



## Tips From SCMS Members for Having a Productive and Supportive In-Person Conference

Note: This was originally composed in April 2023 for the first SCMS back in-person after the virtual ones. It has been updated since with a few new links at the bottom.

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### Socializing



*Dana Och*

➡ When I was a grad student, I would often give my talk and then disappear (or just go to panels and slink out alone). Meeting people, chatting, taking breaks is most important than I realized.

*Alyx Vesey*

- ➡ Set time aside for dinners with friends and for off-campus excursions
- ➡ Give yourself wiggle room for impromptu hangs
- ➡ Grad students: make friends with junior faculty

*Kyra Hunting*

➡ Ask people to introduce you around – your faculty, recently graduated grad students from your program all can typically help if you're a grad student. So much of my conference experiences/career was helped by people willing to do that. That doesn't need to mean the biggest person in the field. Some of the best connections I made were from a grad student in my

program introducing me to a grad student they knew in another program, but meeting some senior scholars can be really helpful too.

*Pete Kunze*

- ➡ If there is someone you're hoping to connect with, try emailing with them before the conference to see if they can briefly meet. Understand that many people are very busy during the conference. Instead of requesting a meeting, you may consider asking to chat via Zoom.
- ➡ The lobby and the book room are often great places to meet people.
- ➡ When possible, ask mutual friends to introduce you to someone of interest.
- ➡ Network with other grad students if you are one. You're coming up together, and you will see each other often. And it may lead to possible collaborations and publishing opportunities.

*Jonathan Gray*

- ➡ One of the easiest conversation starters is to ask what someone is presenting on / presented on. Easy follow up is to ask if that's part of a bigger project or its own thing. By all means tell someone you like their work, but be ready with these questions after, since flattery alone is often a non-starter to a conversation

*Chris Cwynar*

- ➡ Getting to know people is often vital to a good conference experience but can be daunting for those who know few people going in. With that in mind, it's a good idea to attend relevant SIG meetings and social events related to one's area of study in order to to meet people and find one's groups(s) within the broader conference. It's also a good idea to focus on operating on one's level when networking; early career grad students are often best served by focusing on other grad students while senior grads students might emphasize meeting junior faculty and other ABDs. Obviously, that's (thankfully) not a hard and fast rule; it's more of a recommended orientation in terms of where one might have the best chances for success when trying to build relationships at the conference. Finally, remember that scholars can often be shy and slightly awkward people in social settings. While it may seem challenging to be the one to make the first move when it comes to a cold approach, such moves are often appreciated if they are executed with grace and sensitivity.

*Priscilla Peña Ovalle*

- ➡ As someone who is terrible with names, I find name tags to be super helpful visual cues and appreciate when folks wear them. Please don't hesitate to check my tag and say hi!

*Emily Contois*

- ➡ Read name tags. Pay attention to who folks are: in the audience, sitting next to you at lunch, or standing in the hall. If you've read a person's book or paper, but have never met them before, it's easy to start a conversation just by saying that you've read their work, sharing how and why

you enjoyed it and found it meaningful to your own research. At the same time, don't be the jerk who loses interest in someone when you don't recognize their name or are always looking for someone "better" to chat with.

➡ To be honest, events created to promote networking, like mixers, make me feel like a door-to-door salesman and I get all awkward and Willy Loman all over myself. If this is you too, set small achievable goals, like, "I will make two meaningful connections at this event," meaning you have a conversation or exchange business cards with just two people. After you get started, you might gain some momentum and meet many more people.

➡ As you meet with other scholars, ask about their current projects. Everyone loves the opportunity to talk about their own work—and who knows, there could be an opportunity for you to collaborate or contribute.

### *Jeremy Butler*

➡ Instead of saying to someone, "Do you remember me?," which can lead to awkwardness if they don't, just say, "Hi, I'm \_\_\_\_\_. I'm not sure we've met."

➡ If going to lunch/dinner with a pack of people, adopt "The Policy of Non-Accountability," which states, "The person who suggests a restaurant is not accountable for the quality of that restaurant. If the restaurant is bad, then it is the RESTAURANT'S fault, not theirs." This will help get over the hurdle of agreeing on a place to eat.

### *Kevin Ferguson*

➡ go to #scmskaraoke and say hi to me!



