



The WHA's Electronic Guide for Presenters

The digital world has brought with it a host of new ways for hotels to increase revenue, and furnishing equipment and Internet access have proven especially lucrative. A typical four-day conference, for example, can cost a small scholarly association many thousands of dollars. As a result, scholarly association budgets have been strained as more meeting participants take advantage of digital technology. While the WHA encourages presenters to ride the wired range, the association also needs to keep an eye on conference costs. The following are some guidelines for those who have embraced the digital world.

1. If your presentation is a simple PowerPoint or Keynote presentation, think about presenting your paper orally and using handouts. Put another way, if you wouldn't have used a carousel projector in times past, using a laptop and LCD projector is probably overkill for bullet points.
2. If you will be using images or digital movies and have settled on a presentation program, plan on putting your presentation on a laptop and bringing the laptop along. While popping a USB drive in your pocket in anticipation of having machine at the conference venue is attractive, renting laptops in most major cities is prohibitively expensive. You cannot depend on the arrangements committee to provide a laptop.
3. If you do not own a laptop, most universities have loaners that will work just fine. Be aware that using a loaner requires some forethought. Be sure that you reserve the laptop in plenty of time, pick up the laptop well in advance to troubleshoot problems (missing software, a popsicle stick in the USB port), round up any necessary cables and cords, and practice, practice. Alternately, a member of your session might have a laptop that all the presenters can use. In that event, USB drives are handy, but be aware that the cheapest drives, too, have limitations.
4. If you will be accessing the web as part of your presentation, make certain that wi-fi is available in the public rooms and meeting rooms at the conference facility and that your laptop has a wi-fi card installed, especially if it's a loaner. Test your loaner with a public wireless network.

5. You can expect a scholarly association to provide a screen, LCD projector, and extension cords. But you will need to know how to “cable up” your laptop to the projector, how to swap laptops, if necessary, and whether you will need an adapter. (Apple PowerBooks, for example, require a Mini-DVI adapter, so pack your saddle bags accordingly.) If the conference arrangements committee has contracted for tech support, the techie will undoubtedly be elsewhere at the moment of greatest panic. Some universities also have loaner mobile projectors available. This is the optimum solution. You will have both a laptop and projector with which you will be familiar.
6. If your presentation contains sound whether as movie soundtrack or other audio, be aware that most projectors’ sound output is fairly miserable. Bring along your own mobile speaker outfit. Again, most university AV facilities will loan these units, but owning a small, inexpensive speaker system is a good idea if you intend to include video and audio on a regular basis.
7. Once your presentation day arrives, try to be in the room at least twenty minutes ahead of time to get set up and do a quick test. Presenters who precede your group should have their equipment packed and ready to move out as soon as possible. Transitions can be difficult when presenters from one session want to speak with members of their audience while the next group wants to “cable up” and troubleshoot.
8. Murphy’s Law is always operative when it comes to computers and presentations. If something goes wrong and you can’t fix it within three minutes, move immediately to the presenter who is “good to go” and work on the problem unobtrusively. If the problem cannot be addressed, sometimes it’s best to say, “I’d hoped to be able to show you the visual part of my presentation, but that is not to be.” Take your handouts and paper from your bag and press on. No matter what, always have a backup, a version of your presentation that can be delivered without Internet access or computer assistance.

To be sure, there are projectors that accept USB devices, but they are relatively new and few and far between. There also are projectors that are iPod capable. And there is digital presentation nirvana: a dimension where a tech support team armed with switchers, relays, stereo speakers galore, and a screen as big as the Ritz take all your presentation worries away. There have been those who have seen the elephant.

The day is not too far off when we will be able to access our presentations from our servers on our home campus or, should Google realize its plans, present web-based presentations simply by logging onto a local wireless network. Conference hotels may also realize that installing projectors and so forth in meeting rooms is on a par with providing hairdryers in the rooms.