

How to Attend a Conference (and why)

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The International Conference

- 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.

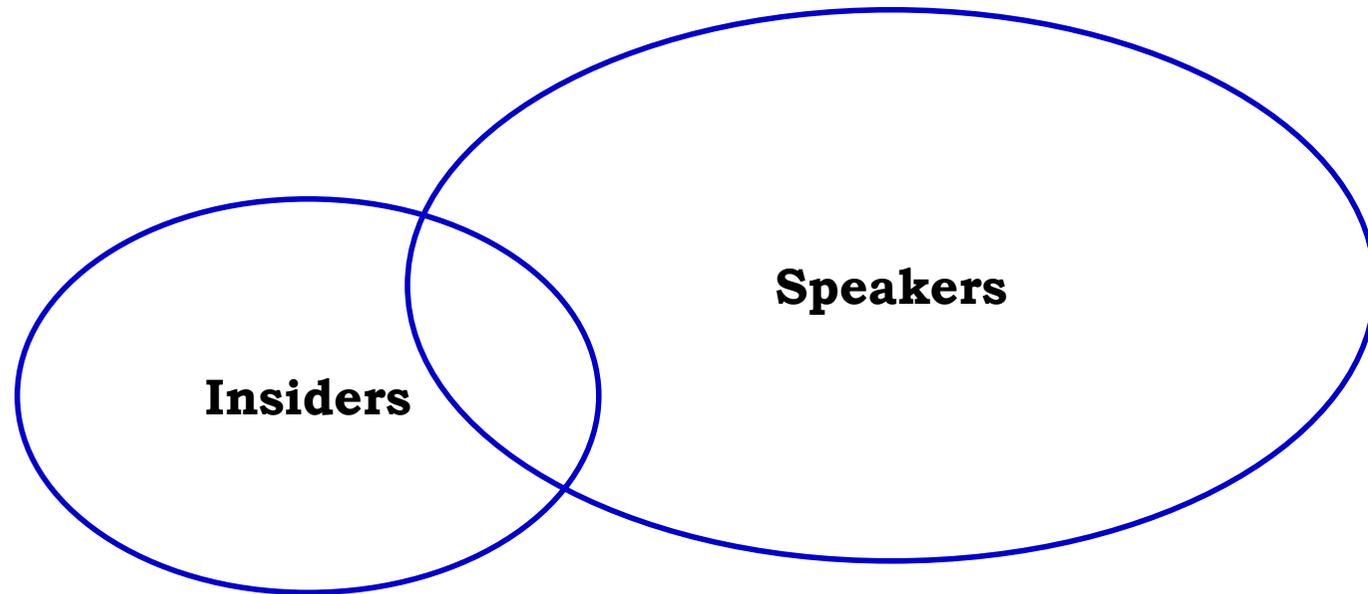
Why Attend a Conference?

- 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.

- 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



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

Everyone else

Prepare an **Excellent** Talk

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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.

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