

# **How to Attend a Conference (and why)**

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# The International Conference

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- International meeting of scientists for the ostensible purpose of hearing presentations about each other's work, usually with permanent publication of written papers.
- Publication aspect is the **primary** means of scientific dissemination in computer science. More important than journals.

# Why Attend a Conference?

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- Get feedback on your work.
- Learn about other people's work.
- Become known and (hopefully) respected.
- Visit somewhere interesting, for free.
- Publish your work in a peer-reviewed venue, in a reasonable period of time.
  - Can reuse text in your PhD dissertation
  - Makes negative judgment by examiners challenging!

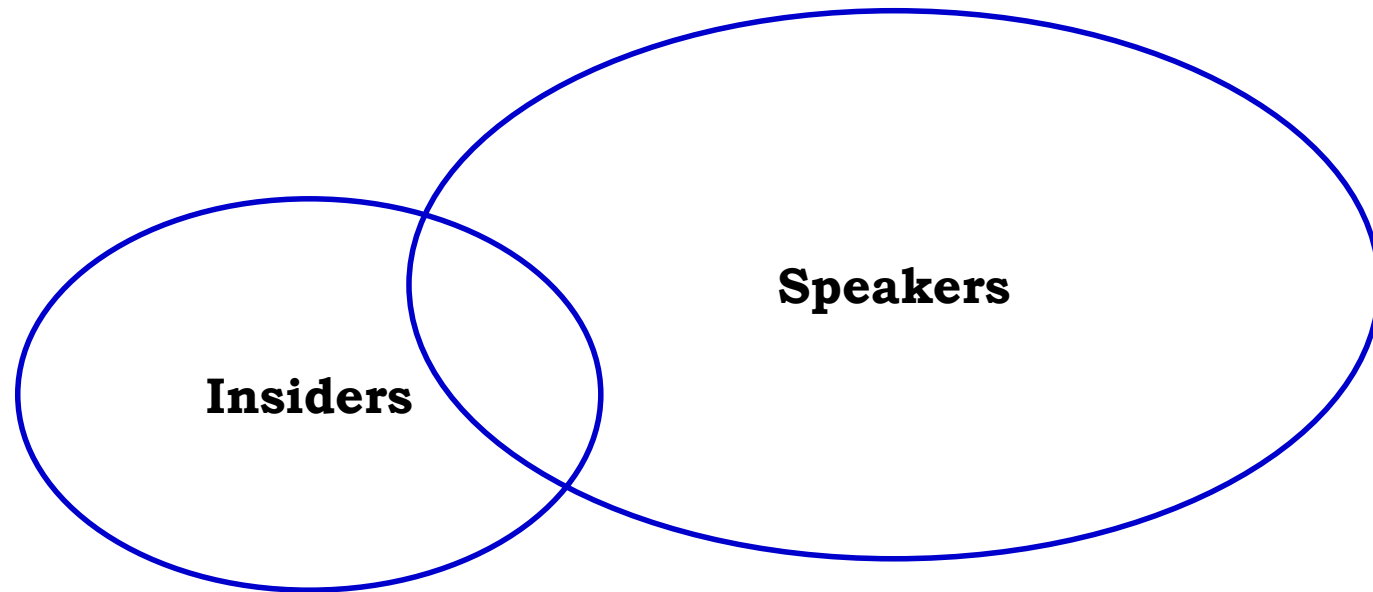
# Why Attend a Conference, Really.

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- Reason number 1:
  - It's not science until it's communicated.
- Reason number 2:
  - To build relationships with colleagues in the international scientific community.
  - Foster collaborations and stimulate new ideas, as well as for personal benefit.
- Corollary: Conferences are primarily a **social** activity, and you have to be good at this!

# Typical Social Structure

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Corollary: you must be a speaker and so have had a paper accepted.

**Everyone else**

# Prepare an **Excellent** Talk

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- It's an advertisement for the paper, but also much more.
- Crucial for your **scientific reputation**
  - Enhanced influence of your scientific ideas
  - Enhanced personal benefits (respect, jobs, invitations to collaborate, ...)
- You **must** be(come) good at this!
  - Prepare, prepare, prepare
  - Consciously study the masters
  - Get friendly feedback

# Registration, Accommodation

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- Hopefully your Department/Supervisor will fund your attendance.
- Most conferences have a cheaper, **early registration** deadline. Meet it!
- Late booking of flights is very expensive.
- Stay in the main conference hotel, if you can possibly afford it, even if it's expensive. Remember, this is a **social** activity.

# Conference Attendance 101

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- What talks to attend.
  - Anything especially relevant to your area.
  - The whole of ‘your session’
  - All keynote/invited talks.
  - All panel sessions, or other unusual format events.
  - Anything by a potential future employer/referee/...
  - Anything where you would be absent conspicuously
  - The business meeting.
- Don’t necessarily attend *every* talk.
  - Make time for side-meetings, walks, rest...
  - But be discreet.



# Conference Attendance 101

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- Ask **intelligent** questions
  - Gets you noticed.
  - But avoid the impression that this is why you are doing it...
- Handling questions - reasons people ask
  - to be polite
  - to compete with/undermine you
  - to advertise their own work
  - to find out the answer
- Some tough questions
  - Have you tried X? (You haven't.)
  - Isn't this just Y's old idea? (You've never heard of Y.)
  - Some technical flaw. (You're unprepared.)

# Conference Attendance 101

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- Have your ‘elevator talk’ ready.
- Q. What are you working on?
- A. Well, erm, we’re looking at, you know, when systems are too big to verify... I mean when the BDDs blow up, ... well ... kind of you have to ... like, it’s like abstraction... and, err..., we calculate how the variables, I mean a relation that we use, kind of, to simplify things...

# Conference Attendance 101

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Remember, the purpose of the conference is to see and talk to people, and to discuss your speciality with colleagues, outside the session chamber.

[Sindermann, 1982]

# Conference Attendance 101

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- Introduce yourself, when opportunity arises, giving your name and affiliation clearly. Don't rely on the badge.
- And have something interesting/sensible to say after that.
- Talk to and ask people about *their* research, only about yours on request.

# Conference Attendance 101

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- Don't hang out only with other students from your Department, or read email all the time...
- Insinuate yourself into the 'inner circle', or at least get introduced to a wide range of attendees – especially the other speakers. But don't intrude on obviously private interactions.
- You can hang out with your supervisor... **for the purpose of meeting people.** Not just for comfort. (But don't be a nuisance.)

# Conference Attendance 101

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- Go to all cocktail parties (early), spontaneous pub outings, and other peripheral social gatherings. (But never get drunk and embarrass yourself.)
- Be especially careful to join interesting and useful groups for dinner – even if expensive.
- Never complain publicly about any aspect of the conference organization (food, transport, facilities, ...)
- Never complain publicly about your own institution, or indeed anything else.

# Harassment

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- Unwanted and unwarranted conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating another person's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for another person.
- Many conferences nowadays have an anti-harassment policy.
- If you are subject to harassment, you have every right to complain to the conference organisers.

# Conference Attendance 101

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- Have a follow-up list
  - Things you promised to send people
  - Ideas to look at in more depth
  - Papers to chase
- And follow up **soon** after getting back
- Submit your expenses immediately.



# TTVSI 2008

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