionals. *Partnership*, 6(2), 1–6. <https://journal.lib.uoguelph.ca/index.php/perj/article/view/1573/2283#.VjYzPzZdGUK>
- Verderber, R., Sellnow, D., & Verderber, K. (2014). *The challenge of effective speaking in a digital age*. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Making Effective Presentations at Professional
Conferences

A Guide for Teachers, Graduate Students and
Professors

Renck Jalongo, M.; Machado, C.

2016, X, 124 p. 11 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-23173-0