

Are you Ready? Preparing and Planning to Make the Most of your Conference Experience In Person, Virtual and Hybrid

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ABSTRACT

Whether you are a first-time conference attendee or an experienced conference attendee, this paper can help you in getting the most out of your conference experience. As long-standing conference attendees and volunteers, we have found that there are some things that people just don't think about when planning their conference attendance. In this paper we will discuss helpful tips such as making the appropriate travel arrangements for in-person and hybrid conferences, setting up your home office space for a virtual conference, what to bring and/or have on hand, networking and meeting up with friends and colleagues both in person and virtually, and how to prepare for your role at the conference, whatever the format. We will also discuss maintaining a workplace presence with your paying job while present in any form at the conference.

INTRODUCTION

Before making the decision to attend a conference, whether your attendance is in person or virtual, do your research. If you are employed by an entity other than yourself or a corporation that you control, there may be regulations and requirements regarding your attendance at conferences. Most companies strictly control conference attendance: there may be requirements that you present or participate in conference management, requirements that you man a vendor or exhibitor booth, dollar and/or time limits on attendance, restrictions on how many conferences are funded, etc. Some companies may have rigorous application and vetting process for conference attendance: for example, requirements that abstracts and papers be submitted for review, standardized application processes that may include competition from co-workers, etc. If you are self-employed or own a small business, you may need to make fiscal decisions and consider the effect of time away from your business.

If your research indicates that attendance at a conference is a possibility for you, congratulations! You've overcome the first big hurdle. Once the decision to attend a conference has been made, you should check the website of the conference you wish to attend from top to bottom. New information is added to the website up through and during the time of the conference, so check back periodically to get the most updated information. The website will provide you with important dates and give information on what actions are required for various scenarios (presenting, volunteering, registering, etc.). It is very important to consider what format(s) the conference offers in terms of in-person, virtual, or hybrid solutions.

Once information has been gathered regarding the conference, it will be time to begin planning your attendance. For in-person conferences, this means travel. We know that sometimes travelling can be a bit overwhelming, especially with the added stress of conference preparations, hotel and transportation decisions, health considerations, packing and preparing to attend a conference. In-person conference attendance is particularly challenging in pandemic times. Virtual participation in a conference also has its challenges. This paper will help to alleviate some of the stress, by providing practical information about preparing to attend a conference, whether your participation is in person or virtual, and about what to do when the conference starts.

PLANNING YOUR CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION AND FUNDING

You, or your company, may have a strict budget and requirements regarding travel and participation in a conference. As you begin to plan your conference, it's important to have your budgetary requirements on hand so that you can make appropriate travel arrangements. Review the conference website for any cost savings that may reduce your registration fee:

- Early Registration Discounts
- Student Scholarships

- Faculty Scholarships
- Newer SAS Professional Scholarships
- Discount on multiple attendees from same company attending
- Conference committee participation discounts
- Section Chair / Room Facilitator discounts
- Educational Trainer discounts
- Invited Author discounts
- Primary Author / Presenter discounts

Potential discounts on travel arrangements will be discussed below. The key is knowing what your available resources are to start with.

PREPARE FOR YOUR ROLE AT THE CONFERENCE

People will have various roles at the conference. Regardless of what your role is, you need to not only physically prepare but also mentally prepare yourself. Below is list of some possible roles at a conference and what the expectations could be. Please note that the responsibilities listed are not all encompassing. The actual responsibilities will vary depending on the conference needs.

- **Executive Committee:** Individuals that oversee the entire conference. They are responsible for almost all aspects of the conference and are the people that others go to with questions, concerns or complaints.
- **Conference Committee:** Individuals that help with the plan and organizing of the conference. This includes the executive committee as well as other individuals to help oversee specific areas. A couple of conference committee roles are
 - **Section Chair or Room Facilitator:** Individuals that are the primary point of contact for presenters. They ensure that the presenter is kept update to date on all pertinent information and make sure that all the necessary submission materials are turned in by the due dates. In addition, while at an in-person conference they will be the ones to make sure the rooms run smoothly. For virtual sessions they will monitor the chat and Q&A windows during the virtual presentation and will notify the presenter that there are questions coming in and will handle any technical issues (or direct them to the appropriate person to handle technical issues). They ensure the presentation runs smoothly and ends at the specified time.
 - **Volunteer Coordinator:** Individuals that work with various other committee members to build a volunteer schedule based on where volunteers are needed. They will be responsible for reaching out and recruiting people to volunteer some of their time to help during the conference.
- **Trainer:** Individuals who provide specialized, extra-fee training before or after the conference. Training is usually a half or full day, and can be virtual or in-person.
- **Moderator:** Individuals who assist trainers during specialized, extra-fee training before or after the conference.
- **Presenter:** Individuals who were either invited to provide content for the conference or who contributed content for the conference and will be required to write a paper and give a presentation.
- **Volunteer:** Individuals that have agreed to donate some of their conference time to help with logistics. Below are a few volunteer roles.

