

Networking and Conferences

Networking

(Based on a previous workshop developed with Elise Woordard)

In philosophy, it is important to build positive working relationships.

- Wider and better sources of feedback on your work
- Friends and emotional support related to academia
- People to bounce ideas off of, to discuss material with, to get advice from...
- New opportunities - e.g. conference and edited volume invitations
- Feeling more comfortable in philosophy spaces
- Think broadly & about the value of varied relationships
 - General point about mentorship: different people serve different needs
 - Don't undervalue (academic) relationships with other grad students

How to get to positive working relationships? Networking.

- Networking includes many different kinds of activities and goals! I think about it as *connecting on a social/professional level with new people so as to build positive working relationships*.
 - Establishing connections + Maintaining and deepening connections
 - Superficial connections (people know who you are, hopefully have a moderately positive impression) to deep connections (you swap work and read stuff together regularly; you mentor and cheer on for one another; you co-author/organize together; you are personal friends)
- Networking ≠ brownnosing
 - The goal is not to talk to the most famous person in the room for 5 min.
 - Rather, the goal is to cultivate relationships that will help you produce good work in the long-run (and help others do so) and have fulfilling academic relationships.
- Networking ≠ one-off. Rather, it is about cultivating and maintaining positive working relationships.
 - Try to keep in touch with people that you meet whose work you admire and/or people with whom you enjoy talking philosophy

Concrete tips for networking in the real world:

- Go to conferences, workshops, & department events
 - Attend seminars, events, & conferences at other departments!

- It's easy to attend local/regional conferences even if you aren't presenting!
- Set yourself goals: asking a question; talking to x new people at a reception; briefly talking to the speaker afterwards...
 - Build up to more ambitious goals (e.g. from talking to a grad student at a different department to talking to a faculty member in your field)
- Ask others to wingman you; tag along a better-networked person.
- Ask for introductions from faculty and older grad students (both in person and over email).
- Hang out at the social part of conferences and other events—at least sometimes, for some amount of time.
- Identify people you really want to talk to in advance (e.g. you loved one of their papers, they work on a topic very close to yours...) and plan to (a) go to their talk, and (b) talk to them in person.
 - Some conferences have many talks happening at the same time— it's worth carefully looking through the program and deciding which talks you want to attend (perhaps by doing some research on presenters).

Concrete tips for networking online:

- Optionally: have a Facebook and Twitter presence; add people on Facebook after you meet them (avoid 'Out of sight, out of mind'). Write about presentations, publications, etc. on Facebook and Twitter.
 - Keep it professional/relatively conservative.
- Have a website and PhilPeople profile.
- Email follow-up questions after talks (when you have them)
- Reach out to new people over email!
 - Dear X, I read your paper and really enjoyed it! I like your work because...[add material on how it connects to your own interests; advertise yourself a little bit]. I had some questions about your work: [add some moderately interesting questions]. I would love to Zoom about this if you have time!
 - NB: keep this to cases where you are actually interested in their work, and it overlaps with yours.
- *You can also apply these tips for ***maintaining*** relationships* — e.g. engaging on social media; sending follow-up emails after talks or reading a paper; suggest getting coffee at conferences, etc.

Concrete tips for expanding your “feedback” network:

- Cultivate working relationships (see above!)
- Do “feedback” swaps with friends (or organized departmentally)
- Mention your work to people - they might ask to read it.
- Send people your work (perhaps after cultivating some working relationship)
 - In the email, you might explain/remind them of why you value their feedback/why they're a good person to comment

- It can be helpful to ask comments on a specific part of the paper, esp. If there's a part that engages with the person's work. (You can frame as a "check" for the exposition.)
- YMMV, but you can also *first* send comments/questions to the person on one of their papers - they might feel more obligated then to comment on yours (either immediately or down the line).
- Facebook groups (e.g. Board Certified Epistemologists / Bored, Certified Ethicists) can be very useful for soliciting feedback (and also references/suggestions!). They also allow you to advertise your work.
- Discussion of how to get "well-known" people to comment on your work here: <https://philosopherscocoon.typepad.com/blog/2021/07/getting-well-known-people-to-read-drafts.html>
- Make sure that you have at least 1 person to whom you can send *multiple* drafts of the same project
- It's valuable to be able to get different types of feedback: presentational and/or writing style; philosophical; counterexample machine, etc.

