Networking at Academic Conferences

10th International Congress of Hittitology
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AGENDA
1. Why Connect?
2. Strategies
3. Personal Narratives
4. Practice
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Perceptions of Networking

- What do you think of when you hear the term “networking”?

- Common Perceptions
  - It’s *disingenuous*
  - It’s *self-serving*
  - It’s *awkward*
  - It’s *unnecessary*
Realities of Networking

- Making connections and sharing ideas sustain a thriving scholarly community.

- If networking is all about you, then you are not doing it right.

- Do not just focus on what you can gain, but rather think about what you can give:
  - Book recommendations, introductions, teaching ideas, restaurant suggestions.

- Yes, early career scholars have things to offer!
Benefits of Connecting

- You’ll meet future **collaborators**, dissertation committee members, letter writers, book and journal **editors**, manuscript **reviewers**, hiring committee members, readers, and **friends**
- You’ll stay abreast of **trends** and **opportunities** in your field
- You can **learn from your peers** and those ahead of you
- You will **disseminate your work** more widely (and no, your work does not speak for itself)
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Hello
my name is

I HATE THIS! 😞
Why Is Networking Hard?

- What difficulties or obstacles have you encountered when trying to connect with new people at conferences?

- Common difficulties
  - Negotiating differences in power or seniority
  - Striking up a conversation and making small talk with strangers
  - Not knowing to whom you should be talking
Preparation Strategy

- Study the program and make note of any workshops or receptions
- See scholars who you’d like to meet? Email them before the conference to schedule a chat
  - Always have a reason for connecting, such as needing advice on something
- See panels that align with your interests? Plan to introduce yourself briefly to one presenter
- If you are presenting, set up a panelist meal
Buddy Strategy

- Plan to **meet up with a friend** or acquaintance before entering crowded receptions
- At events that precede meal times, ask others nearby if they are headed to lunch or dinner
- **Ask your advisor** or mentors to introduce you to other scholars (but do not cling to them)
- If you see anyone standing alone, invite that person to join your group or conversation
Small Talk Strategy

- **Good conversations** move naturally from topic to topic, often from mundane to substantive matters.
- Have a few **opening questions** at the ready when you meet new people:
  - Are you enjoying the conference? How was the journey here? How is your day going?
- Keep the conversation going by asking **open-ended questions**.
- Return the favor when someone asks you a question, because sharing something makes you **relatable**.
- If you feel the conversation waning, **exit gracefully**.
Things to Keep in Mind

- Be **gracious, open, and humble**, not aggressive, dismissive, or judgmental
- If you are self-conscious, just focus on genuinely **getting to know** the other person
- If someone rebuffs you or seems distracted, **do not take it personally**
- These should **not** be one-and-done interactions—you are building relationships
- **Follow up** by email after the conference
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Personal Narratives

- Part of being prepared is having a polished personal narrative.
- It answers the questions, “What do you do?” and, “What do you work on?”
- It should be short (less than a minute).
- You should give the basics (Who are you?) and adjust additional content for your audience.
- It need not be perfect, but it should be authentic.
My name is _____ and I am a graduate student at _____ University. I specialize in ______. (situate within subfield)

(If appropriate, continue) I am interested in questions or problems of ______. (use key terms, think strategically)

I explore these questions by using ______. (archive/methodology/approach)

I do this because ______. (motivation/intervention/contribution) (why should we care?)

(Bring it back to the here and now) I hope to get ______ from attending this conference.
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Networking Practice

- Stand up and **form groups of two or three**, partnering with others you don’t know.
- Spend no more than one minute each giving your **personal narrative**.
- Use the remainder of the time to **practice small talk**.
- When you hear the bell, **move on** to a new partner/group.