- **Registration/Information Desk Assistant:** Individuals that may help with getting attendees checked in and providing them their badge and/or bags.
- **Session Coordinator:** Individuals that will assist the section chair by keeping track of time for the presenters and possibly taking head counts.
- **Technical Experts / Code Doctors:** Individuals that like to help others troubleshoot problem with code or data. These individuals typically have a strong skill set in a particular area and a knack for problem solving.
- **Sponsor / Exhibitor:** Individuals that represent a company that has a booth in the main networking area of the conference.
- **Attendee:** Everyone at the conference is an attendee. However, there are two different types of attendees: First Timers and Experienced Attendees. First Timers will typically look to those Experienced Attendees for guidance. As individuals that have been to several conferences we should work to make the First Timers feel welcomed and at ease so that they will want to come back.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

You may be attending an in-person conference, a hybrid conference, or a virtual conference. At times, the decision as to what type of conference will be held may come after you've submitted proposals for content. The key is to be flexible in your expectations and preparations. Many activities involved in conference attendance will be the same, but there are some key differences between the different content types. We will describe various elements of conference preparation below, and call out which conference types they apply to in the section heading.

PREPARING FOR VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION (HYBRID, VIRTUAL)

If you are attending a hybrid or virtual conference, you will want to prepare an environment in your home, office, or other space that will allow you to participate fully in the conference. The first step is to consult the conference website to find out what platform(s) are being used for virtual components so you can make sure you have what you need in order to connect to virtual components. Reliable internet service, a reliable computer and accessories including monitor(s), microphones/headphones, and lighting. A space that can be made private for the duration of your participation is key.

PRESENTING AND TAPING

Preparations are particularly important if you will be presenting a session or recording a session that will be a part of the conference. If presenting, consider having two monitors hooked up: this makes sharing an uncluttered screen while viewing any presentation notes much easier. Test your microphone, audio visual tools, and lighting in advance. Make sure you do some dry runs using the system (most hybrid and virtual conferences will have at least one session with presenters to make sure they are able to access conference tools). Always connect well before your session. Make absolutely sure you have contact information for your moderator and section chairs (see below). In addition, if you have hotspots keep those handy in case of an outage. Test your hotspots to make sure you can connect to them quickly if the need arises. If you are presenting live and you have impending inclement weather in your area, it may be best to give those in attendance a heads up that if you are disconnected that you will reconnect via a hotspot and to please stay on the line. If you have a battery backup system (UPS) for power outages, ensure those are connected to your laptop and video equipment and test the UPS prior to presentation day to confirm it is still viable.

VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE

Always connect at least 5 minutes prior to the session that you would like to attend (or whatever length of time is recommended by the conference website). Make sure you are in a space where you will not be disturbed, and you will not disturb others. Although most virtual conferences are automatically muted and have video suppressed, make absolutely sure that your sound is muted, and your video is off. Plan to ask

questions via the chat or Q&A windows – most virtual presentations will have moderators which keep an eye on the chat window. Some webinars may have separate moderators for chat and Q&A, with chat being primarily used to deal with technical issues while the Q&A is specifically used for questions that pertain to the presentation. Make sure you are using the correct window to direct your questions to the appropriate moderator.

MAKING APPROPRIATE TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS (IN-PERSON, HYBRID)

Once you have decided to attend an in-person or hybrid conference, the first thing to review as you prepare for an in-person or hybrid conference is whether there are any travel restrictions and requirements for travel from your residence to the conference location. This can include COVID restrictions (testing requirements, masking requirements, quarantine requirements), any required VISAs, international flight restrictions, etc. One resource to check is the conference website which will frequently have COVID policies posted, but your research should not end there. Look on government and travel websites that cover the conference site, and continue to monitor up to and through your conference attendance.

Next, it is important to make the appropriate travel arrangements at the best possible rates. Begin with considering the best mode of transportation to the conference.

DRIVING

Is the conference only a few hours away? Or maybe you prefer driving to flying? If you decide to drive, there are several things that you need to consider.

