

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR PRESENTING A CONFERENCE PAPER

Michael McAleer

University of Western Australia

Les Oxley

University of Canterbury

The Ten Commandments

Most academics have attended one or more conferences during their careers, and will also have presented research papers at such conferences. What Commandments does one need to know about presenting a conference paper? As in the case of other sets of Commandments, many, if not most, are self-evident. For those academics not aware of such requirements, as well as for early career researchers planning to present conference papers for the first time, we have taken the liberty of establishing the following Ten Commandments for Presenting a Conference Paper.

Commandment 1: Meet the submission deadline

Submitting your paper and/or abstract before the deadline will satisfy the necessary but not sufficient condition for having your submission accepted for presentation at the conference. Do not treat this requirement lightly, as even established researchers and hardened conference delegates have been known to ignore submission deadlines, with obvious consequences. [Some conference chairpersons and convenors are notoriously unsympathetic toward late submissions, even in the event of earthquakes (see McAleer and McKenzie, 1996). This is a true story!]

Commandment 2: Turn up at the right conference

Although it might sound obvious, this is easier said than done, especially if there is little or no information sent to delegates by the conference 'organisers', or possibly if you do not speak the local language. Alternatively, if there are several conferences being held at the same venue, make sure you follow the right directions at the conference site.

The 1997 Far Eastern Meeting of the Econometric Society, a conference that was splendidly organised by the Chinese University of Hong Kong in July 1997, had one day at the newly-opened Convention Centre on Hong Kong Island. As there were several conferences being held simultaneously in the huge Convention Centre, it was surprisingly easy to end up in the wrong part of the building, and hence at the wrong conference. Quite by accident, one of us ended up at an Erotic Manga Comics Convention, which was being held on a different floor in the same building.

Commandment 3: Turn up at the right room

Many conference organisers seem to do their best to lose conference delegates after they have paid their registration fees. Typographical errors can and do creep into conference programs, so you are advised to check your paper session early and with care. It is not uncommon to have paper presenters appearing at a session after it has commenced, especially on the first morning of a conference. This is not always appreciated by the Chairperson, the other presenters in the session, and/or the members of the audience.

Some conference sessions have been known to have only the Chairperson, the paper presenters, and the official discussants (as appropriate) in attendance. Under such circumstances, failing to turn up at the right room might not be a good idea. This outcome is a regular event at a particular conference that is held in the middle of a North American summer at one of many magnificent tourist destinations. Even a relatively small conference site can have more than one conference being held simultaneously, such as the 1997 Australasian Meeting of the Econometric Society (see McAleer *et al.*, 1998), with the attendant confusion as to which rooms belonged to which conference.

Commandment 4: Distribute copies of your paper

One might well ask how much effort it could possibly take to bring along some copies of a paper, or at least some graphs and figures, for distribution at a conference. This would be especially so if the presentation were not high-tech and/or if conference proceedings were not available. Giving a website address for your paper might be useful after the conference, but it certainly does not make it any easier to follow the paper presentation. Surprisingly, there are many presenters who seem to treat the captive audience as if they have nothing better to do than sit through an awful presentation. Such presenters would be mistaken. Respect your audience.

Commandment 5: Think about your OHP transparencies

Do not *ever* say: 'I am sure those in the last row cannot read these transparencies without opera glasses'. [It is true, they can't!] Bear in mind that not everyone is sitting in the front row of a huge auditorium. Even those in the first row can have

severe difficulties in deciphering OHP transparencies with microscopic print (see McAleer and McKenzie, 1996). Think about what you are doing.

Commandment 6: Pay the registration fee

To state the obvious, a conference delegate is obligated to pay the registration fee, either before or during the conference. This Commandment holds especially true if you have attended the conference, that is, the academic sessions or the conference dinner, or both. Some people have no shame. There is an international blacklist of delinquents who have defaulted on their registration fees. This is not the sort of reputation anyone wants to have.

There are others who, having paid their registration fee, do not attend the conference, and then request a refund. Asking for a refund after a conference has ended is not reasonable. Behave yourself.

Commandment 7: Avoid the morning session after the conference dinner

This Commandment might be rephrased more colloquially as: 'Avoid the morning after the night before'. Sometimes the scheduling of the academic sessions is beyond your control, such as when it is determined by the conference program committee. Regardless of how the program is decided, make sure you are not presenting a paper in the first morning session after the conference dinner.

This Commandment does not necessarily apply if you missed the conference dinner.

Commandment 8: Prepare your presentation before the session

This Commandment might seem far too obvious to be taken seriously, but it does not always happen. Some boring speakers have long been known to put those in the audience to sleep. One of us was in a session at a conference in San Francisco on 4 July 1981 [this is as much information as we can safely divulge] when the speaker, seated and reading directly from his paper, fell asleep and started snoring. We are not making this up! After a few minutes, it became obvious that this was not the intended performance. Respect your audience.

Commandment 9: Allow questions from the audience

If time permits, be prepared for some interesting questions from members of the audience. Even if this means not using the allotted time for your presentation, leaving some time for questions from the audience could be a good investment.

Commandment 10: Enjoy yourself

A conference is supposed to be an exciting learning experience, even for the most jaded of academics. Try to have fun.

Epilogue

As virtually all of the Ten Commandments for Organising a Conference (McAleer, 1997) and the Ten Commandments for Attending a Conference (McAleer and Oxley, 2001) are routinely ignored by conference organisers and delegates alike, we would not be surprised to find a similar response to these Ten Commandments for Presenting a Conference Paper. The choice is yours, but it would be a good idea to think of the audience while you are preparing your conference presentation.

Acknowledgements

The first author wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Australian Research Council and the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Osaka University.

Disclaimer

Names have been deleted to protect the guilty and to prevent lawsuits.

References

- McAleer, M. (1997) The Ten Commandments for Organizing a Conference, *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 11, 2, 231–33.
- McAleer, M. and McKenzie, C. (1996) The 7th World Congress of the Econometric Society: Tokyo, Japan, 1995, *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 10, 1, 105–14.
- McAleer, M., McKenzie, C. and Oxley, L. (1998) The Winter of Our Content: The Econometric Society Australasian Meeting, 1997, Melbourne, Australia, *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 12, 1, 111–24.
- McAleer, M. and Oxley, L. (2001) The Ten Commandments for Attending a Conference, to appear in *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 15, 671–78.