### *Michael Dwyer*

➡ If somebody's work or question or behavior impressed you in some way, tell them. So much of the work we do (especially lately) is done in isolation, and it's very easy in situations like SCMS to feel intimidated or small--part of the work of the society, I think, is for everyone to chip in to make the people who contribute in one way or another to feel validated. Don't just huddle with the people you already know!

*Pam Wojcik*

➡ Say hi to senior scholars. Don't think you can't talk to them. Introduce yourself. They will be happy to meet you. Talk to people after their paper, even just to say thanks. Say hi in the elevator.

*Molly Schneider*: In a similar vein, I always wished some of my more advanced colleagues would help by doing some casual introductions (if the opportunity arose) so I didn't feel like such a dufus walking up to strangers.

*Pam Wojcik*: Yes, so advice to senior scholars: always be introducing.

Speaking of advice to senior scholars...

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## Socializing Part 2: Advice for Being Supportive as Mid-Career/Senior Faculty



*Sara Bakerman*

➡ Introduce people! a great way to get to know colleagues better AND help newbies expand their networks

*Molly Schneider*: Yup, more advanced folks should really help nudge this along occasionally by doing some casual introductions when they can.

*Jeremy Butler*

➡ Introduce Person A to Person B. Don't worry if A and B already know each other. Redundant introductions are better than missing a needed intro.

*Racquel Gates*

- ➡ If you have healthy travel funding, offer to take a taxi to/from the airport with a grad student/contingent faculty and cover the cost. Same with coffee/lunch. Make that clear BEFORE inviting/ordering.
- ➡ Be kind when offering comments during presentations.
- ➡ Introduce one grad student/junior faculty with one other mid career/senior faculty person that you know.
- ➡ If you meet someone who works in your city, reach out post conference.
- ➡ Ask about their research - don't just talk about yours.

*Derek Kompare*

- ➡ For us vets, I would recommend seeking out panels and papers from grad students and younger scholars in our areas of interest, and making connections with them. And for those folks with grad students attending, introducing their students to scholars from other schools.

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## Inclusion & Respect



*Mark Stewart*

- ➡ You don't know what people's health situations are, who they might be returning home to etc, so being conscientious around masking, ventilation, space etc helps make the conference a space that is safe for everyone. This is an equity issue, and makes sure that your colleagues feel safe around you, and that they will feel like they can return next time.

*Jeremy Butler*

➡ As someone with celiac disease, I am particularly sensitive to folks with food restrictions and allergies. If you have such restrictions/allergies (editor's note: or if you want to be an ally to those with allergies), try to do some advance research about restaurants in the area so that you might have a suggestion at the ready. e.g., most Indian restaurants have a large selection of gluten-free options. Before a conference, I try to find nearby Indian restaurants and other GF options.

*Michael Dwyer*

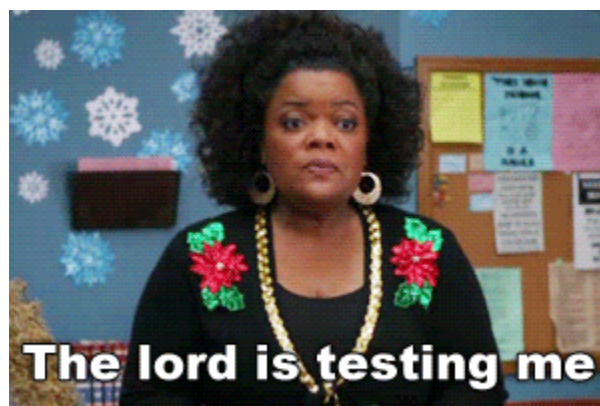
➡ Please be conscientious when standing around – try not to totally block hallways or escalators. There are all kinds of people with different kinds of abilities to navigate tight spaces and we need to literally make space for everyone!

*Mary Desjardins*

➡ It is also not cool to keep talking loudly in the hallway after a panel and the next set of panels have started – the panelists and audiences can often hear this chatter. Go the lobby or elsewhere!

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## Mental & Physical Health



*Melissa Lenos*

➡ Don't stress if you start to get Panel Burnout. There is SO MUCH amazing scholarship and so many exciting presentations but give yourself permission to take breaks when you need them. No one's taking attendance. (Except me. I will be taking attendance at my panel. [jk])

*Derek Kompare*

➡ Pace yourself! It's totally fine to skip a few panel sessions for a long lunch or exploration of the city.