- Should you rent a car to save wear and tear on your personal vehicle?
- If you take your personal vehicle will your employer pay for mileage reimbursement?
- Do you need to pay for parking at the hotel? (This can be an exorbitant fee in some cases). If so, will your employer cover the cost of parking? Sometimes the added cost of parking at the hotel can make driving more expensive than if you took an alternate mode of transportation.
- Be sure to map out the best route ahead of time, and/or have reliable GPS available.

FLYING / TAKING A NON-COMMUTER TRAIN

When scheduling your travel, make sure you have all the necessary information so that you can ensure you are arriving early enough and departing late enough to be available for the entire conference.

- Not all conferences start on the same day of the week, nor do they all start at the same time of day. For example, a conference can start on a Sunday evening with the opening session, while another conference may start on a Wednesday afternoon. Yet another conference may start on a Thursday morning.
- Be sure that you plan to stay for the entire conference. Know what the conference end date and time are. This will ensure you get the maximum benefit from attending the conference. Not all the best presentations are in the first day. Some must-see presentations are saved for the last day. In addition, some conferences have a closing session with some great give-a-ways for which you must be present to win.
- If you are involved with the conference, whether as a committee member, a volunteer or a presenter, find out if you need to be there early or stay late. For example, as a presenter you may be required to attend a presenter meeting. If you have signed up to volunteer, there may be some volunteer responsibilities that may require you to arrive early or possibly stay late.
- Making sure you catch your flight or train on time is just one portion of your travel. Often people only think about making their reservations and do not give thought to making plans to get to the airport or train station from their home or get to and from the hotel. Research the various land transportation options (e.g., Uber, Lyft, SuperShuttle, courtesy hotel shuttle, etc.). See if anyone you know is coming to the conference and arriving and/or departing around the same time so you

can share transportation. Think about creating a shared spreadsheet to keep track of friends' and colleagues' travel schedule. This spreadsheet will help to coordinate schedules (see Figure 1)

Conference	Traveler	Arrival Date	Arrival Time	Airline	Departure Date	Departure Time	Airline	Comment
SGF	Sansa Stark	4/27/2019	9:27 AM	AA3971	5/2/2019	12:21 PM	AA2610	Changed by American - updated
SGF	Brienne of Tarth	4/27/2019	8:33 AM	AA132	5/2/2019	12:47 PM	AA901	Changed by American - updated
SGF	Daenerys Targaryen	4/27/2019	11:45 AM	AC7663	5/2/2019	6:05 AM	AC7662	
SGF	Arya Stark	4/27/2019	9:29 AM	AA1403	5/2/2019	11:34 AM	AA2368	as of 4/23/2019 - DFW
SGF	Jon Snow	4/27/2019	9:25 AM	SW4789	5/1/2019	3:45 PM	SW32	Flying to/from DAL (Dallas - Love Field) not DFW
PharmaSUG	Sansa Stark	6/14/2019	7:10 PM	DL3378	6/21/2019	7:10 PM	DL3455	
PharmaSUG	Jon Snow	6/14/2019	12:31 PM	AA4449	6/19/2019	8:30 PM	AA4520	
PharmaSUG	Brienne of Tarth	6/14/2019	5:03 PM	DL5385	6/21/2019	5:38 PM	DL5420	Changed by Delta - will update
PharmaSUG	Arya Stark	6/14/2019	7:53 PM	Train - Amtrak	6/19/2019	evening	Black '09 Scion tc	Driving from DC
PharmaSUG	Cersei Lannister							
PharmaSUG	Jon Snow							

Figure 1 Sample of Google Spreadsheet to Track Travel of Friends/Colleagues

- If you are travelling internationally, check the country requirements. Do you need a visa to get into the country? If you need a visa, do you need a formal invitation letter if travelling on a work visa? If a visa is required, be sure to start that process early. Do not wait to the last minute to start the process. Obtaining a visa can be time consuming and for some countries the rules and regulations are very strict. Inaccurate information or an improper photo format could delay the process. In addition, be sure to get the proper foreign currency to pay for items that are to be paid in cash. Some banks may require a week turn around or may require you to go to another branch.
- Research and make land transportation arrangements ahead of time instead of when arriving at airport (i.e., book SuperShuttle, Uber or the like in advance.)

ROOM AND BOARD

If an in-person or hybrid conference is held in a hotel, the conference will typically have discounted hotel rates. In some cases, especially with larger conferences, there will be several hotels to choose from. These rates are only good until either the room block is full or until the end of the guaranteed room rate, so if you want to stay in one of the conference hotels at the discounted rate then you need to book early. Keep in mind that by booking early you have a better chance of finding room availability for all room nights. In addition, for those conferences that have a limited number of government rate rooms, you may miss out on these special rates if you do not book early. Some room night blocks will fill up faster than others. The later you book the greater the likelihood of rooms only being available for part of your stay, requiring you to find a different hotel for the other part of your stay, or have two separate reservations in the same hotel requiring a room move.

