

“Presenting at Conferences”

Notes from Dr. Bruce Wilson’s presentation
to the GPS on April 8, 2003

*** Think of convention/conference papers as a “process.”**

* Tip: Attend a conference before presenting at one.

* Start out at the lower conference levels and work your way up. Same idea with ‘getting published.’ Begin with the lower journals and work your way up.

*** Good conferences to ‘start out’ at:**

- Florida State
- Southwest in San Antonio
- SECOLA (Have to submit proposals in November for March conference)
- Turn over times are shorter, environment not as stressful, graduate panels will give you experience for the bigger conferences later on.

***What Should You Present?**

- MA Thesis:
- Think about structuring your thesis as a series of short papers.
- Perhaps later you can publish your chapters as separate articles.
- Can also present and submit different chapters at different times.
- Also, good idea to approach your seminar research papers as potential conference papers. Always write publishable work.
- Draw your conference papers from your classes! Good source.

* When you are presenting at a conference, you will be approached with suggestions and comments for improvement. Take those suggestions and apply them to further develop your piece.

* Plan ahead if you are thinking about presenting a paper at a conference.

- Calls for papers come in 6 month to year long cycles — plan now!
- Lower level conferences typically have shorter ‘turnover’ times.

* You will be asked to submit a title for your work and an abstract. You will most likely post it online.

- Keep the title as GENERAL as possible. A more general title will allow the conference coordinators to fit you into a panel discussion more easily.
- You should pitch your work to a particular subsection in your field of interest (e.g., subsections within Comparative, International, American, etc.)
- It should be one to two paragraphs long – keep it brief and concise.
- It should present the ‘puzzle’ that you are researching, how you intend to resolve the puzzle, and the basic conclusions that you expect.
- It is OK if your paper is not the exact replication of your abstract by the time you finish

* You can also apply to do a Poster Presentation of your work at a conference. Posters have higher acceptance rates since you do not have to be slotted into a particular panel discussion group.

* It is OK to decline an invitation to present a paper at a conference. But, you must let them know. Don’t just be a “no show” or blow off a conference. If you are a no show, many organizations have created ‘blacklists’ that prohibit you from being accepted to present at that conference ever again.

* Also, do not miss conference paper deadlines. It is common courtesy to give your discussant leader 3-4 weeks time to review your work. Typically, your papers should be 25-35 (or 20-30) pages in length. (Remember: Journals usually only publish work that is 20-30 pages long). Also, your paper may have some loose ends. You don’t have to answer everything and you are not the definitive source. Take suggestions and other plausible explanations that are offered from other scholars if applicable — that is part of the reason why you are there.

***Presenting:**

- You should keep your presentation short (10-15 minutes)
- Keep it relaxed. Be confident — you are the expert on your own work
- Keep the presentation focused:
- Main points: what is the puzzle, why is it interesting, your approach to uncovering explanations for the puzzle, why it is applicable and relevant to the field?

- Make some notes, but speak to your audience. Will allow you to be more flexible in your presentation.

***What else can you do at a conference?**

- Be a discussant.
- Discussants usually review 3-5 papers and critique them
- Be a panel chair (keep time)
- Visit other panel discussions

***DO NOT try to “network” at a conference.**

- “Sucking up” is not necessary
- You are there to present your work. If you write a good paper, and give an interesting presentation, those “big names” in your field will try to talk to you!

***Other resume builder/publishing opportunities:**

- Write book reviews.
- Reviews will usually be published in non-refereed journals, but that work still makes you stand out when applying to a big name school and competing for a spot/funding against someone else.