Conferences: preparing, participating and presenting
(or: career building for beginners)

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Why Present?

Research is about communication as well as discovery.

Presenting makes your ideas accessible and makes people take notice of you.

It is a good idea to open your work up to healthy debate.

Positive audience feedback can increase your confidence.
Academic Identity Work?

Communicating your research in public is also **Identity Work** because you are presenting yourself as a researcher

As a short 5 min exercise, make a list of what tends to signify a researcher in your area (i.e: language/jargon, dress, types of images used etc)

How might you use this knowledge in your approach to self presentation? Should you ‘play by the rules’ or subvert them?
Questions for discussion:

Let’s break into small groups to discuss the following questions:

1. In what ways might we need to be selective about when and to whom we speak to about our research?

2. What about your appearance – When and Where does it matter?

3. In your opinion what makes for a bad presentation?

4. What is the difference between selling and telling? Which is more important?
The Audience: An exercise

Think of a potential audience for your research outcomes (it may be an upcoming conference or a presentation to your peers). On a piece of paper quickly write a response to these two questions:

What might my audience expect to learn from listening to me?

And

What sort of feedback do I want from them?
Getting on the conference circuit & staying there
(or: how to talk the talk)
Getting on the Conference Circuit

• Subscribe to and regularly visit websites in your research area.

• Subscribe to email lists run by people with an interest in aspects of your topic.

• Make a note of the journal or conferences where key papers were published.

• You can use Google advisedly

Any other suggestions?
Writing a Tasty Abstract

• A good title both sums up the paper and grabs the attention of the reader.

• Write succinctly. If no word limit is given a good rule of thumb is that an abstract should never be more than 10% of the length of your paper.

• Generally there are two types of abstract: Descriptive and Informative.

• Look at previous years of the same conference to establish what the prevailing ‘style’ is.
Example of an Informative Abstract:

Despite various theories about the exact origin of gestures in speech production, researchers generally accept that gesture and speech constitute the product of a single unit of thought within the speaker. On the other hand, what I call *gestural mimicry* requires consideration of factors outside such speaker-internal coupling of gesture and speech. Through detailed analysis of a joint narration task and casual conversation in a dyad, I will show that, once perceived and decoded by a partner, the form–meaning relationship of a speaker's gesture can become part of the common ground of understanding between the participants. In gestural mimicry, communicativity is observed in the way a speaker's spontaneous gesture shapes the subsequent gestural move of the interlocutor. With a recurrence of gestural features across speakers, image construal through gesture becomes an interactional phenomenon. That is, gesture as well as speech provides an interactional resource for co-constructing talk.”

Example of a Descriptive Abstract:

“There is an underlying theoretical structure between the spheres of politics and architectural practice. The contingent relationships between them are ideology, function, process, and design. In each of these contingencies, there are middle-range theoretical dimensions that relate more directly to the architect's practice world. In this article, I present empirical cases to map the terrain between politics and architectural practice. A general causal model interrelates these four primary contingencies and identifies their structural relationships.”

Let’s have a go at an informative abstract (sciences + quantitative humanities)

Do this exercise using your paper or a chapter from your thesis.

Write a sentence or some notes under the following headings:

1. Problem Statement (What’s it about?)
2. Motivation (Why should we care?)
3. Approach (How did you do it?)
4. Results or Insights (What did you discover?)
5. Implications (How might it help others?)

Now try to write these points, in any order, into a paragraph of text.
Let's have a go at a descriptive abstract (design / humanities non quantative)

Do this exercise using your paper or a chapter from your thesis.
Write a sentence or some notes under the following headings:

1. **Background** (What's it about?)
2. **Location** (What discipline or area are you contributing to?)
3. **Aims** (What is the main argument or contention of this paper?)
4. **Research outcomes** (briefly describe what have you found out / discovered or come to a conclusion about)
5. **Interest value** (What does it mean? What are the new insights?)

Now try to write these points, in any order, into a paragraph of text.
Getting Funding to attend conferences

• Schools at RMIT must make it known to all candidates what provision they make for students to attend conferences.

• Generally it would have to be a peer reviewed event.

• It’s worth contacting the organisers to see if they will waive the conference fee.

• Be persistent. Look for other sources of funding within the university and outside.
Condensing your Paper

At most you can say about 2400 words in 20 mins

Start with an ‘establishing shot’ of your paper

On a copy of your draft use a highlighter to identify key facts, quotes, statistics and points of interest

Omit or condense lengthy examples, tables, and other supporting detail. Use graphs wherever possible.

Consider prioritising the paragraphs as a way to decide where to make cuts
Some general notes on Structure

• A good presentation is like a good story – beginnings and endings are important.

• If you are making an argument, try to make it clearly

• Understand that different amounts of sell and tell that are required

• Don’t assume knowledge of the topic or of insider jargon
Presenting at the conference

It is bad manners to go over time in your presentation.

Arrive at the room early; introduce yourself to the session convenor.

Observe academic etiquette: you never know who will be in the audience.

Practice reading your paper to get a natural ‘flow’ (preferably into a recorder)
Presentation Style

Reading and listening simultaneously are difficult.

Speak slowly. Make the pauses count

Watch the audience body language – are you losing their attention?

Try to make eye contact with members of your audience as you speak.
‘Know thyself’

For this exercise we will reflect on how to be an effective public speaker in small groups.

In each group draw up two columns on a page; one called ‘feelings’ and the other called ‘possible solutions’.

As a group discuss your last public speaking opportunity – what did you feel? How did your feelings manifest themselves physically or mentally? Why do you think you felt this way?

Try to come up with some solutions together. When we have finished we will share our problems and solutions with each other.
Good graphic principles

Keep it simple and clean (avoid most Power Point templates)

Be careful with colour

Use graphics to cut down on cognitive overhead – not add to it.

Limit your font palette.

Images can set the ‘tone’ of the information as well as illustrate things.
References

There are many good websites out there, but some books and articles that might be of interest are:


Tuft, Edward from Graphics Press, Cambridge, Mass:
  Envisioning Information. 1990
  The cognitive style of powerpoint. 2003


Let your audience know you have finished by saying a simple ‘thankyou’
(That way they know when to clap).