*Genevieve Newman*

- ➡ Do NOT feel pressure to go to everything. Keep your body in mind as best you can.
- ➡ If you don't drink, either choose wisely who you go to mixers with or make other plans. A lot of socializing happens around alcohol and that's not your fault but the org doesn't have a good alt yet.
- ➡ Have exit routes and escape plans for when you feel overwhelmed by people/places/sounds/etc. This is a HUGE conference and it WILL be overwhelming if you're neurodivergent. Be ready to walk out of anything; back row if you need it. Have detailed good plans and backups if you can.
- ➡ Know local grocery stops near YOUR HOTEL to grab something premade but cheap. Pack extra clothes, chances are you'll sweat through what you have if the heat's on or it's hot outside.
- ➡ If you smoke, plan ahead and make friends at the smoking areas (hi! It me! @GenNewman)
- ➡ If you can, get in contact with other neurodivergents going ahead of time (again, it me @GenNewman) so you have a text line/call buddy if you need a talk down from anxiety. A handful are best but if you have someone who knows what's up ever one person can make a big difference
- ➡ I've done SCMS at least once in person (maybe twice?) and PCA national/regional, plus SDCC and a handful of others. These are my tips for absolutely all of them. Do NOT prioritize productivity over your well-being and it will be a far more productive experience anyway.

*Andy Owens*

- ➡ Don't forget to eat (and thankfully we have built in lunch breaks for the first time this year).

*Jeremy Butler*

- ➡ As well as a water bottle, bring something not-very-perishable to the conference to eat. Carrots, cheese, crackers, beef jerky, kale (is kale perishable?), etc. Conference schedules can lead to odd time conflicts where you only have 20-30 minutes between event A and event B. Spend that time nourishing yourself and keeping that blood sugar up!

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## Panel Attendance Advice



*Pete Kunze*

▀ Try to attend 2-3 sessions a day. And when asking a question, be generous, thoughtful, productive. No need for highly critical or provocative questions.

*Molly Schneider*

▀ I was grateful for the advice before my very first SCMS (2010) that it's totally okay and expected to do some panel jumping. I think it's easy to be afraid of being rude by arriving late or leaving early, but as long as you are courteous as you enter or exit, you're good.

*Mary Desjardins*

▀ It is okay to do some panel-hopping, but please be aware that in some meeting rooms the dais of presenters is right by the only door for the room. Try to avoid crossing IN FRONT of people presenting if you leave or come in to the room during the session. This is very distracting to presenters! If the door is open and you can see that someone is presenting when you arrive, try to wait unobtrusively outside (you often can still hear the presentation from outside) and wait until that particular talk is over and then enter the room (if it is a large room with the door in the back, this is not an issue).

*Neil Verma*

▀ Go to a panel solely out of curiosity! I think SCMS is so big these days it's hard to get to things we don't feel we "have" to see, but it's what makes the Society worth having.

*Emily Cantois*

▀ Ask questions during the Q&A and/or speak with presenters after their session. If you're shy or feeling nervous, send the presenter an email, tweet, or direct message instead. It can also be great to attend those early morning panels. Presenters dread being assigned those spots and often worry about drawing a tiny crowd, so there's more opportunity for discussion with a small group of dedicated folks.



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## Presentation Advice



*Racquel Gates*

➡ Time your presentation ahead of time! Nothing worse than realizing that you're running short on time.

*Jonathan Gray*

➡ Arrive with your presentation ready. If it's not, you'll waste great socializing/listening time doing so there.

➡ Your allotted time will almost definitely end up being less than you think (tech issues, people over-speaking, a chatty chair, etc. can all cut it down), which means you'll likely need to cut on the fly. With that in mind, start with your big conclusion — I've seen far too many folk struggle and panic when given the "one minute" warning and be forced to end without having concluded ... so just conclude at the outset then it doesn't matter where you get cut off.

*Katie Morrissey*

➡ I'm going to counter Jonathan slightly and add: while arriving with a finished presentation is ideal, don't feel bad if you can't finish your paper before you arrive. Given our jobs/lives, it's not always possible. Be kind to yourself. But, one thing I'm a stickler about: for the love of god, time your talk before you present it and make sure it doesn't run over!!

*Jeremy Butler*

➡ Only try to make THREE points. Trust me, that is all you will have time for once you elaborate upon those three points. Do NOT go over your allotted time. It annoys your fellow panelists and makes the audience uncomfortable.

