

Linguistics Association of Great Britain
Student Committee



How to organize a conference?

Step by step guidelines

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1. Introduction

Through these guidelines an attempt will be put forward to provide a detailed description of all the steps followed for the organization of a conference. It is vital that those who wish to organize such an event are aware of the differences between a conference, a seminar and a workshop. A conference is a “prearranged meeting for consultation or exchange of information or discussion, a discussion among participants who have an agreed topic” (Princeton University, 2006), whereas a seminar is “any meeting for an exchange of ideas [... which] is offered for a small group of advanced students” (Princeton University, 2006). A workshop is something that could either be part of both a seminar and a conference or an event on its own which involves problem solving procedures and it is addressed to a small group (Princeton University, 2006). In this manual guidelines for conference organization will be provided which could be extended for either workshop or seminar organization.

1.1 Why organize a conference?

Before going through the first steps of conference organization it is essential to address the benefits of a conference. A conference since it is the broadest of the three kinds of meetings (seminar, workshop, and conference) can provide among others the opportunity to:

- meet students, researchers, professors etc. from other linguistics departments of your own or other countries
- become aware of other cultures and ideas related to linguistics
- familiarize yourself with other research work, projects etc.
- promote your association, university / department within the field
- attract new and active students in your association, university / department
- build connections and create a network of co-workers and institutions
- travel and get to know the hosting country (geographically, culture, religion etc.)
- promote your own research and get feedback

When organizing a conference apart from the above you can:

- gain and train management skills
- train interpersonal skills
- learn how things are behind the scenes
- become an active member of the linguistic community

1.2 The idea

At the beginning the idea of organizing a conference without any specific details is usually generated by one person. If you are that person, you need to spread your idea within your department and see who is willing to help. Once you have a team with at least two-three members you can start preparing.

2. Pre-Preparation

A group of two- three persons will not be enough for the organization of a conference, hence; you will need to recruit more students in your group. Take into account that if your department has not been informed about your intentions of having a conference you should inform the department about your ideas and goals and have their approval before inviting more people to help.

2.1 Call for volunteers

Usually postgraduate student conference organizing committees are created by postgraduate students who volunteer to help and thus are small in number. If you have a small team (2-3 persons) you will need to “call for volunteers” so as to expand your team. A “call for volunteers” should outline the purpose of the team -which can now be called a committee- and provide a general description of what the new members will do¹. Make sure that you provide a ‘response deadline’ for those who would like to volunteer and before admitting anyone in the committee it is advised that you make an interview.

2.2 The interview

Allocate a time and place for the interview. Before having the interview make sure you have a list of all the questions you and your colleagues would like to ask as well as what it is that you are looking for from the new members. What you are looking for should be determined by the list of duties in the sections 3 and 4 below. The most important restriction for a person to become a member of the committee should be to be available during the conference preparation period.

Have in mind that a conference organizing team will surely need among others a:

- head of the conference/team who will be responsible for keeping the agenda and organizing all other members. The “Head” position could be field either by an individual or a team
- head of finances; the person who will know exactly how much money you have and what you spent the rest of the money on
- head of the programme; to know what the program would be like, getting in touch with lectures, students etc.
- head of accommodation; the person who will organize all the accommodation facilities and offers provided for the conference, as well as inform the participants or attendees about all the tourist information needed
- head of technical support & webmaster: the person(s) who will know how to handle audio-visual equipment as well as support the organization and maintenance of the webpage

¹ Samples of calls can be found through the list of links of conferences at section 5.1.

Therefore the students admitted in the committee should abide with the above requirements.

2.3 Specifying the nature of the conference:

Once having a team you need to specify the actual nature of the conference. Try to provide answers to the following questions in order to determine the nature of the conference.

- Who is the conference going to address?
- Who is most likely to attend it?
- Which area of linguistics will be covered?
- Will it have a specific theme within the area?
- Is it going to be a regional or European conference?
- Where will it be held?
- How long should it last?
- What is the scope of the conference?

In order to be able to answer these questions you should draw some information from previous postgraduate conferences. Learn as much as possible about other linguistic conferences, seminars and workshops, so as to be acquainted with many hints and procedures. You can follow the links on section 5.1 for more information.

3. Preparation / Timetable

When having a team and the approval of your department as well as being able to answer the questions above then you can continue with administering to each member of the committee what they are suppose to do. Firstly, you should plan the timetable for preparation, execution and follow-up. The timetable should be divided into three sections with respect to the remaining months until the conference is held. The first step should involve preparations made for the 5-6 months before the event, the second for the preparations made for the 3-4 months before the conference and lastly the 1-2 months before the conference.