To get the most out of the conference it is often ideal to stay at the conference hotel since many of the early morning or evening activities take place at the hotel. However, if the cost of the hotel is still out of your price range even with the discounted rate there are still other options.

- Find a travel buddy. Do you have a friend(s) or a colleague(s) that is going to the same conference and is also looking to cut costs? If so, consider rooming together. Most hotels will allow up to two guests per room without incurring additional fees. Having a roommate will give you someone to talk with at night once you get back to the room and your roommate can also act as your 'backup' alarm clock if they are a light sleeper and you are a heavy sleeper (i.e., they can make sure you are up, so you don't miss breakfast or any of the morning presentations).

- A viable alternative is to find a hotel within your budget that is within walking distance. Most conferences are located in areas where there are several options. In some situations, there may not be other hotels within walking distance, but maybe an Uber/Lyft ride back and forth may still be more economical than staying in the conference hotel. However, with this option you will need to allow for additional time in the mornings to ensure you get to the conference venue on time. You also need to consider that you may have to miss (or leave early) from some of the evening activities.

WHAT TO PACK

Once your travel arrangements are made, and your hotel room has been booked, now you need to start thinking about what to take on the trip. If you are like most people, you are thinking “why worry about packing now, I’ll just pack the week before”. The actual packing can take place the week prior to the trip, but you need to consider what to take. It may take time to get all the necessary items. Of course, you know to pack the standard things such as clothes and toiletries, but there are things that most people don’t consider packing. Below is a list of things that you may want to consider.

- If you are sharing a room, it might be beneficial to have a multi-prong adapter or power strip. Some hotels may have only a few outlets that really work so having a multi-prong adapter can come in handy. In addition, a good quality USB hub with five plus slots is very helpful.
- Long extension cords or 15 foot + charging cables are a plus in case there is not an outlet near the bed or the work area.
- If you are bringing along work, be sure to pack the following:
 - your laptop with a charging cable,
 - mouse and mouse pad if necessary,
 - computer glasses if necessary, and
 - port adapters for connecting to other equipment if you have a laptop that only has USB-C ports or an older laptop without HDMI ports
- A portable charger, charging cables and wall plugs are incredibly useful. Most conference locations have a shortage of available outlets for charging. You can make new friends if you have a two USB port charger to share. Charging cables with multiple options (iPhone, Android, Google) are also useful tools.
- A nightlight that can double as a charger or outlet can be beneficial, especially if you are the type of person that gets up in the middle of the night and do not want to turn on the lights to navigate the room. This is extremely important if you have a roommate. You do not want to disturb their sleep by turning on lights or bumping into things and waking them up.
- If you have any dietary restrictions, you will want to pack food/snacks that you know you can eat. Although the conference committee does a great job trying to provide a variety of foods, it is not always possible to accommodate special diets for all meals. If you are unable to pack food and you need a special diet, then you will want to look for a store close to the hotel so you can pick up something once you get to your destination.
- If you enjoy running or working out or maybe just want some downtime at the pool or hot tub (provided there is one in the hotel), be sure to pack athletic gear and/or a swimsuit. This is a great way to unwind especially if you were on your feet all day. Research safe running routes (or have a running buddy) and check on the times of the hotel athletic facilities.
- COVID-19 materials are important. Rapid antigen tests, a thermometer, and KN95 masks, plus an analgesic to reduce fever, are good additions to your travel kit. Have your vaccination certificate on your cell phone. Within 48 hours of travel, test and have electronic proof of a negative test. **IF YOU TEST POSITIVE, DO NOT TRAVEL OR ATTEND AN IN-PERSON CONFERENCE.**

- Don't forget to pack a first-aid kit. Items in your first-aid kit may vary based on your location. For example, if you are going to some place warm and sunny, then you may want to include sunscreen and aloe. If you are going someplace where bugs and insects could be problematic, you will want to pack some anti-sting / anti-itch wipes or gel. You will want to include band-aids as well. You may be on your feet more than you are accustomed to, or walking more than you are used to. Blister bandages can be very helpful. Other items like nail clippers, nail file and tweezers should be part of your first-aid kit.
- Stain removers, such as a Tide pen or Wine Away, can be a life saver. Hand sanitizers and wipes are also useful.
- Many conferences now offer hydration stations. Consider bringing your favorite reusable water bottle for use at the conference.
- Most importantly, do not forget to pack your medications. This includes both prescription and over the counter (OTC) medications (e.g., Airborne, Lactaid, emergen-C, allergy medication). Although OTC medications can probably be purchased at your destination, your prescription medication typically cannot be easily obtained, especially if you are travelling out of the country.
- **If you are presenting, ALWAYS bring your presentation(s) on a thumb drive.** Although the presentations are typically pre-loaded to the conference laptops, having a backup of your presentation is a nice safety precaution.
- Include in your carry-on luggage any important documents that may be needed during travel, e.g., passport, visa, proof of COVID vaccination, foreign country entrance forms (if applicable) and/or formal invitation letter.
- Print a copy of your itinerary with your name on it and place inside your laptop that way when going through TSA you have proof it is your laptop.
- Lastly, don't forget your business cards. These will come in handy when you start networking.

