10 Academic Conference Presentation Tips

1. Most important: Stick to the amount of time allotted for your presentation. To be safe, plan to leave an extra five minutes at the end. That way, if you accidentally take longer, you still won't have gone over time. And, if you don't, there will be more time for Q&A, which audiences love.

2. Practice your presentation, out loud, several times beforehand, in front of a real audience. Sometimes people talk very fast when they get nervous, so practice slowing your voice down and speaking clearly and confidently, especially.

3. Use multiple practice sessions to also become comfortable enough with your presentation that you don't have to solely read from your paper. Look up and make eye contact with audience members. Smile. Look around the room. Speak off the cuff (even if these moments are planned).

4. Keep in mind people will be listening to you, not reading your paper along with you, so keep your sentences short and easy to understand and include helpful signposts every so often.

5. As best you can, avoid fidgeting or fiddling (with the podium, your hair or hands, water, etc.).

6. Make sure you have a main point (like a thesis) and that it's obvious and that you return to it throughout the presentation.

7. Arrive early to your presentation and familiarize yourself with the location and equipment (especially any technology needed) ahead of time, so that you are comfortable with everything.

8. Be sure to thank the audience at the beginning or end of your presentation.

9. If you plan to use slides, be sure that you don't cram them full of text. White space or a simple image without any words can be very effective. Less is more.

10. Have fun! You are participating in a time-honored scholarly activity and you should be proud that your work was accepted to the conference. Try to enjoy yourself.

Some professional academic associations offer tips for conference presentations. Although each discipline will have its own conventions, these websites may still provide some useful tips for you:

- http://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2010/04/presentation.aspx

- https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2008/conference-rules-everything-you-need-to-know-about-presenting-a-scholarly-paper-in-public

And, finally, here are some presentation guides from other Undergraduate Research offices with tips:

- http://www.ugresearch.umd.edu/writingconferencepaper.php
- http://www.virginia.edu/cue/presentationtips.html