3.1 First Step: 5-6 months before the event

When planning the timetable you should consider that you should provide at least 5-6 months for preparation. This is vital for both you as organizers and the presenters.

3.1.1 Secure a day

In order to be able to secure a day for the conference you should search at some linguistics pages and find all conferences held during the academic year you are interested in organizing your conference. Make sure that you choose a day that it is at least 5-6 months away and there is no other linguistic conference on that day in the same area as the one where you are thinking of having the conference.

3.1.2 Room bookings

Once you decide on the day you need to allocate room bookings (committee-style or lecture style). When making room bookings you should think about how many parallel or not sessions you are going to have. The more parallel sessions the more rooms you will need. Also consider the fact that depending on the length of the conference the attendance will vary. Therefore, you need more rooms that you may use at the end which are good sized rooms where your participants will not seem to be too few or too many. Also consider that the rooms you book have the appropriate requirements; for example audiovisual (AV) equipment. In a conference you always serve coffee and sometimes lunch or dinner depending on the nature of the conference. This is something that should also be considered since you need the lecture rooms to be close to a coffee room where the coffee will be served; either by a university catering or any other catering service which is approved.

3.1.3 Catering

If you are organizing the conference in your university then you should ask for the approved by the university catering services available in your area. That is, universities tend to have some approved services which can be given to students so as to follow among others safety regulations. Once having the list you can start contacting the catering services and choose the one which suites your requirements. Consider that when being

asked to give the catering service the program of the conference you should tell them to bring everything 10-15 minutes earlier so as to avoid any delays and be able to have a back up plan in case that something goes wrong; with respect to catering services.

3.1.4 Funding

In order to be able to pay for all your expenses you will need a sponsor. First you should address your department to see whether they could fund your conference. You could also apply to other organizations such as the LAGB; visit the LAGB student committee website for more information about funding.

3.1.5 Plenary Speakers

All postgraduate conferences tend to have two or three plenary speakers who are well established linguists from all over the world. As a conference organizer you should have decided whether the conference you are organizing will be of a specific subject or not. If the conference covers a specific area of linguistics then you should choose the leading linguists in that field and invite them to become the plenary speakers.

If though the conference you are organizing is a general postgraduate conference in linguistics without a focus on a specific area/field then you should be cautious when choosing who to invite as plenary speakers. In most cases the plenary speakers influence paper submission, since postgraduate students who are working on a particular area of linguistics will be more interested in attending your plenary speaker's presentation than others. Hence, if you would like to have a conference which covers different areas of linguistics, invite as plenary speakers professors who are working on dissimilar fields of linguistics.

3.1.6 Advertising the event

When confirming your plenary speakers then you can advertise the event. Initially the event should be advertised to your audience, depending on the nature of the conference; whether it is a regional, European, etc. If you are aiming at advertising the event around the United Kingdom then you could use the list of universities in section 5.2 below.

3.1.7 Call for abstracts

The 'call for abstracts'² should include information such as:

- time and place of the conference
- names of the plenary speakers
- which departments / associations support the event
- deadline for abstract submission
- description of the abstract format required; named, word count etc.

² You can find examples for call for abstracts through the links of the conferences mentioned in section 5.1 below

You should make sure that you have a reasonable deadline for abstract submission and that you sent at least three invitations to your prospective audience with a short interval in between. Be prepared when setting the deadline that you may have to extend the deadline, since for uncountable reasons you may not have enough abstracts to complete the slots you want.

3.1.8 Call for attendees

The ‘call for attendees’³ should be distributed once the deadline of the ‘call for abstracts’ has passed, so as to invite more students to attend and to remind them of the event. This should include:

- time and place of the conference
- names of the plenary speakers
- which departments / associations support the event
- any bursaries along with the specifications for each bursary
- deadline for registration
- the exact link of your webpage which they should visit in order to register.
- contact details in case of any further enquiries
- registration form

3.1.9 Registration form

The form should include among others:

- name and affiliation details
- information about registration packs/fees
- bursary information
- information regarding dietary requirements or any other individual needs
- a box to indicate whether they are presenting or just attending the conference
- information about accommodation packs

Advise all presenters to register, since information about dietary and accommodation requirements is not obtained through an abstract submission.

