

[Morse code beeps]

[Whoosh]

[Helicopter rotor]

Hello.

Welcome to the Success at Conferences
Workshop.

My name is Evan Kramer

and I'm an AeroAstro

Communication Lab Fellow,

and I'll be your instructor today.

To kick things off, we'll get started
with an introductory activity.

If you have been to a conference before,
please

reflect on what worked well

and what didn't.

Is there

anything you wish you knew ahead of time
before going to the conference?

If you've not been to a conference before,
what challenges do you anticipate?

Please take five minutes for this activity
and feel free to write down
your thoughts to reference as we go on
throughout the workshop.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

Our lesson goals are as follows.

At the end of this workshop,
you will be able to know how conferences
fit into your academic journey
and what to expect from them.

You will be able to systematically
establish actionable conference goals
and next steps to tailor your experience
in order to achieve them.

And you'll be able to create a milestone
timeline

using a list of common conference
logistics to help prioritize your efforts.

Let's first define what a conference is.

Conferences

involve gathering to exchange ideas
about a predefined set of topics.

This involves

sharing your own ideas and engaging
with others' similar and competing ideas.

Conference attendees

include members of academia,
industry, government,
and the general public.

All of whom are working towards similar end goals. Conferences can take place in locations that require a day or more of travel, or in your backyard, at your home institution. In terms of your academic journey, conferences are a solid stepping stone towards sharing your work in more formal formats, such as a journal article. With definitions established, what does finding success at a conference really look like? Well, success at a conference looks different for different people. It is common to have multiple questions milling around in your head leading up to a conference. You could define success as achieving favorable answers to these questions, including; Will anyone come to my talk? Will I make meaningful connections with future collaborators? Will I attend sessions that inspire future research directions? While different people might be looking for different things at a conference, one generalizable statement is true about finding success; you get out what you put in. Finding success at conferences requires effort. You might be asking, "So if conference success requires effort, what kinds of effort are worthwhile?" From a high level, we can break down worthwhile efforts into two categories, creating a goals list, and creating a chronological checklist and timeline. Both of these efforts must be put in before the conference begins to maximize success. Perhaps most important is the creation of a goals list. This requires reflection on what your underlying motivations are for attending the conference in the first place.

Some examples
might be to gain experience creating
and delivering a technical presentation
to experts, receiving feedback
that identifies strengths
and areas of improvement
for your work, and understanding
what the current state of the art
is of a field.

The second category of worthwhile efforts
has a more logistical focus to it.

Creating a conference
checklist and conference timeline
helps chronologically order
major milestones and deadlines
so that you are prepared
and not feeling overwhelmed
before, during, or after your conference.
In fact, creating a checklist
and a high level
timeline is the first thing you should do
once you decide
you'd like to attend a conference.

We'll go into more detail
on these worthwhile efforts
on the following slides.
Let's focus on setting conference goals.

In this activity,
we ask you to define a list
of conference goals that will help
you approach the conference methodically.
The intended outcome is that this will
hopefully
make you feel more prepared and confident.
Please take five minutes to respond
to the prompts in the Defining Conference
Goals worksheet.

[Alien spaceship beeps]
Awesome!

Now you have some practice
drafting your conference goals.
Ideally, drafting your goals should happen
weeks to months before the conference.
Simultaneously,
it is important that you handle
some logistics in this time frame as well.
Most importantly,
you'll want to figure out who is covering
your conference travel expenses.
This will likely be your primary advisor,

so make sure to bring up your interest
in attending a conference early
to get this on their radar.
Once you have funding sources sorted out,
you'll want to register
and book excursions as early as possible.
Most conference registration fees
are cheaper the earlier you submit them.
You also want to.
Consider where to stay
during the conference.
Check for accommodations
recommended by the conference,
as they typically offer discounts.
While the previous slide covered
some high level logistics
considerations, here we present
some specific questions to consider.
In terms of getting to the conference,
you'll want to check if you know
anyone else in your lab or department
who is also going, to coordinate.
If you're traveling internationally, check
if you require a visa to travel.
Consider how close you want to stay to
the conference venue and how you will get
to the conference venue.
Will you rent a car
or get reimbursed for taxis or Ubers?
Once you're at the conference,
what are your go
to ways of connecting with people?
Will you have business cards?
Will you scan LinkedIn QR codes?
Making sure you cover
all these bases will reduce
your stress
leading up to and at the conference.
As we approach the 1 to 2 week
pre-conference mark,
you'll want to consider a few logistics.
First, you'll want to create
a more granular schedule.
Download the conference
mobile app and identify keynote
speakers and session topics of interest.
Identify individuals
you would like to speak with
and attempt to arrange meetings
via email or LinkedIn,

keeping in mind that most leading scholars typically attend conferences to share their own work.

