

Communication scientifique, écrite et orale, en langue anglaise

Session 9

Participation at conferences

Purpose of conferences	1
Who can organize a conference?	1
Format of participation	2
Organization	2
Oral presentation	3
Poster presentation	3
Special sessions	4
Proceedings	4
Rules to write a conference communication	4
Value of a conference paper	5
Rank of participation	5
Contact making during the conference	5
Other forms of meetings	5

Purpose of conferences

There are many conferences these days. If you have the necessary funding, you could spend all your life at conferences. However, the purpose of a conference is not only participation. It is actually made for *contact making* between scientists. Science is becoming more and more complicated, so new results are usually obtained by cooperation of several scientists.

Cooperation needs good contacts. People have to select carefully their co-workers. (You cannot select those which are in your laboratory; you have already selected them when you joined the lab; here we speak about contacts *outside* the lab.)

Who can organize a conference?

Actually, anybody.

In many cases, some chief editors of journals initiate conferences. One of their motivations is actually to encourage the participants to send their paper related to their presentation to the journal.

There are traditional conferences and there are some new ones. When a new one is repeated, of course, it becomes traditional. Some conferences are so important that people working in that field want absolutely participate in them; otherwise they would feel being outside of scientific circulation.

For traditional conferences, there is a committee who decides about the timing and the next location of the conference. Big scientific associations are usually also conference organizers.

Format of participation

You can be:

Organizer (Chairman or Co-chairman),
Member of the Local Organization Committee,
Member of the Scientific Committee,
Plenary Lecturer,
Keynote Lecturer,
Chairman of a session,
Invited Lecturer,
Lecturer,
Participant.

Organization

Your lecture can be in the format of:

- Oral presentation.
- Poster presentation.

The conference has to be organized in advance. There are usually two circulars, which announce the conference. The first one is for information and call for papers. If you would like to participate, you should send a short abstract. You can indicate your preference concerning the format of your contribution (oral or poster) or let the scientific committee decide about it. Young scientists usually prefer poster presentations.

In the second circular, you receive notice about the acceptance of your contribution (the rejection rate varies from 10 to 50%). Then further details about the organization are given (typing instructions for the communication, accommodation, deadlines for payment, etc...).

There is a participation fee, which is to cover the costs of the organization (renting of rooms, equipment, receptions, excursion, mailing, etc...). The main cost usually is the price for the reproduction of a proceedings, which is for publication of the contributions.

Oral presentation

The length of an oral presentation is usually limited to 10-25 minutes. You have to construct your lecture in a very efficient way to be able to pass the message you want.

There is a Chairman in the session where you present the lecture. Its role is to ensure the good timing of the lectures and to lead the discussion, which follows the lecture. It is important to introduce yourself to the chairman before the session. He is supposed to introduce you to the audience and will certainly tell you the way he will organize the timing. (For example; he stands up 2 minutes before your time is over.)

It is important to be very well prepared for your lecture. The format of your slides or overheads is also crucial. They have to be clear, not crowded, written with big enough letters and, of course, not too many. If you have 10 minutes, you should have about 10 slides, for 20 minutes, about 20, not more. Speak normally, not too fast. It is very embarrassing when the lecturer tries to accelerate in order to tell more. Instead, tell less, but try to be motivating and convincing. Do not read your transparencies. This is a typical serious mistake. It reflects an imperfect preparation of the talk and a non-respect of the audience.

The discussion period is an important part of your talk. If you do not respect the time limitation, and use the time reserved for the discussion period, the chairman may decide not to open your paper for discussion.

During the discussion, respect the audience. They are supposed to do similarly. If some details are discussed too long, it is better to propose for your questioner to continue the discussion after the session.

Poster presentation

It can be a very successful presentation, especially, if the poster is attractive and easy to follow. Important rules:

- the title has to be readable from 3 meters,
- any other writing should be easy to read from about 1 m

- the poster should be such that somebody can also follow it alone.

When your poster is presented for discussion, you, or a co-author, should be present. The visitors may ask questions from you, which could be a good opportunity to discuss your findings and perhaps to establish a scientific collaboration. It is also a good idea to *invite* some people who you know to your poster for discussion.

Prepare some handouts of your work for the poster session. It could be a paper in several copies related to the poster or copies of your conference paper (in case the proceedings comes out after the meeting).

Special sessions

At some conferences, experts of specific fields are asked to formulate special (invited) sessions. They address letters to other scientists in the subject to participate their session and they construct the whole session. Such organized sessions can be very successful at a conference.

Proceedings

The proceedings is a book issued by the conference. It contains the presentation of the participants in written format. The papers are usually of limited lengths (2-10 printed pages). In many cases, they are simply kind of extended abstracts.

Rules to write a conference communication

The rules are not the same as for full-length papers. The literature overview is usually absent, the experimental part is not so detailed, and the reference list is limited. The main reason is the shortage of place (length reduction). The main purpose of the paper is to quickly publish some new ideas. A conference communication is usually followed by a full-length paper in a journal. It is also possible that what is proposed in the conference communication turns out to be not good (critics received during the presentation or after), so that there is no continuation of that work.

The organizers decide the exact format of a conference paper. Once you accepted to participate, you must follow exactly the rules. You have to submit your paper in camera-ready format.

Value of a conference paper

Usually there is no Referee in such a publication. So its content is not verified by experts. That reduces the value of the publication. Nevertheless, it is up to you to improve your communication so that it approaches the value of a paper in a journal. Final judgment of the work is the *citations* that one receives on his/her conference publication. When the length of the conference paper is at least about 6 pages in print, you may make a nice small paper with a substantial content.

Some conference papers are collected in special issues of journals. In such a case, there must be a review process, which increases the value of the paper.

The availability of proceedings is quite limited. Actually, it is distributed only among participants, so the number of copies is not much more than the number attendants.

Rank of participation

You may be an invited participant. This is a distinction. It does not necessarily mean, however, that the organizers will cover your expenses. Such a “rank” is already recognition of your scientific activity (similarly, when you are asked to be Chairman of a session). I believe that financial aid for conference participation should be granted only for those who really need it (coming, for example, from developing or underdeveloped countries).

Contact making during the conference

This is the main purpose of the meeting. There are several possibilities for private discussions: poster sessions, breaks, lunches, suppers, excursions, and banquet. Do not isolate yourself with your colleagues from your lab; that you can do at home anyway. It is important to use the opportunities for personal contact making. You may get invitations for seminars, get involved into organization of other meetings, invitations for collaborations, and so on.

Other forms of meetings

Symposium (part of a conference, usually for the honor of some distinguished scientists)

Workshop (specific subject, only by invitation, not more than 50 participants)
Seminar
Colloquium (well defined theme, small number of participants).