

First conference, first paper and beyond: Academic presentations and building your networks

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My experience

- Collaborated with over 130 academics from 24 universities in Australia and abroad
- Participated in almost 40 research projects
- Published 69 papers and 42 reports
- Delivered 187 presentations

Presentation outline

- The nature of academic collaboration
- Key aspects of academic collaboration
- To attend or not attend (conferences)?
- Presenting at conferences

What is research collaboration?

- Networking, coordinating, cooperating and/or partnering between individual researchers, stakeholders and organisations
- Collaboration can vary from bottom-up, once-off, virtual and distributed to formal, long-term and institutional
- Research groups are complex systems - plural not singular (rather than one 'team' there are often multiple, fluid, intersecting groups)

Why collaborate?

- ‘Taskmaster’ based on work style and ethic
- ‘Mentors’ to assist junior colleagues/students
- ‘Followers’ through external requests/mentors
- ‘Buddies’ via length and quality of a relationship
- ‘Tactician’ due to skills required to achieve a goal

(adapted from Bozeman et al. 2013)

Key aspects of collaboration

- Visibility
- Networking
- Partnerships

Visibility

- Establish yourself in a niche area of your field/discipline whether through key reviews, edited collections, special issues, convening conferences
- Increase your profile and ‘footprint’ by having up-to-date details on Google Scholar, LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Academia; use YouTube, press releases etc.
- Ensure your website is easily accessible (i.e., first hit with your name + institution in Google)

Visibility

- Take every opportunity to peer-review articles, conference papers, grants, fellowships and, where possible, recommend key figures in the field to peer-review your work
- Offer to write book reviews, be involved in committees, chair conference sessions etc.
- Cite scholars from disparate networks as widely as possible; many academics now track those citing them through Google Scholar

Networking

- Attend conferences (more on this later), present at forums, workshops, guest lecture, post to online forums, serve on committees, apply for awards
- Meet with colleagues when travelling interstate/internationally
- Utilise established networks of your mentors, supervisors and colleagues to build your own

Networking

- Stay up-to-date with who's who in your field, be an early responder to new literature/research
- Hand out business cards and cold contact relevant people (e.g., after reading their work, hearing them present, given travel to their location etc.)
- Maintain your network by sharing relevant publications, ideas, questions, linking people with each other or simply endorsing LinkedIn skills

Partnerships

- Work on intra/inter-institutional research projects, including: co-authorship, event organising, mentoring, stakeholder engagement
- Have a core group of relationships with like-minded colleagues and a larger group with whom you have less frequent partnerships
- Foster flexible relationships that allow a flow of members to and from the core collaborating group

Partnerships

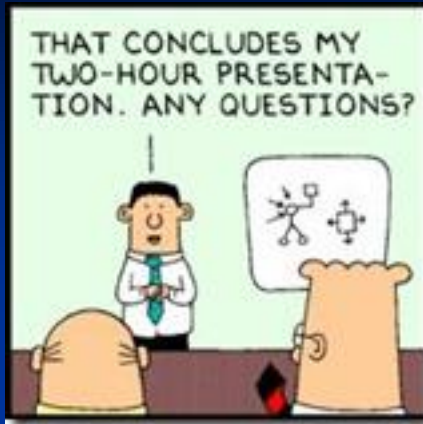
- Be adaptive to communication and decision-making styles; have clear roles, expectations and responsibilities; and ensure there are formal and informal processes for resolving disagreements
- Beware of exploitation and unethical practices such as ghost/gift authorship, duplicate publications etc.
- Finally, academia is a tough industry so take the time to celebrate success when it occurs

Attending conferences

- Pros: Increased visibility, networking and the chance to form partnerships, learn from colleagues about the latest developments in your field
- Cons: Can be quite boring and tiring; you may have to talk to people you don't like, deal with detractors or academic politics in general (not always pretty)

Presenting at conferences

- Make regular eye contact with your audience (don't forget those video linked if applicable)
- Use graphics, video clips etc. where possible to heighten engagement; avoid unnecessary jargon
- Ask questions so the audience doesn't fall asleep (use humour where appropriate)
- For example, what have I preached but failed to practice in my presentation so far?



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Presenting at conferences

- Don't simply read out a script; use written text as a guide only. Slide dot points should be elaborated on rather than read word for word
- Don't talk too fast; converse in a leisurely fashion
- Sound passionate about your topic not bored by the sound of your own voice
- Practice a handful of times but don't over do it; your presentation should be interesting even to you!

I COULD HAVE E-MAILED YOU MY POWERPOINT DECK, AND YOU COULD HAVE READ IT IN FIVE MINUTES.



Dilbert.com DilbertCartoonist@gmail.com

BUT I PREFER MAKING YOU SIT HERE FOR AN HOUR WHILE I READ EACH BULLET POINT IN SLOW MOTION.



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P-O-I-N-T
N-U-M-B-E-R
O-N-E...



YANK THIS AS HARD AS YOU CAN.

Presenting at conferences

- Don't have too many slides/words and never skip over sections of text/slides because you don't have time to cover it (sure sign of a poor presenter)
- Don't have too many words, tables, data etc. on each slide; never use less than 24-point font
- Know your audience (mix of backgrounds, interests etc.) and tailor your presentation accordingly
- Leave plenty of time for questions (ask for them during your presentation if you like)

Presenting anywhere

- At conferences or beyond, presenting is about making an argument and/or telling a story
- It isn't about conveying an avalanche of information or an incoherent series of 'facts'
- It certainly isn't about proving that you know everything but rather a 'conversation' with your others in which they should learn something new or understand a topic from a new perspective



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Five gratuitous career tips

- Work flexible hours, learn to say no and don't over commit (there is, or should be, more to life than your academia)
- Undertake work that is important to your PhD/career rather than tasks that are 'merely' urgent
- Undertake work you enjoy and aim for 'small wins'
- Avoid paperwork and 'excessive' meetings where possible
- Learn something new every year (e.g., theory, method)

Questions

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