Common difficulties

Difficulty 1: people don't want me to approach them.

With a lot of this, you might be thinking "easier said than done!". It can be scary to talk with new people; a lot of us struggle with social anxiety to some extent or other.

The upside of that is: other people are also struggling with the same things. *You are doing them a generous favor by talking with them.*

If you don't feel as comfortable networking IRL, the internet is great. You can also find a buddy at a conference (perhaps another graduate student) and approach people together. Challenge yourself, but also find what strategy works best for you!

When things go well, make a note of it! This can help be motivating for continuing to engage in these practices in the future.

Difficulty 2: I won't impress people enough.

People are usually not looking to be impressed. They are looking for others to make them feel good about themselves.

Approaching people with attempts at devastating objections etc. is not typically the way to go; approach them with a spirit of interest and curiosity in their work and in them. Ask questions, offer (sincere) compliments, etc. Shift from focusing on how you come across to focusing on how they feel in the interaction.

(The original Carnegie book writes, "You can make more friends in 2 months by becoming interested in other people, than you can in 2 years by trying to get other people interested in you." IMPORTANTLY: this show of interest must be *sincere*!)

Difficulty 3: I'll waste their time and they will be annoyed at me.

Sure, hogging people's time with pestering questions, or sending them whole papers and expecting them to read them with great interest, is likely to be annoying.

But you don't have to do these things! Again, begin by focusing on what they are interested in. Do not expect them to read your work immediately (leave that for later). Be mindful of their time and don't try to get all their attention all the time.

Bottom line: train yourself to think:

- Faculty are people too, with all the same insecurities and desires.
- You are cool and fun and interesting!

Activities:

1. Identify 3 philosophers you would like to get to know (these could be grad students, junior people, senior people). Identify potential opportunities for meeting them. Make a plan to reach out to at least one of them (e.g. get a mentor to connect you; commit to emailing them after a talk you are attending soon; plan to email them about a published paper).
2. Set up a goal for one way in which you will change how you act at conferences so as to meet more people.
3. Identify 3 reasons why other philosophers should want to talk with you. (These could be related to your personality, distinctive perspective, or to your work, or anything!)
4. What is one difficulty you foresee in networking, and how might you address it?
5. Identify two people whose work you engage with and whose feedback would be valuable. Make a plan for asking them for feedback (might be long-term, e.g. establishing a working relationship first!).

Presenting at conferences

Key points

- Focus on the key point you want to make, and make it well.
 - Do not get lost in the technical details of your view; people will not remember them or follow them particularly well.
- Think about the audience, and what they can get out of your talk; give them goodies.
 - Assume: smart, engaged people who have not read the literature you have read and don't have a settled position on the debate.
 - Focus: get them excited to talk about the topic. As opposed to: *defending* your view. Not so different from good teaching!
 - Goodies for the audience:

- An explanation of why the problem you are thinking about matters, and why it does not have a trivial answer
 - A well-crafted summary of key positions in the literature
 - Some ideas that they can object to/provocative points to think through
 - Interesting examples, a joke here and there.
- Do NOT read your talk.
- Have a visual aid (slides and/or handout).
 - Pro handout: nice for the audience to have key claims written out to refer to in Q&A!
 - Pro slides: often more fun/engaging.
 - Do not include too much text on slides!
- Within these constraints: be yourself! People are different and have different talk styles. Think of the most engaging persona you can cultivate and get comfortable with it.
 - High energy, flamboyant, a little bit of pop culture
 - Argumentative and slightly apocalyptic or grand
 - Humanistic, old-school, a little vulnerable
 - Very neat, organized, standard analytic philosophy format...
- Stay within the allotted time (can go a couple of minutes over, but no more).

