Once you have submitted an abstract to a conference (See “How to Find and Respond to CFPs” and “How to Write and Submit an Abstract”), received word that your abstract was accepted, sent a short bio and mentioned any audio/visual needs or special requests to your panel moderator (See “Conference Etiquette”), and written or revised a 7-10 pg. conference paper based on your abstract, you are ready to present at a conference!

However, when you enter the room with your paper and PowerPoint, see the 3-4 empty chairs at a table with 3-4 water glasses and a sea of expectant, watching eyes out in the audience, your courage may fail you, especially if you didn’t rehearse or time your paper and slides. Prevent this by working on your presentation well before the conference.

**Tips for delivering a great conference presentation:**

1. **Read your paper through and time yourself before arriving at the conference.**
   Ensure that you do not go over your allotted 15-20 minutes or end up with a 10-minute presentation by cutting out too much.

2. **Deliver your paper and presentation to a group of friends prior to the conference and get constructive feedback and advice from them.** Did your presentation lag? Were some of your points repetitive? Could they hear you distinctly? Did you trip over certain words (personal names foreign to you, accidental consonance or tricky tongue-twisters, etc.)? If so, alter or practice these passages.

3. **Use PowerPoint slides creatively and carefully.** They can often distract from your own words if they are lengthy or if your audience is straining to read large quotes or engrossed by a colorful picture. In the words of LUC professor emeritus Frank Fennell (Dept. of English), “only use PowerPoint slides to show information that you could not easily explain otherwise.” Information to present on PowerPoint slides may include graphs, charts, images such as historical paintings or letters, photographs of famous individuals, and quotes from different works that strongly resemble each other (compare and contrast) or are crucial to your argument (proof).

4. **Avoid overwhelming your audience with PowerPoint slides.** How many slides you have will depend, of course, on your paper’s subject. Usually, one slide per page is considered an appropriate number. This gives the audience time to thoroughly engage with and understand the slide (and therefore, an important point of your argument) before you move on.

5. **Try to have a physical essay or talking points with you on notecards while you present.** Even if you are using a PowerPoint, or reading your essay from a tablet or iPad, remember that electronics often prove unreliable at conferences. In case the worst should happen, try to bring backups on USB drives. While some people choose to talk from notecards instead of a paper when doing a PowerPoint presentation, you should only do so if you are a good, experienced public speaker and thoroughly understand your research subject. Frequently, speakers without papers to read from will panic and start to ramble incomprehensibly or vaguely about the subject, or will get sidetracked by an interesting
part of their research, stay on that aspect for too long, and ultimately run out of time before getting to the conclusion. *Writing and printing an essay is usually the safest bet.*

6. **Dress appropriately in professional business attire that isn’t distracting.** Being disheveled, having hair falling over your eyes, wearing garishly bright colors, large jewelry, and neon ties, or inappropriate, informal clothes, will make sure you are remembered for the wrong reasons.

7. **Stand up straight, smile, and don’t hunch over your paper or shield your face from the audience with it.** Good posture exudes confidence, bad posture makes you seem nervous and unsure about your research and presentation.

8. **Greet your audience.** A brief “thank you” to conference organizers and to your panel moderator for chairing often wins the audience’s good will at your friendly politeness and self-possession even before you have begun describing your research.

9. **Look up at your audience from time to time and interject some brief humor into your presentation, if appropriate.** These are actual people listening to your work, so look around at a few facial expressions and ensure that everyone is following your argument.

10. **Speak clearly so that everyone can hear your words.** Don’t shout or whisper, but speak in a tone suitable for the room’s acoustics. If you are speaking in a small room to a group of 5-10 people, a typical panel audience size for large conferences like NeMLA that boast multiple concurrent sessions, you should speak in a moderate tone, especially if you have a microphone. In a larger room with 25-100 people, you would be expected to speak louder, even with a working microphone, so that your voice carries.

11. **Don’t deviate from your presentation plan in the heat of the moment.** If you break away from the paper and explain a PowerPoint slide to your audience at some length, you _need to have factored that minute or two into your presentation time._

12. **Remember that the Q&A session following the delivery of your panel’s research is still part of your presentation.** As mentioned in “Conference Etiquette,” this is the time when you can touch on other aspects of your research that you didn’t get to explore in your paper due to time constraints. Make sure that you listen to and satisfactorily answer the questions you receive. Don’t elbow in on other panelists’ questions, wait your turn, and be polite and friendly at all times, even if a member of the audience disagrees with you. If a question-and-answer become too lengthy, threatening to take up all the Q&A time, tell the audience member you would be interested in discussing the matter with them after the panel is over.

*Congratulations, you’ve successfully given an excellent paper presentation!*