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?
That concludes my two-hour presentation. Any questions?

Did you intend the presentation to be incomprehensible, or do you have some sort of rare “PowerPoint” disability?

Are there any questions about the content?

There was content?

Your PowerPoint slides impressed the executives so much that they're changing our entire strategy.

Those slides were nothing but a bunch of garbage dressed up to look good.

And that's what our new product line will be!

Oh.
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.

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

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
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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