

Conference Participation Guide

For university students and recent graduates

Attend with a learning goal and a relationship goal. Prepare a simple introduction, ask thoughtful questions, and turn useful conversations into follow-up actions to build your network and foster opportunities.

Before the conference

- Confirm registration, venue or online access, timing, transport and any accessibility needs.
- Check the organiser's dress expectations and participation rules.
- Review the agenda and choose sessions linked to your interests.
- Read about a few speakers or organisations you would like to learn from.
- Prepare a short introduction and two or three questions.
- Check your professional profile and have a convenient way to exchange contact details.
 - I still like business cards, but I am old. QR codes are great. I am sure there are, or will be, new ways. Just make sure you are up to date and realize others may not be so have options.
- Set a realistic goal, such as one useful conversation, two ideas to apply, three industry contacts.

Start and join conversations

For some it may be hard to start conversations. It comes naturally to some. I am sure you know the type. However, if that is not you, you will need to push yourself. The suggestions below should help.

At a break:

- “What interested you most in that session?”
- “That was an interesting session, no?”
- “What's brought you to the conference?”

With another participant:

- “What brought you to this conference?”
- “Which sessions have you most enjoyed?”

Joining a group:

- “May I join you? I’m [name], studying [subject].” Wait for a natural pause and introduce yourself briefly.

Generally: Ask about career paths, current challenges or advice for newcomers. Listen, ask a follow-up question, and share a relevant experience without taking over.

Participate professionally

Arrive on time and keep your phone from interrupting sessions. In a question period, ask one concise question rather than giving a speech. Respect different communication styles and personal space; follow the other person’s lead on greetings. Ask before photographing people or sharing identifiable comments.

If approaching a speaker, keep your question brief and be mindful of others waiting. Sometimes, just hanging around the speaker, you can pick up good information from others' questions. For online events, test audio, use an appropriate display name, and use chat or questions as the organiser requests.

Close and follow up

End warmly: “I enjoyed hearing about [topic]. May I connect with you or email you about [specific point]?”

Note the context and any commitment after the conversation. Follow up within 48 hours with a specific detail and complete anything you promised. Use Networking Email Templates for wording. Staying connected should have a purpose beyond collecting contacts.

Your conference plan

Event and date: _____

My learning goal: _____

My relationship goal: _____

Priority sessions or people: _____

My introduction: _____

Two questions I can ask: _____

Reflection and contact record

Person and organisation: _____

What we discussed: _____

Permission and preferred contact method: _____

Action I promised and deadline: _____

Follow-up sent on: _____

One idea I will apply: _____

My next step and date: _____

If networking feels uncomfortable

Practice makes perfect. Attend several networking events or conferences. Start with one participant or participate in organized discussions. Prepare an opening question and give yourself short breaks. You do not need to meet everyone. Curiosity and reliable follow-through are the key to making rewarding connections.