



Networking at Academic Conferences

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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**



Narrative Template

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