With the conference mobile app handy, and a list of potential meetings you might have during the conference, you can create your own granular conference schedule that accounts for, not only professional events, but also meals, exploring exhibit halls, and free time.

Lastly, prepare for your presentation if you'll be giving one.

Prepare and practice your presentation in the assigned format. Be sure to pay close attention to all formatting requirements

for oral and poster presentations.

In addition

to preparing for your presentation, you'll want to also practice a concise elevator pitch of your work and interests.

This will be really useful when meeting new connections.

Okay, we've covered goal setting and logistics

considerations for conferences.

Let's take this time to do an activity on creating action items.

Action items set concrete objectives for achieving goals.

Please take five.

Minutes to complete the action items. worksheet.

[Alien spaceship beeps]

Now you're there.

So how should we approach it?

Well, first and foremost, take advantage of your efforts.

Attend conference keynote presentations and technical sessions based on your curated schedule.

While following your curated schedule, be sure to be an active conference goer.

What this means is to be diligent about taking notes and asking questions during Q&As.

Stick around after sessions
to talk to presenters of interest.
And lastly, make sure to be flexible.
Conferences are dynamic.
And while you may have curated
an extremely detailed schedule
ahead of time, it's
okay for your schedule to be dynamic too.
Welcome unforeseen invitations
to networking sessions
and impromptu lunch invitations
from people you meet.
While the conference might end,
your work shouldn't immediately stop too.
There are few remaining important
activities for you to do to ensure
that you get the most
out of your conference experience.
First, take some time
to summarize your experience.
Write down or create slides
about what you learned,
who you spoke with,
and what actions you'd like to take next.
Also, be sure to download conference
proceedings you'd like to reference,
since these often go behind paywalls
shortly after the conference concludes.
Next, you'll want to follow up with people
you've met by sending emails
or LinkedIn messages.
Schedule future meetings
with collaborators you'd like to pursue.
Finally, reflect and plan for next time.
Did you achieve your goals?
What went well
and what can be improved for next time?
We've talked a lot about logistics
and strategically
organizing your efforts
during this workshop.
A tool to help You handle
these efforts is a conference timeline.
Conference timelines
visually present major milestones
before, during, and after the conference.
They're useful resources
for strategically directing your efforts
throughout your conference experience.
Note that a more granular

week-of-conference timeline
should be created
using the aid of the conference app.
Furthermore, important sources
of information for creating your timeline
are the conference social media pages,
as they often post updates
to the technical program
and extracurricular activities
as the organizing committee
finalizes them.
We invite you to check out the conference
timeline activity
to create your own draft
conference timeline.
In this activity, you're provided
a reference list of milestones
in a checklist format on one side
and a blank timeline on the other side.
As a first pass effort,
create a milestone timeline
by filling in the blank timeline
with the items from the reference
checklist and durations along the top bar.
If you have a particular conference
in mind, try
to write absolute,
rather than relative, dates
in the top bar.
[Alien spaceship beeps]
That concludes
this workshop
on finding success at conferences.
You should now be able to know
how conferences
fit into your academic journey
and what to expect from them.
Systematically establish
actionable conference goals
and next steps to tailor your experience
in order to achieve them.
And create a milestone timeline
using a list of conference
logistics to help prioritize your efforts.
I hope you find the presented tools
and resources
useful in your upcoming conferences.
This workshop was created
and presented by Fellows
of the MIT AeroAstro Communication Lab.

You can find other workshops
related to technical communication
in the MIT OpenCourseWare repository.
Thank you.
[Morse code beeps]