2-18-2020

Presenting At Conferences

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Presenting at conferences is a rewarding and sometimes nerve-wracking opportunity. Listing your conference presentations is often an important part of our resumes and CVs. There are many ways to present at conferences from participating in roundtables, speaking as a panelist, or as a virtual speaker, participating in a lightning round, Pecha-Kucha, or poster session, and more. The NMRT December discussion focused on presenting at conferences and all that goes into it.

Regardless of how you feel about public speaking, presenting at library conferences whether it is on the local, state, or national level is a great experience for any librarian.

Some questions that came up this month included:

- How do you determine a topic to present on?
- Do you feel you need to be an expert on a topic to present or can you present on something that interests you?

Topics

Many of us found that having a topic you feel confident in or that you are excited about makes the presentation experience fun and enjoyable. You do not always need to present by yourself.

If you can, find others who are also interested in the same topics. This gives you an opportunity to find co-presenters to collaborate with. If there is no one at your library that shares similar interests with you, you can join a committee, roundtable, or special interest group of those who share the same interests.

Think about the projects you have launched or participated on at work. One of our members noted that "when you try something out at work or have an interest in something library-related, you can turn it into a good presentation or poster." While you may not be an expert on the topic you could consider yourself an expert on a particular project or assignment you worked on.

Prep work

It is important to prepare your presentation ahead of time. From learning the ins-and-outs of your topic to building and designing your PowerPoint slides or poster (if applicable). Then practice and practice again. Try practicing with a timer to see if you need to cut anything out or add to the presentation. Multiple walk thoughts will boost your confidence and help you fine-tune the presentation so that it flows well and hits important points.

Do not fear technical difficulties but be prepared for them to come up. Everyone has to check their notes and everyone will have technical difficulties at some point - don't let this scare you. The best thing we can do is be as prepared as possible. One member shared a story about being prepared to present on venue equipment with a borrowed Mac adapter cord, but only after it was time to set up did they realize they didn't have the specific type of Mac adapter cord necessary. They strongly emphasized that you need to research the proper type of equipment

and adapters that the venue requires even if that means contacting the conference organizers to confirm.

Using Slides

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Throughout the discussion, it was echoed that when you present with a slide show it is wise to have your slideshow available in both a cloud-based slide deck (such as [Google Slides](#)) and a PowerPoint slide deck. Equipment issues may require you to access the cloud-based slide deck over wifi. Internet connection issues may require you to use the PowerPoint slide deck. Bring a printed copy of your slides or notes in the case that all technology fails. This ensures you will still have your content available to discuss with the audience.

Adaptability

Finally, be able to adapt to situations. When things go wrong, let your audience know what is happening. Our members have found audiences to be very forgiving when things go awry during presentations. Sometimes conference venues have poor wifi. Sometimes equipment is faulty or not compatible. Sometimes presentation blocks are scheduled one after another so that

you cannot get into a room ahead of time to set up. One of our members reassuringly noted that no one ever mentioned technical difficulties on a presentation evaluation form.

Further Interest:

The ALA Store has a related on-demand workshop: [“Face-to-Face Presentation Skills: How to Present Like a Lion (Even if You Feel Like a Lamb)”](#)

Lauren Puzier is the User Experience Librarian at the UAlbany Libraries. Her research interests include the incorporation of new and emerging technologies in higher education, user-centered and service design, and reference services. Previously, she was the Acting Head Librarian for the New York Library at Sotheby's Institute of Art.