



The Space Within  
Management Erudition

# Conference Checklist

**A Guide for Those Organising  
&  
Those Running Conferences**

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## Purpose

This guide is intended as a working tool, to remind those organising or running conferences, seminars, workshops, of those things to be thought about and covered. It will serve as a planning tool and as a constant reminder as the conference is in progress. Not everything that will apply to your conference is necessarily here, but the items that are, will serve to remind you of those things peculiar to your event. You should not feel that you have to work through and make an entry on every item; be selective and **choose only those which are relevant**. Add any which are missing that you consider relevant.

## Use

In some cases, you may be able to complete entries in the accompanying **Conference Forms** [Contents - Items 1-18 inclusive] and be covered for your needs. In other cases, you may have to photocopy pages and make several similar entries - eg, when selecting a venue, you will be able to fill out the page for general requirements, but then you will have to complete a separate page of specific facilities for each prospective venue you visit. If your needs cover more than one room in the venue, then you will have to use copied pages for room requirements.

Some items have a couple of boxes next to them -   - the idea is to tick the first one in the planning stage if that item needs attention; you can then tick the second box when appropriate arrangements have been made. Planning dates, budget figures and timelines should be **entered in pencil** so that they can be changed readily according to circumstances. For some items, you will need to add a comment at the side - if there is insufficient space, just make a note to show that there is additional information elsewhere.

## Initial Advice

Keep written copies of all meetings and all decisions - don't throw anything away! After any meeting with venue management, send them a copy of what you think was discussed and agreed - ask them to confirm your findings.

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[Items 1-18 are in the accompanying file  
*Conference Forms*. Items 19 & 20 are below.]

## 19. Running the Event

Once you are up and running, everything slips into place - if you have been thorough in your planning! I cannot advise you on the daily spanners in the wheel; there will be some, but good organisation will take care of them easily.

### 19.1 Liaison

To maintain the smooth running, consider having only one person to liaise with the venue management over any changes to the advertised programme or numbers or requirements etc etc. That way, you will avoid conflicting advice. Make sure that your committee and your speakers know who that person is; also a good idea to ask registrants to speak to the liaison person if there are any suggestions or problems. In a large conference, there may be a need for several liaison officers - ensure everyone knows who they are and that no one crosses over lines of authority.

### 19.2 Registration & Admin Facilities

Make sure you have plenty of space for registration and provision for a smooth flow of traffic - first impressions are vital, so ensure you get off on the right note. Enough people if there are likely to be floods of arrivals? Ushers to show people where to go? Noticeboards with maps, programmes, personal messages, lists of participants? Separate desk to deal with any complaints or queries after registration? Don't skimp on the production of professional name tags [with your logo?] and/or satchels - name and date on the outside, containing pad, pen, conference and tourist info?

Speakers and delegates will need access to photocopiers, email, telephone, typing, preparation of overheads etc. If speakers want papers copying, collating and distributing - have a team on standby: you cannot do it all yourself. Perhaps a policy needs enunciating - eg, copies will be available at the end of the day, first thing next morning ... Try to get hold of copies well in advance of the start date - easier said than done!

### 19.3 Timetable

If there is only one speaker at a time and one room in use, then there is no problem. If there are several options at certain times, you need to ascertain at registration, or as soon as possible, how many will be attending what.

A flexible method where numbers are not known till the last moment is to name the locations on the programme - Section 5 suggests a map of the layout of the venue [eg, Room A is the Abel Smith Lecture Theatre] - and then *on the day put the room letters next to the paper's title*.

This ensures everyone knows where the rooms are as soon as they arrive, the rooms are consistently identified, and only the topics for each location will be notified at short notice. Prevents 2 people in a room for 200, and vice versa.

The following is a brief example.

Room A     Abel Smith Lecture Theatre  
 Room B     Mayne Hall  
 Room C     Staff Club

**Monday**

Opening session     9.00am - 10.15am     Room B  
 Morning Tea         10.15am - 10.45am     Room C

Optional Groups     10.45am - 11.45am

*Montessori Approach*     Room C

*Project Management*     Room A

*Profit from Waste*     Room B

Lunch                 12.00pm - 1.30pm     Room C

**19.4 Catering**

Make sure you and the registrants know what is being catered for and what is at their own expense. For example, the venue may provide continuous tea/coffee - but use throwaway containers: you don't want people complaining about the lack of cups and saucers. Similarly, it may be instant coffee rather than percolated; orange juice and iced water may not be provided as alternatives - an extra to be paid for by those who want it?