ON-SITE CONTACT INFORMATION

Once you get onsite, the registration desk may have a list of important contact numbers. It may be beneficial to see if you can get numbers for at least the conference chairs from that list. In addition, prior to arriving at the conference, be sure to ask your section chairs (if applicable) for their on-site contact number. Do not rely on the phone numbers at the bottom of an e-mail signature. This phone number may be a business number and the individual may not have the phone with them at the conference. If you are volunteering, make sure you have the volunteer coordinator's number as well. Ideally, you want an on-site contact number for the person in charge of any role you may be participating in.

MANAGING YOUR CONFERENCE SCHEDULE (IN-PERSON, HYBRID, VIRTUAL)

One of the most important aspects of the conference website is the conference schedule. In the time leading up to the conference, a schedule of presentations will be posted once potential papers have been accepted and allotted to sections / presentation rooms. Conference leaders will have taken care to make sure speakers are not double-booked, etc. but it is up to you to decide which presentations you are interested in attending. Some websites allow you to create a custom schedule. If the website allows for this, you should take advantage of this feature in order to manage your schedule. It's handy to have a couple of options for each time slot, in case a room is full, or a presentation isn't a good fit for your interests.

It's a good idea to collect the information in a format that works for you: for example, some people book sessions in their calendars, some people use the conference app (described below), others create a spreadsheet of presentations by date and time, while others have a paper list. Conferences will vary as to whether they provide the fold-out card or printed schedules – many have opted to just provide the schedule in the conference app and on the website.

Most conferences offer "Hands-On Workshops/Hands-On Training" (HOWs/HoTs), which allow attendees to try out concepts and code at no additional cost. The HOWs are very popular and often will have a line

to get into the room. If you are interested in attending a HOW, plan ahead and arrive early. Most smaller conferences are now BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) – attendees should have access to the necessary software on their device. Typically, the requirements for HOWs that are BYOD will be available on the conference website. For the conferences that are BYOD, there are a variety of ways in which the instructors will provide class materials. For example, the instructor may provide the HOW materials on a thumb drive which can be installed on attendees' devices or as a download from a website.

Many conferences also offer extra fee training classes before and after the conference. These are a great opportunity for excellent training at a very affordable price. Most extra fee training classes are available as a half day course. However, there are some that are a full day course. You may even have the opportunity to attend a class taught by very experienced presenters who are published experts in their fields. Conference committees plan carefully to offer a number of different courses at different levels. Check the conference website for topics and times, and adjust your schedule accordingly if you would like to take advantage of this training.

WORK NEVER ENDS

Some companies may require that you keep up with the demands of your paying job while you are attending the conference, especially if it is virtual. This may not always be easy to do since there is so much going on. If you know in advance that you will be required to put in some time for your paying job, then you will need to plan accordingly. For example, if you know that you have a meeting that you must attend, be sure to set a reminder on your phone. If you are presenting and know you have work commitments as well, let the person in charge of conference scheduling know as early as possible that you will not be available at certain times so that they can try and accommodate your schedule. Do not let them know one or two weeks prior to the conference because by then it is hard to reschedule presentations. After all it is not just your presentation that would be rescheduled: it could affect several other people and those individuals may also have other commitments. In addition, once your presentation is scheduled, it's a good idea to alert your paying job that there will be a block of time when you are not available.

When working at an in-person or hybrid conference, there are some things you will need to be prepared for and possibly make alternate arrangements. Some examples are listed below.

- Some conferences have a large number of attendees. This could put a strain on the Wi-Fi connection causing you to have spotty or non-existent internet service. You might want to be prepared by having a hotspot for your own use or maybe upgrading your internet access. If those options are not viable, then you may need to head to your hotel room and use the guest room Wi-Fi instead of the conference Wi-Fi. Within your hotel room, there may be a restriction on the number of devices using internet. It's also a good idea to check with IT staff if you are travelling with a VPN that has restrictions on internet quality.
- The conference areas tend to get noisy, and it may not be feasible to take a call in some areas. Prior to your call scout out the area and see if there is a relatively quiet spot that you can take a call.
- If you are sharing a room with others, make sure they understand when you need to use the room for business purposes.

