



A Guide to Presenting Graduate School Conference Papers

A-State Online Writing Center

What is the importance of presenting a paper at a conference?

“Conference papers can be an effective way to try out new ideas, introduce your work to colleagues, and hone your research questions. Presenting at a conference is a great opportunity for gaining valuable feedback from a community of scholars and for increasing your professional stature in your field” (“Conference Papers”). Also, whenever you present a paper at a conference, you are simultaneously giving an oral presentation. Therefore, you will need to master the art of both writing and presenting to successfully present your paper to your chosen academic audience. Below are the steps to follow to successfully present your paper at a conference.

1. Choose your conference paper

You will first need to choose or write a paper to present it. You can use one you have written from your past or present graduate coursework, or you can write something new to fit the theme of the conference you have chosen to attend. Either way, make sure that it is a piece of writing that you are proud of and that you are passionate about. If you are interested in the material, then your audience will be, too!

2. Select a conference

You have several options when choosing a conference

1. Contact your graduate supervisor. These professors are here to help you, and they have several connections to university events where your work would be welcomed. Ask them for recommendations or places to start looking to browse for a presentable conference.
2. Sign up for email lists from various universities and academic programs. These organizations update their information regularly and constantly send out virtual event flyers, including information regarding public, academic events; this is one of the best ways to connect with conferences that would be interested in your work.

3. Search the web. A simple internet search can open millions of doors. Be sure to search for conferences that could be nearby (or even international ones if you'd like to travel for your work).

3. Write an abstract

Once you choose a conference, you will need to submit an abstract of your work. Most conferences will ask you for a specific format and certain information regarding your paper within your abstract. Still, no matter what you write in it, you must interest the conference hosts in what your paper is about. Many conferences ask for an abstract of about 200-300 words, so, in this case, "less is more" when explaining the main concepts, themes, or ideas of your paper. While writing your abstract, it is important to make an overall, decipherable point to your paper.

Below is an example of an abstract one of our tutors wrote for a conference while attending graduate school in 2018:

Abstract for "Harry Potter" Critical Research Paper

One-Sentence Description: This paper focuses on the concept and personification of death, as presented in the "Harry Potter" series.

Author: Kayla Davis

Paper Title: "Harry Potter and Death: A Complicated Relationship"

Abstract: In this paper, I discuss the concept of death as it is portrayed in the popular fantasy series of "Harry Potter," focusing primarily on how author J. K. Rowling uses the passings of her characters as well as the depiction of death's power to not only display the complex relationship it has with her protagonist but to also help her readers cope with it in the "real world." I know death is not a comfortable subject to write about; I was inspired to write on this topic because the "Harry Potter" series helped me cope with death when it struck my family years ago. Therefore, I believe my research to be both original and heartfelt.

I plan to be an English professor one day, and so my ultimate goal is to teach a college course on this series. Researching for this paper has further inspired me to plan lessons and activities for the higher-learning environment. "Harry Potter" made me love reading; it was the main reason I chose my teaching career. I want this paper to testify that books can change lives by inspiring powerful revelations about the world we live in.

4. Prepare the Conference Presentation

Once your abstract is accepted, you can begin creating your presentation. What's just as crucial as the information in your conference paper is how you present it to your audience. You want audience members to understand your ideas and concepts. You also want to keep them engaged in your material without overwhelming them with loads of new information at once. The trick to

finding this balance is to condense your hefty, thoughtful, and complicated work into a digestible few minutes; this is not only for your audience's sake but also for your own. Below are some tips to help you transform your lengthy conference paper into a short presentation that will engage your audience and keep them interested in what you have to present to them.

How will you present? You can give your presentation in the form of an oral reading, a slideshow, or a combination of the two. Given your paper's nature and how you would like to speak about it, decide which format you would like to go with. You can read some of your paper to the audience, have a visual slideshow to condense your paper's main idea, or include a small combination of both.