Meals may be priced as entities, or may be by individual item: make sure that people know that lunch includes iced water but not orange juice - unless they want to pay for it. All inclusive meals save problems - but make sure you know what you are getting when you are in the planning stage.

People will go away with a good feeling if the catering goes smoothly - they will forget about the stimulating content if they had a battle to get a lousy cup of coffee at morning break!

**19.5 Alcohol**

For estimating purposes, work out the number of people who will drink beer, wine, OJ, spirits etc [and the latter are usually worth excluding] and where you are the provider, the number of glasses per bottle, wine cask etc. Remember that people drink more in the first hour, and then slow down.

If you wish to be health conscious, note that each bottle or cask states [in Australia, at least] the number of standard drinks it contains - these are much smaller than people imagine! A bottle of wine containing 750 mls = 7.4 standard drinks. A stubby [small bottle of beer] of 375 mls contains 1.4 standard drinks!

The following spreadsheet can be used as a planner, both for the amount to be obtained, and for the cost thereof.

<u>Number attending</u>	<b>80</b>		<u>Length of function</u>	<b>2 hours</b>	
	<u>standard drinks</u>		<u>price</u>	<u>average consumption</u>	<u>bottles/casks</u>
	<u>perbottle/cask</u>			<u>standard drinks</u>	<u>required</u>
<u>Drinking wine</u>	<b>60</b>				
	bottles	6	\$10	5	50
	casks	25	\$12	5	12
<u>Drinking beer</u>	<b>20</b>				
	cans/stubbies	1	\$1	4	80
	large bottles	3	\$2.5	4	27
					\$500
					\$144
					\$80
					\$67

You can type this into a spreadsheet - the formulæ should be obvious. You can then vary numbers, amounts and costs to suit your local event and get an idea of the estimated cost - bulk beer and wine is cheaper than individual containers, even though bulk wine may not have the kudos of labelled bottles!

Check need for licence, no under age drinkers, provision of soft drinks and water, some form of food if it is a reception. What is your legal position if you provide the alcohol to someone who later has an accident? *Duty of care* requires that you take all reasonable precautions.

For cash bars, find out what the venue will be charging - there is nothing worse than moving from provided drinks to a cash bar where prices suddenly seem outrageous!

## 19.6 Stalls

Some events have stalls to sell T-shirts, caps, books, conference papers, books, professional products etc, or to provide demonstrations of relevant work or computer programs. If you are going to run them, you will need a team - work out when and where, how many tables & chairs, who will staff what, overnight security .... If outsiders are going to participate - will you charge them a fee, a commission? Will they provide their own tables etc?

## 19.7 Social Events

Leave enough opportunity during the day for people to chat, but remember that the evenings can be lonely for those away from home. An opening reception [cocktail party or BBQ] and a conference dinner make up two nights; other nights can be on site or around your city - the latter take more organisation and cost more. Consider drinkers and non-drinkers: a cruise up the river can be pretty tedious for some!

Formal or informal - everyone goes and the evening is planned - or there are alternatives provided for registrants to follow their own paths? An on site cash bar is always good value - people can drink what they choose and make conversation with no requirement to dress up or stay longer than they wish.

Visitors to the city, and accompanying partners, may wish to see the sights. Do you provide a separate programme for partners during the day or leave them to their own devices : which is more courteous and deserving of kudos? The more formal your organisation, the more you need to know before people arrive and the more you need to

get money in advance. Put some effort into your initial planning - incorporate the options in your brochure - and ask for at least a deposit [refundable?]

**The registration form, for all details, should match your computer layout so that data entry is made easy as is the production of a variety of lists.**

## 20. Validation

Once the dust has settled and everyone has gone away, make a list of all the headings and subheadings you have used in your planning; go through them one by one and write comments about their comparative success, need for elaboration or amendment.

Even if you think this is the only conference you will ever organise, who knows? And your skill can always be passed on to the next organiser!

For my own part, I am always interested in your views as to the adequacy or otherwise of these notes and forms. I can be contacted at:

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