When working while attending a virtual conference, there are some helpful guidelines to maximizing your conference experience while attending to your day to day workplace duties. Some examples are listed below.

- If working in an open plan office, sharing an office with others, or at home, seek out a quiet area / focus room for times you want to be present at the conference, and try to minimize family / coworker interference during this time.
- Block out conference attendance hours in your workplace calendar well in advance so you aren't scheduled for unexpected meetings, and put "do not disturb" status on your phone, teams, and other collaborative tools for the times you have designated for conference attendance.

Don't just watch presentations you are interested in! Attend keynotes, participate in activities such as code doctors, question and answer periods, on-line water cooler chats, etc.

ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL MEDIA BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE CONFERENCE (IN-PERSON, HYBRID, VIRTUAL)

You have made all the necessary preparations, and you are ready for the conference. You may want to start engaging in social media well before the actual conference begins. Social media is not just Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. You can also engage in social media by using SAS Communities, SAS-L, LinkedIn, specialized listservs, and blogs. Each conference will typically have one or two hashtags that they are using, so be sure to use the appropriate hashtags. Below are a few pointers that will help you to engage with social media.

BEFORE THE CONFERENCE

- Most conferences have a conference app that will have all the necessary information to help you navigate the conference. The conference app typically is available as a mobile app, although there may also be a website version. If you are using the mobile app, you should download the app prior to attending the conference to start mapping out what presentations you want to see and figuring out what activities are available. Don't wait until the conference begins to download the app - you could experience a delay in downloading the app if a lot of people are trying to download the app simultaneously. Most of the apps allow you to put activities on your calendar and set alarms, and we highly recommend using this feature.
- If you are on a conference planning committee, let people know what you are doing to help with the planning. For example, if you are working on paper recruitment, posting on social media indicating your helping in a specific topic area may encourage some of your colleagues to submit something.
- If you are a presenter at the conference, post on your social media sites the titles of your presentations so that you can entice your followers that may also be at the same conference to attend your presentation. If you have code that you would like to share, then share your code on GitHub or share your concepts on the different social media channels.
- Even if you are just attending the conference with no specific role (i.e., planning committee or presenter), announcing on social media will let your followers know that you will be in attendance and if they are there as well then you can schedule a meetup.
- Take advantage of resources such as SAS Communities and LinkedIn to announce your attendance, ask questions, provide answers, and share information.

DURING THE CONFERENCE

- The mobile app typically has an activity feed that will allow you to post directly to social media. Use this feature to take pictures of a presentation that you are attending that you found useful.
- Participate in extracurricular conference events, such as charity events or photo booths (yes, these happen during virtual events, too!), even if you are shy! Take pictures during these events and post on social media and/or post in the activity feed in the mobile app.

AFTER THE CONFERENCE

- Did you have a great time at the conference? Then you can write an article or blog to share your experiences and highlight some key things that were of particular interest to you.
- If the conference you attended, has awards that are given out (e.g., Best Paper) share the news with your colleagues via social media.
- Be sure to connect with the new people you met at the conference on the different social media channels.

NETWORKING AND MEETING FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES (IN-PERSON, HYBRID)

Sometimes going to a conference can be more than just about learning, it can be a great away to network and meet new people. It is also a great avenue for reconnecting with your friends or your 'conference family'. Below are some pointers on how to make the most of your time at an in-person or hybrid conference so that you can get the full benefit of learning some new and cool concepts while still taking time to meet and reconnect with friends.