3.1.10 Webpage design⁴

You should try to either form a webpage through your department’s server or through one of your own; this depends on the status of your conference and whether it is approved by your department. The actual webpage should include:

- information about the nature of the event

³ You can find examples for call for abstracts through the links of the conferences mentioned in section 5 below.

⁴ Visit the links in section 5 for further details about webpage designing.

- information about the place and the surrounding area of where the event is taking place
- travel information, bus, trains, metro timetables etc
- hotel lists
- contact details of all committee members
- information about the committee members
- abstract guidelines
- fares for registration/ packs available for students
- ways of payment
- registration form
- previous events etc.

3.2 Second Step: 3-4 months before the event

3.2.1 Receiving the abstracts

Once receiving the abstracts you should make sure that they follow the format you requested. Those that abide to the guidelines can be categorized depending on their field.

3.2.2 Reviewing the abstracts

You should decide on whether you would like postgraduate students or teaching staff to review the abstracts submitted. Once you decide on this then you can distribute a call for reviewers.

- **Call for reviewers**

The ‘call for reviewers’ should include information about possible areas of linguistics which will be addressed by the abstracts as well as a deadline for notification of interest. This should also include a deadline for when the abstract reviewing is due. You should also include a note as to which area the volunteered reviewers would feel more positive to review. This, you should have in mind when distributing the abstracts received. When sending the abstracts to reviewers you should give the reviewers an anonymous copy of the abstract so as to avoid any biased answers. You should also provide the reviewers with reviewing guidelines, in order to obtain clear comments and avoid more subjective recommendations.

- **Acceptance/ Rejection of abstracts**

When receiving reviewers’ comments and their suggestion for accepting or declining the abstract you should inform the presenters. Before that you should try to crosscheck reviewers’ comments so as to make sure that you also agree with their comments. The abstracts that were rejected could be accepted as a poster presentation or nothing at all.

3.2.3 Conference programme

When creating the program there are several factors you should consider, such as:

- enough time for registration in the morning
- include a 15 minute slot in the first session for the opening of the conference which should be made by a member of your sponsoring organization and the chair of your committee
- adequate breaks between sessions
- coffee breaks should last for at least 30 minutes
- lunch breaks should last for at least 1 hour
- have extra time for poster presentations
- allow for a five minute break between presentations so that attendees can choose to leave or change the lecture room
- try to have presentations in each session and same lecture room that cover the same or similar area of linguistics. That is, have syntax presentations on one session and morphology on another
- have both the name of the presentation and the presenter on the program. You may also want to include affiliation details
- it is advised that if you are having the conference at your university try to use as first presentations those given by members of your department so as to avoid any delay problems from the very first session
- also try to have two-three last minute backup presentations (if you can) in case that there is a last minute cancellation

3.2.4 Advertising conference program

Once you have created the program you should send it to all departments and your audience. Use the list in section 5.2 if you want to advertise the event to all linguistic departments in the UK. When sending the program also include in the email a second/third call for attendees along with all information needed; do not forget the registration form.

3.3 Third Step: 2-1 month before the event

- Arrange facilities for collection and banking, cancellation and upload them on the webpage.
- Ask the presenters whether they would require any special equipment
- Book AV equipment etc., finalizing room allocation.
- Create an abstract booklet for both oral and poster presentation (or even workshops) and send it to the printing services.
- Create conference posters and use them to advertise your conference around your department and University.
- Try to collect all the flyers needed for the conference packs (see section 4.1 below).

4. Last Preparations

4.1 One week before the event

- Make the conference packs for the event. This should include the following:
 - abstract booklet
 - conference timetable
 - information about local events and the area, which you can get from the tourism office from your town/city
 - any advertising leaflets given by your department or any other funding body
 - taxi telephone numbers, Train, metro, bus timetables
 - name tacks (make sure that committee's name tacks differ in color or layout to the ones given to presenters and attendees)
 - food vouchers (if any)
 - area maps
 - delegate lists
 - feedback form
- Make preparations in case that the event has to be cancelled. That is, you may need to have a cancellation notice ready which you could distribute to everyone who was registered as well as to any mailing lists.
- Ask your plenary speakers, attendees and presenters whether they would require any extra help with their arrival at the place of the event.
- You should printout some extra taxi numbers and bus, train, metro timetables, area maps for the registration desk.
- Briefing session with helpers.
- Triple check room bookings, speakers, refreshment/catering arrangements, room layout and AV provision.

