

Advice for First-time Presenters

Academic conferences present special challenges to presenters. We offer the following advice for speakers new to this kind of event:

Before you go:

- Plan and write your paper well in advance of the conference date. Because the audience of this conference will be interdisciplinary, you may need to define specialized terminology up front.
- Leave yourself plenty of time to revise and rehearse your presentation. Ask friends and advisors to serve as your practice audience.
- Limit your presentation to 15-20 minutes maximum (note the length of time indicated in your acceptance letter) to ensure time for discussion following all panels. For most people, this means no more than 5-7 double-spaced, printed pages. Be advised that if you go over your allotted time the chair of your panel will need to cut you off. Again practice ahead of time to ensure that your paper is an appropriate length.
- Use only carefully chosen props and graphics (appropriate, legible, simple, clear, and correct) to complement the organization and content of your presentation.
- Indicate all audio/visual equipment needs clearly on your registration form. Remember that such equipment is never fail-safe and plan accordingly (for instance, print 5-10 copies of images central to your presentation so that your audience can still follow your talk in the event of AV equipment failure). Be sure to practice your talk with the equipment you plan to use.
- Print at least two copies of your paper before traveling to the conference and, if possible, pack each copy in a separate bag. Resist the urge to make extensive last-minute changes (or frame these ideas as open-ended, concluding questions).

At the conference:

- Arrive at the room of your talk at least 10 minutes ahead of time. This way, you can introduce yourself to your panel chair, ensure that your AV needs are met, and otherwise do what you need to do in order to stay calm. If you have any problems, go directly to the registration desk and ask for help.
- During your talk, face your audience. If you can, stand up to deliver your paper (this will help you project your voice appropriately). At the beginning of your talk, check to make sure that everyone in the room can hear you. Speak up if necessary.
- Pay close attention to what the other speakers on your panel have to say. Get engaged with their ideas. This makes for wonderful discussions following the formal presentations, which many speakers find are the best part of presenting!