- You can use the conference as an opportunity to plan a mini vacation with your 'conference family'. You may decide to arrive early or stay late to enjoy the sights of the city or maybe get in some rest and relaxation. After all you worked hard to get to the conference, so you might want some down time. Planning a mini vacation with your friends is where the shared Google spreadsheet comes in handy. Research and discuss options ahead of time – think Escape Rooms, concerts, ferry rides, etc. See if special reservations are needed for any desired events, and BOOK EARLY.
- The conference is also a place where you can meet a specific speaker that seems to awe you with their knowledge. If you plan on meeting a specific speaker, be prepared. Know when they are presenting and show up early, with questions.
- Visit the Quad / Attendee Hub / Demo Room. You will never regret introducing yourself to amazing professionals, vendors, partners, exhibitors, etc. In addition, there may be short software demos, giveaways, and opportunities to collaborate with other attendees. Bring your problems to technical experts from user communities and browse publications.
- During the various activities, don't be afraid to go over to someone and start a conversation. Everyone is there for the same reason: to learn and make new connections. If you are shy and aren't comfortable starting a conversation with a stranger, then prepare ahead of time with some ice breaker questions. Such as
 - What did you think of 'x' event/presentation?
 - Is this your first conference?
 - What presentations have you seen so far and what was your favorite?
 - Did you hear about the 'y' activity that is planned?
 - What company do you work for, and what do you?
- Another great way to network and meet new people is to get involved in conference activities. Attend "meetups" or "Birds of a Feather" sessions at the conference or sign up to volunteer at registration or as a session coordinator.
- Be sure to have your business cards ready! If you meet someone that you really enjoyed talking to, you can hand them your card and ask that they keep in contact. If you don't have a business card and the person is wearing a name badge, ask if you can take a photo of them with their name badge. Taking the photo of them with the name badge is a great way to associate the name with the face. We recommend creating your own QR-code and putting it on a business card you can show to people which, if scanned by a smartphone, directs people to more information about you and/or your website. Please see Troy Hughes' paper "Badge in Batch with Honeybadger: Generating Conference Badges with Quick Response (QR) Codes Containing Virtual Contact Cards (vCards) for Automatic Smart Phone Contact List Upload " in the references section below for tips.
- Remember that networking is about building relationships with the people you meet. These individuals may later be someone you can turn to for help on a project or even a job. Please see the references to four SAS blog entries written by a SAS instructor's after interviewing several individuals to get their thoughts on networking at conferences. You may leave your next conference with a lifelong friend.

CONNECTING AND NETWORKING VIRTUALLY (VIRTUAL)

Virtual conferences can be helpful in networking, as well.

- Check for the bios and contact information for presenters of sessions that you enjoyed on the conference app and proceedings. Reach out to presenters on social media and/or via their contact information. Most presenters are happy to discuss their concepts!
- Create or join zoom sessions with colleagues or new contacts that are attending the conference to discuss conference nuggets or just get to know each other.
- If any virtual networking activities are planned for the conference, don't be shy! Join in, and find some new BFFs.

CONCLUSION

Make your next conference the best you've ever attended! Careful pre-planning and research can help you, and your fellow conference attendees, find the perfect match in terms of which conference to attend, what choices you have for transportation, room and board, and cost saving opportunities. View our tips for navigating the brave new world of in-person, hybrid, and virtual conferences. Learn to network before, during and after the conference to enhance your conference experience. We hope our ideas and experiences will give you some great concepts to run with, and that you will share your own thoughts with other conference goers.

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APPENDIX 1: CONFERENCE PLANNING CHECKLIST

Travel and Room Arrangements

- Determine mode of transportation (e.g., driving, flying, train) and book early if necessary.
- For mode of transportation other than driving, book transportation to / from transportation depot (e.g., from airport or train station).
- Obtain all necessary documents for travel.
 - Driver's License (REALID)
 - Vaccine Card (if applicable) or Test Results or Statement for Exemption
 - Passport
 - Visa
 - Foreign Country Entry Form
 - Formal invitation letter
- Book room at conference hotel or place nearby.

Things to Pack

- Electrical equipment (e.g., power strip, extension cord, multi-prong adapter, USB hub, charging cables, nightlight)
- Laptop and accessories
- First-aid kit
- Medication (OTC and prescription)
- Stain remover
- Food/snacks
- Athletic / swim wear
- Masks (if applicable)
- Test kits
- Foreign currency (if applicable) – carry on your person and not your suitcase