➡ Show something visual from the media text you're analyzing. Even if audience members have seen that text, they will not have seen it as recently as you have. It greatly improves the audience's comprehension of your three points if they can have a visual reminder of the text. Heck, you can even go old school and have a single-page paper print-out for attendees. They'll appreciate it and you can cover it with your contact info.

*Pam Wojcik:* I will say not just "show something visual" -- which for many seems to mean still images -- but SHOW CLIPS!!!

*Jeremy Butler:* Yes, but if you do show clips, make sure you've allowed for time to start/stop them and potentially troubleshoot issues with getting them to show.

*Pete Kunze*

➡ Briefly and respectfully establish what's been said and what your contribution is.

➡ You may want to bring a one or two page handout. Be aware: this can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, you allow your audience to follow you; on another, you open yourself up for pointed questions and provide your audience a distraction. Be prepared to guide. Relatedly, a printout of your paper in a clear, legible font increases your presentation's accessibility.

➡ PowerPoints are helpful but not necessarily expected. If you use them, don't read word-for-word from them. Give the audience what it needs: a visual or excerpt. Don't make yourself irrelevant.

➡ In rare instances, you may have an insistent respondent to your paper. A variation of "That is a point I had not considered, and I appreciate your feedback" or "Thank you, you've given me something to consider for a future draft" are good ways out.

➡ Do not expect to get great feedback on your work. People may not have read the texts or arguments you are working with in your paper. What happens more often is people will have a clarifying question, encouraging remark, or a self-centered comment ("In my area...")

*Emily Cantois*

➡ Arrive as early as you can to get tech set up, check in with your panelists, and get settled, so you feel comfortable and confident to begin. As you present, connect with your fellow presenters. Speak confidently, clearly, and at an appropriate volume. Make as much eye contact as possible, even if you're reading your paper. Pay attention and respect your panel's time keeper. Welcome questions from the audience. Answer them succinctly and directly. If the audience doesn't ask questions of all panelists, find ways to connect your answers to fellow panelists' work to draw them into the conversation. If possible, follow up with the people who ask you questions after the talk to continue the conversation.

➡ I find it helpful to include a running footer at the bottom of each PowerPoint slide with my name and contact/social media information. People may come into sessions late, so if they miss your introduction, they can still know who you are.

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## Final Tips



*Andy Owens*

- ▣ Don't try to overcommit yourself (we can't do everything and that's 100% fine).

*Kyra Hunting*

- ▣ Make some time in your schedule to go to things you're interested in that aren't "in your area" and to browse the book room. I think serendipity is one of the key things that you can get from conferences.

*Pete Kunze*

- ▣ While it's OK to talk with editors informally, set up a meeting to do a formal pitch. Many recommend waiting until you have a solid draft of your dissertation before shopping around, although occasionally, editors reach out earlier than that because your presentation title aligns with their current acquisition interests.

*Joseph Roskos*

- ▣ Take a moment to explore, check out one of the local food places, and consider what song you'll sing for #scmskaraoke

*Sara Bakerman*

- ▣ Save time to hit the exhibit hall on the last day for discounts, display copies, and the occasional freebie

*Colin Tait*

- ▣ Send follow up emails to let people know that you enjoyed meeting them.

*Emily Contois*

➡ Don't be a missed connection: If there was someone you wish you had met or spoken to at the conference, but somehow didn't, it's not too late! In the days immediately following the conference, reach out to those folks. Tell them how much you enjoyed their presentation, loved their book, or regretted that you weren't able to meet in person. See if there might be opportunities for you to meet on their home turf or on yours if they're traveling near you for another conference or event.

*Maggie Hennefeld*

➡ My best advice is to dive in and soak up as much as possible!! very much looking forward to this festive gathering of critical thought. It's truly been too long.

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Want even more info?

For links to in-depth articles on all of these topics  
compiled by SCMS, head [here](#).

Also check out [Emily Contois' annotated list of 24 tips](#)  
“for ensuring the most satisfying, productive, and engaging conference experience  
no matter what conference you're attending” (posted in 2014)

And Loleen Berdahl's *Academia Made Easier* post on  
[How to network at academic conferences](#)

And Brian Moritz's *Sports Media Guy* post on  
[Academic Conference Survival Tips](#)

And Jenn McClellan's *Publish Not Perish* post on  
[An Introvert's Guide to Conference Networking](#)

Email SCMS Secretary [Christine Becker](#)  
if you have more tips to add to this doc.