4.2 One day before the event:

- Make sure there are enough signs for speakers and attendees to find the room where the event will take place. If not create some yourself.
- Re-confirm: room bookings, catering.
- Arrange room layout for both poster and oral presentations.
- Make sure the whole committee is on call in case that something goes wrong.
- Confirm that the folders etc are ready.
- Confirm you have a printout of the lists of presenters and attendees.
- Confirm you have a list of any economic arrangements that need to be settled on the day.
- Have a list of all the telephone numbers for all possible services needed. That is, catering, safety services as well as hospital telephone numbers.
- Check that you have done the name tacks and food vouchers etc.

- Make sure you have a money box for the day of the event.
- Arrange which members of the committee are going to be at the registration desk, who is going to welcome guests and who is going to assist presenters test their presentation on your AV equipment.
- Make sure you have at least two extra laptops for the day of the event, in case that a computer or the AV equipment in any of the rooms is not working properly.
- Have an announcement advising attendees to enter/leave the lecture room if they are late by the emergency exits not the front doors so as not to interrupt the presenter.

4.3 On the day

- Arrive early
- Prepare the registration desk and make sure that everybody is on their position
- Check on room layout, provision for speakers (AV, water in the lecture rooms)
- Advise the presenters as soon as they register to check their presentation with the person who has been allocated for this job.
- Before the beginning of the first presentation thank everyone for coming and also make sure you acquaint them with safety and room evacuation procedures. When organizing a conference or any other event you are responsible for guiding people in case of an emergency event. Therefore, make sure that you have been informed about all the safety procedures and that at least one member of the committee knows first aid in case that you might need to act accordingly.

4.4 Afterwards

- Record who actually attends
- Thank you letters to speakers
- General report to all delegates
- Settle accounts
- Proceedings

5. Conferences and Universities

5.1 Conferences

There are some postgraduate conferences that have been funded by LAGB in previous years. Follow the links provided for further information:

1. Newcastle Postgraduate Conference in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics
<http://pglinguistics2006.ncl.ac.uk>

2. Language at the University of Essex (LangUE)
<http://www.essex.ac.uk/linguistics/pgr/langue/LangUE2008/home.shtm>

3. Oxford Linguistics Postgraduate Conference (LingO)
<http://www.ling-phil.ox.ac.uk/events/lingo/>

4. University of Cambridge Postgraduate Conference in Language (CamLing)
<http://www.srcf.ucam.org/camling/>

5. International Postgraduate Linguistics Conference
<http://personalpages.manchester.ac.uk/staff/Filippo.Nereo/>

6. Aston Corpus Symposium
<http://acorn.aston.ac.uk/symposium.html>

5.2 Universities

The list of universities below could prove beneficial in case that you would like to advertise your event to the United Kingdom.

° ~	·
University of Aberdeen, Centre for Linguistic Research	d.watt@abdn.ac.uk
Aston University, The Language Studies Unit	lsu@aston.ac.uk
University of Bradford, Languages and European Studies	P.E.Frost@bradford.ac.uk
University of Buckingham, Department of English	English@buckingham.ac.uk
University of Cambridge, Department of Linguistics and Research Centre for English and Applied Linguistics	ak302@cam.ac.uk AND sjr13@cam.ac.uk
University of Central England, School of English	Pat.Wheeler@uce.ac.uk

University of Central Lancashire, Department of Humanities	dwilliamson@uclan.ac.uk
City University, Department of Language and Communication Studies	J.Topping@city.ac.uk
University of Durham, Department of Linguistics	a.c.l.taylor@durham.ac.uk
University of East Anglia, School of Languages, Linguistics and Translation Studies	sally.martin@uea.ac.uk
University of Dundee, Department of Psychology	l.mcdonald@dundee.ac.uk
University of Edinburgh, Linguistics and English Language	office@ling.ed.ac.uk
University of Exeter, School of Modern Languages	sml-pga@ex.ac.uk
University of Glasgow, Department of English Language	A.Bennett@englang.arts.gla.ac.uk
University of Gloucestershire, School of Humanities	researchadmin@glos.ac.uk
University of Greenwich, Languages and International Studies	s.m.healy@gre.ac.uk
Heriot-Watt University, Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies	enquiries@sml.hw.ac.uk
Hertfordshire University	m.groefsma@herts.ac.uk
University of Hull	R.Muroni@hull.ac.uk
University of Keele	e.gardiner@keele.ac.uk
University of Lancaster, Department of Linguistics and English Language	e.heeron@lancaster.ac.uk
University of Leeds, Department of Linguistics and Phonetics	C.J.Buxton@leeds.ac.uk
University of Leicester, School of Education	soad@le.ac.uk
University of Liverpool, School of Psychology	ledmonds@liverpool.ac.uk
King's College, London, Department of Philosophy	bridget.barlow@kcl.ac.uk
Birkbeck College, Applied Linguistics	s.williams@bbk.ac.uk
Queen Mary, London, Department of Linguistics	s.j.bernor@qmul.ac.uk
SOAS, Department of Linguistics	as4@soas.ac.uk
UCL, Department of Phonetics and Linguistics	molly@phon.ucl.ac.uk
University of London Institute of Education, Department of culture language and communication	b.peries@ioe.ac.uk a.pran@ioe.ac.uk
London Metropolitan University, Centre for research in language and culture	t.pooley@londonmet.ac.uk