Finding Conferences

- Check Upcoming Events and Deadlines at [PhilEvents](#)
 - Graduate student conferences are a lower-stakes way to practice your presentation skills and build community with other grad students.
 - In our region: annual Berkeley-Stanford-Davis Graduate Conference in Philosophy
 - Note: small, specialist conferences vs. big, generalist conferences.
- Sign up for [Philos-L](#) for events in Europe (I recommend not using your regular email address; you'll get swamped with emails)
- Check out this very handy [document](#) for recurring conference deadlines (created by [Alex Dietz](#))

Before

- Prep handout/slides - set a nice chunk of time aside for this.
- Some people write out a script. (Though you still should not read from it!)
- Rehearse (ideally a couple of times; you *will* find things you want to change, typos, etc.).
 - You need to do this to ensure you've timed the talk correctly.
 - Can help to memorize the first couple of sentences you want to say.
 - **Advice:** set up a practice round with your peers in the department (on Zoom or in person)

- Pick an outfit (slightly formal; I do what you always see me with in the department), print, gather your relevant computer passwords or laptop equipment.
- Show up with enough time to set up any equipment.
- Find strategies to handle nerves:
 - Breathing exercises
 - Sleeping enough the night before
 - Ask friends to show up for you
 - Positive self-talk/reframe anxiety as excitement
 - Remind yourself that no one actually is paying that much attention/cares that much. Your task is to give them something they want to think about for a little bit.

During

- Make eye contact with audience members.
- Have a watch/timer to keep track.
 - If you're running over, you can skip an objections section or the like; think in advance of what you can cut if needed.
- Signpost (This is the core of my view) and repeat key points (as people get distracted)
- Include variation: some images, you moving around, breaks to sip water, shifts in tone...

After

- Think of the Q&A as a chance to do philosophy with your audience. A chance to think aloud with them.
- Take notes during the Q&A (take a notebook ideally)
- Restate people's questions in your own words back to them to start answering.
- Don't be defensive; be willing to change your mind, say that you need to consider their objection or alternative view more...
- People LOVE being right and being told they made a good point, pointed out something you had not noticed, etc. - they feel smart and helpful!
 - So: what you might think of as "failures" are actually often points that will make the audience like you more.
- Your answer should be addressed to everyone, give enough background that others can understand the dialectic.
- It's ok if you can't answer every objection! Say "that's a good objection, and I don't have an answer for it right now." Maybe use the "make things worse" trick—explain why you think the objection is an especially good and tough one (if that is true), and why a promising reply won't in the end answer the objection.
- Handling bad questions (clueless, off-topic, rambling, overly aggressive):
 - The audience knows that it's a bad question too!

- Find the closest reasonable question in the vicinity, restate it, answer that, move on.
 - If they are being really terrible, you can say “Thank you for your comment, I need to think more about that” and move on.
- Think about what worked after giving a talk: it is normal to make mistakes, and presenting becomes easier with practice.
 - Reflect on what works for you, and be easy on yourself :)

Activities:

Do you have any specific questions on a talk you are giving?

1. Write down two key things you learned about giving academic talks.
2. There are many ways to give effective talks. What sort of strategies do you think will work for you?

BONUS TEMPLATE FOR REACHING OUT OVER EMAIL

Dear Prof. X,

I have recently read your paper [**several of your papers; book**] on X, and [**insert compliment, e.g. I am very sympathetic to the account/project**]. I was wondering if you would be willing to talk over Zoom at some point about X and related issues? [**Or, I saw that you will be at conference Y and was wondering if you might have time to get coffee there?.**] There's a lot of overlap between your work and things I've been thinking about, and I would love to get your thoughts!

[**Short paragraph connecting to your own work.**] I would love to hear more about your recent thinking on this!

Below are some specific questions I'm interested in, but I'd be interested in chatting about X generally! (Feel free to skip/skim these.) Of course, I totally understand if you don't have time. Either way, I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,

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