*Tip: Avoid copying and pasting your paper into segments on a PowerPoint or Google Slideshow; this will not engage your audience! If you make a slideshow, ensure it enhances and complements your presentation and that it is not a crutch for you to read. Try adding images or thought-provoking questions for the audience to take in. Think outside of the box!

Know your time limit. You will most likely have a time limit of ten minutes to present your paper at a conference, although some conferences could give you fifteen to twenty. Check with the organizers of your conference to know your time limit; then, you can start adjusting your presentation accordingly.

Condense your paper: You will want to condense your paper into a few main points, given your ten-to-twenty-minute time limit. Try shooting for a digestible number such as three or five. Give each of the points a name and prepare tidbits of information to include in each one, whether this is an outline of your paper, quotes from your writing, or references you used to create your paper. This way, you can gauge how you would like to start, decide what information is most important, and find a way to strongly end. As much as we all want to cover our entire paper at a conference, there is never enough time to do so. Utilizing this method is the best way to give a small taste of all of the information you would like to share with your audience within the time limit.

Instead of naming a few points to follow, you could read as much of your paper as you would like within the ten to twenty minutes. Be sure to label which parts you want to read and cross out which parts to leave out of your presentation. Be sure that your reading time falls within the time limit!

If you ever have any issues condensing your paper or choosing which parts to read, seek assistance from any of your instructors. It is best to reach out to the instructor who assigned the paper.

Practice! “Practice makes perfect!” With your time limit in mind, run some trials of giving your shortened presentation over your paper. Rehearse your points and practice reading your paper aloud or giving your slideshow to make your voice authoritative and informative. Ask some of your graduate school cohort to listen to you, keep an eye on your time, and/or give you some constructive feedback for your presentation. Overall, don’t be afraid to reach out and ask for help from people who have experience attending and/or speaking at conferences!

5. While at the conference . . .

Arrive early and prepared

Be sure to arrive at the conference early and prepared with everything you will need, including a copy of your paper and any digital components you may require (flash drives, login passwords, or files of the paper). Before your panel begins, find the room you will be presenting in and test out the technological components such as how to log in to the computer system and how to work the presentation screen. You may want to do a dry run of your presentation during this time. Being prepared is key, and this way, you are less likely to hit uncomfortable “speed bumps” and delays along the way while presenting.

Engage with other presenters

While the other presenters give their panels, be sure to give them your undivided attention. Engage with their presentation just as you want them to engage with yours. Ask questions at the end, give them feedback, and be gracious.

When it is your turn...

When it is your turn to present, first, thank the audience for coming to your panel. While you introduce your paper, make eye contact with the organizers, conference sponsors, and other audience members that have come to hear you speak. As you read your paper or click through your slideshow, remember to pause and take a breath. Also, continue to make eye contact with your audience every once in a while to hold their attention. The moderator will more than likely give you visual cues to let you know how much time you have left (usually at the two-minute mark), so remember to be aware of this.

Q&A section

Most conferences will host a Question and Answer (Q&A) time after each presentation, so be prepared for the audience to ask you questions after you complete your panel. While many of these questions may be thought-provoking and heartily welcomed, be aware that some audience members may ask misinformed or off-topic questions. If this occurs, keep your composure, smile, and nod, then be courteous and say something along the lines of, “I’m not sure how to answer that, given that my paper/research mainly focuses on ____ instead of ____, but I will gladly look into that for future reference.” Also, if time runs out and someone has a question

that you would like to engage with, let them know that you'd be glad to speak with them after the presentation in a nearby location (but only if you want to, of course).

Final thoughts

Conferences are wonderful, eye-opening, and experience-gaining events. While they can seem intimidating at first, they are incredibly insightful and enriching when it comes to enhancing your resume and/or networking with people who are in the same field. Giving a presentation at a conference is not only professional and personally empowering, but it's also a taste of the occupation that you want to attain after graduate school. My advice is to always take an opportunity to present. You never know what you will discover, who you will meet, or what you will learn!

Sources

[Art of the Conference Paper](#)
[Conference Papers](#)