

# ATTENDING A PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE

## BENEFITS OF ATTENDING

**Conferences are all about professional development.** There are a great many benefits to attending. You get to listen to lectures that relate to your academic major and to your career interests. You will have the opportunity to interact with experienced professionals who can give you advice, or even be possible future internship sites or employers. Depending on the conference, you may also meet students from different universities and learn about their programs and plans for after graduation.

**Conferences can also be overwhelming.** A lot of information and activities are scheduled into a few short days, maybe even just one day. These activities can include poster presentations, workshops, career fairs, exhibit halls, networking and other events.

## SUCCESSING AT THE CONFERENCE

1. **Choose the right conference.** Think about what you want to achieve by attending the conference. Do you want to present your work? Learn about industry trends and innovations? Find a possible internship or job? Select a conference that aligns with your goals for attending.
2. **Act professionally.** You only have one chance to make a good first impression. The other attendees of the conference could be co-workers or future supervisors, so be on your best behavior both during the conference, and outside the conference if you are staying overnight.
3. **Dress professionally.** Wear clothes that you would wear to your job. Take a suit if you will be interviewing for internships or jobs at an on-site career fair. Business casual means dress / casual slacks, casual shoes and polo / dress shirts. Business casual does not mean sweats, t-shirts, jeans or sneakers.
4. **Review the schedule.** Find out which talks you're going to attend. Be aware of the times and room locations. Make time to attend the exhibitors showcase area. Decide which social / networking events you will attend.
5. **Silence your phone.** This is professional courtesy that avoids disturbing the presenter.
6. **Get 3 ideas.** For each workshop presentation, identify 3 big ideas that you will take away from the workshop. Many times, workshop PowerPoint slides and handouts will be posted on the conference website after the event.
7. **Take notes.** Highlight parts that you had questions on so you can ask clarifying questions during a Question and Answer (Q & A) or when talking to the speaker after the end of the workshop.
8. **Divide and conquer.** If you are going with a group, split up and attend different talks. Be sure to share the information with each other later on.

## NETWORKING WITH PURPOSE

1. **Take business/networking cards and/or copies of your resume.** This will help individuals you meet to follow up and keep in touch with you.
2. **Collect business/networking cards.** Make notations regarding where you met the person and what you talked about. This will help you to send a follow-up email, once you have arrived home from the conference.

3. **Make a Strong First Impression.** Be sure to deliver a firm handshake using the entire web of your hand. Make eye contact with the individual when speaking with him/her.
4. **Develop a “30-60 second elevator pitch.”** You can use this to introduce yourself in a professional setting. You can adapt your introduction to networking situations career fairs or to answer the customary first interview question: “Tell me about yourself.”

## DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE ELEVATOR PITCH

**What would you say if you found yourself going down in an elevator and the only other person in the elevator was the hiring manager for the company for whom you dream of working?** This could happen at a conference. You would have 30-60 seconds to confidently deliver a concise overview of who you are professionally that is focused enough to make a strong first impression. Include your top selling points and organize them in three parts:

**Part 1:** Who are you?

**Part 2:** Why are you qualified? How have you made an impact? What sets you apart?

**Part 3:** Why are you here? What are you seeking? Why you are a good fit for the position?

## 3-STEPS TO PERFECTING YOUR PITCH

1. **Outline 5 or 6 bullet points.** Highlight your strongest education, experience, successes.
2. **Customize the elevator pitch.** Select 2-4 bullet points for each situation. Take into consideration the person with whom you are speaking, the organization and your goal.
3. **Practice delivering your elevator speech.** It should sound natural and not rehearsed. Be sure to speak slowly and clearly. Practice once or twice with your notecards and then gradually remove your reliance on the notes until you can deliver your elevator pitch without them. Practice in front of the mirror so that you see what the other person is seeing. Are you smiling? Are you making direct eye contact with the other person or are you glancing to the side? Do you have good body posture and language?

## ELEVATOR PITCH EXAMPLES

**NETWORKING:** *Hello, my name is Roberta Cat and I am a Junior at UC Merced majoring in Mechanical Engineering and minoring in Applied Mathematics. This summer, I completed an internship where I gained experience in XXX and XXX [Technical Skills]. Additionally, I have worked on several research teams and have developed research interests in XXX. I have served for the last year as Treasurer of the UC Merced chapter of the Society of Women Engineers and will serve as the President of the same organization in this coming year. I have researched the innovative projects that your company is working on and I am interested in learning more about those related to sustainability.*

**CAREER FAIR ADDITION:** *I am interested in applying my education, experience and research in the industry.*

**EMPLOYER INFORMATION SESSION / CAREER MEET-UP:** *Hello, my name is Robert Cat. I am a Sophomore majoring in Psychology. I am very glad to meet you and have the opportunity to learn how psychology can be utilized in the field of Criminology. Could you please elaborate on the future trends you see developing in this area?*