APPENDIX 2: SECTION CHAIR / PRESENTER COORDINATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- Be familiar with the conference website and submission system so that you can answer any questions that the author(s) may have
- Be familiar with all documents and know all important dates
- Communicate with author(s)
 - Inform them of the expectations (i.e., adhere to paper/presentation guidelines)
 - Inform of the registration requirements
 - Upload material according to the deadlines
 - Inform them of any presenter meeting or other 'housekeeping items' that may arise
- Keep Academic Chair or Conference Chair informed of all pertinent information
 - Papers / presentations that have not been uploaded by the expected deadlines
 - Lack of communication from author(s)
 - Special requests from author(s)
 - Use of personal laptop is not recommended and requires permission from the chair because a person laptop may not have the correct connectors nor compatible with the projector
 - Not available at specific times due to work commitment
 - Live demonstrations are not recommended due to fact that internet connections vary from conference to conference and VPNs may not be accessible
- Ensure consistency of documents with the templates and/or guidelines
- Ensure consistency across the documents submitted (i.e., paper number, title and authors match)
- Ensure the paper has the correct conference and year in the title section
- Ensure the presentation slides are available in the system. If they are not available in the system follow-up with the presenter(s) to confirm that they will bring the presentation on a thumb drive and that they will be available prior to their presentation to get it loaded onto the conference laptop
- Interact with other conference committee members to ensure a smooth-running conference
- Coordinate with section co-chair(s) to ensure that at least one section chair is always in the room
- Attend the Presenter, Section Chair, Volunteer meeting at the start of the conference *
- Know who the AV people are and how to contact them
- Introduce the speaker(s) *†
- Keep head counts - make sure the room does not go beyond capacity *†
- Keep time *†
 - Know the length of the presentation
 - Ensure the presenter adheres to the allotted time
 - At end of allotted notify presenter and attendees that questions need to be taken outside of room
- Judge for best paper/presentation *†
- Ensure doors do not slam *†
- Thank your presenter(s) and volunteer(s) for helping to improve the conference experience for all attendees

- Return all documents and equipment to Academic Chair or delegate at the end of the conference
- Attend closing session to present the Best Paper winner for the section *
- Be sure to network and have fun!

* Duties that can be delegated to a volunteer if one is assigned

† Some conferences will have other individuals taking care of these responsibilities

Note that the list of responsibilities is not an exhaustive list, nor is everything required by every conference. The expectations of this role will vary by conference, region and year.

Both authors have been in this role at SAS Global Forum, PharmaSUG, regional SAS User Group conferences and local SAS User Group events.

APPENDIX 3: PRESENTER EXPECTATIONS

Submit idea to submission system before close of call for papers

Include a draft or a detailed outline during submission

Complete all information on profile and use proper casing

- Name
- Affiliation
- Biography

Note this information will show up on the website and mobile app as it is entered.

Ensure proper casing of title in submission system. The title will appear on the website and mobile app as it is entered.

Read ALL e-mails in their entirety that come from the Academic/Conference chair or from the section chair/presenter coordinator

Be familiar with the conference website because it contains important information

- Important dates
- Paper, presentation and e-poster templates
- Submission guidelines
- How to documents

Adhere to the timelines (i.e., refer to the important dates)

Use templates or adhere to the submission guidelines when preparing paper, presentation and/or e-poster

- Margin
- Title and author(s) information
- Page numbers
- Font size
- Biography on the first slide if it is required

Complete the copyright grant form or permission to publish form by the due date and it should be signed by all authors

Ensure consistency across the documents submitted (i.e., paper number, title and authors match)

Ensure the paper has the correct conference and year in the title section

Attend the Presenter, Section Chair, Volunteer meeting at the start of the conference. If you are not able to attend notify your section chair and make plans to meet up with them at another time prior to your presentation. *

If a first-time presenter or would like help preparing, reach out to the Presenter Coaches early *

Keep Academic Chair or Conference Chair informed of all pertinent information

- Use of personal laptop is not recommended and requires permission from the chair because a personal laptop may not have correct connectors nor compatible with the projector. If personal laptop is needed, then be sure to test out the connections and compatibility once on site.
- Not available at specific times due to work commitment
- Live demonstrations are not recommended due to fact that internet connections vary from conference to conference and VPNs may not be accessible

- Practice your presentation
 - Utilize the practice room if one is available
 - Do a dry run with your colleagues
 - Dress professionally for your presentation. You represent yourself and your company.
 - Be sure to network and have fun!
-

* Duties that can be delegated to a volunteer if one is assigned

APPENDIX 4: VIRTUAL CHECKLIST FOR PRESENTER

- Prepare a space
 - Quiet area
 - Appropriate lighting
 - Reliable microphone and audio
 - Adequate electricity
 - Necessary internet connectivity
- Hotspots in case of connectivity issues
- Familiarize yourself with the platform and any other virtual tools that may be used during the virtual session
- Do a dry run on the platform if possible. Otherwise, do a dry run with colleagues in another location to make sure presentation area is appropriate (see first item).
- Make sure that presentation is set up in 'Use Presenter View' and the correct window is what is being displayed to the audience.
- Contact information (i.e., e-mail and phone number) of moderators

APPENDIX 5: VIRTUAL CHECKLIST FOR ATTENDEE

- Prepare an area
 - Quiet area
 - Appropriate lighting
 - Reliable microphone and audio
 - Adequate electricity
 - Necessary internet connectivity
- Hotspots in case of connectivity issues
- Familiarize yourself with the platform and any other virtual tools that may be used during the virtual session