London South Bank University, Faculty of arts and human sciences	ridgesm@lsbu.ac.uk
University of Luton, Division of Language and Communication	ed.hounslow@luton.ac.uk
University of Manchester, School of languages, linguistics and cultures	rachel.m.corbishley@manchester.ac.uk
Middlesex University, School of Arts	f.dominiguez@mdx.ac.uk
Newcastle University, School of Education, communication and languages sciences	i.buchstaller@ncl.ac.uk melanie.birch@ncl.ac.uk
University of Northumbria [Newcastle], English language centre, School of Arts and Social Sciences	az.ecl-office@northumbria.ac.uk
Nottingham University, Faculty of Arts	modern-languages-enquiries@nottingham.ac.uk
Nottingham Trent University, Modern Languages and European Studies	ema.lockton@ntu.ac.uk
The open University [Milton Keynes], centre for language and communications	c.l.johns-mackenzie@open.ac.uk
Oxford University, Department of linguistics, philology and Phonetics	enquiries@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk kate.dobson@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk
Oxford Brookes University, Westminster Institute of Education	cdouglas@brookes.ac.uk
University of Portsmouth, Faculty of humanities and Social Sciences, School of Languages and area studies	janet.blaikie@port.ac.uk
Queen's University Belfast, School of Languages, Literatures and (performing) arts	modern.languages@qub.ac.uk
Reading University, School of Languages and European studies	a.p.tonkyn@reading.ac.uk
Roehampton University [London SW15], School of Arts	s.madden-grey@roehampton.ac.uk
St.Andrews University, School of Modern languages	bf@st-and.ac.uk
University of Salford, School of languages	d.blakemore@salford.ac.uk
The University of Sheffield, School of Modern languages and linguistics	d.g.shepherd@sheffield.ac.uk
Sheffield Hallam University	b.macmahon@shu.ac.uk
University of Southampton, Division of Modern Languages	smlinfo@soton.ac.uk
Stirling University, Faculty of Arts, Department of English Studies	English@stir.ac.uk
The university of Strathclyde [Glasgow], Faculty of Law, arts and social sciences	b.dallat@mis.strath.ac.uk n.fabb@strath.ac.uk
University of Surrey -School of arts, communication and humanities -Surrey Morphology Group	linguistics@surrey.ac.uk

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University of Sussex[Brighton], Dept of Linguistics and English language	sarahc@sussex.ac.uk
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University of Wales Lambeter, Department of Welsh	thorne@lamp.ac.uk
University of Wales, Swansea, school of European languages	sel-pg@swansea.ac.uk
University of Warwick, The centre for English language teacher education	h.j.nesi@warwick.ac.uk
University of the West of England [Bristol], Faculty of Humanities, languages and social sciences, school of languages, linguistics and area studies	kate.beeching@uwe.ac.uk carmen.arnaiz@uwe.ac.uk
University of Westminster, Division of English and linguistics	bakerp@wmin.ac.uk
University of Wolverhampton, School of humanities, languages and social sciences, division of applied social studies and languages	hlssenquiries@wlw.ac.uk
University of York, Department of language and linguistic science	jmb22@york.ac.uk
University of Essex, Department of language and linguistics	wendym@essex.ac.uk

Email all (for easy copying and pasting, preferably to the BCC field):

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hlssenquiries@wlv.ac.uk; jmb22@york.ac.uk ; wendym@essex.ac.uk

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Modern Language Association (MLA):*WordNet® 3.0*. Princeton University. 26 Oct. 2008. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/workshop>>.

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