

Editor's LETTER

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Events to Remember

It's the summer conference season, and many of you have weeks filled with opportunities to chat about science and perhaps drink a few beers with your scientific colleagues. No plans yet? Well, check out the *ACS Chemical Biology (ACS CB)* Events page, where we list many conferences of interest to chemists, biologists, and physicists. We've updated the interface so that you can upload your scientific event for free, so take a moment to add your favorite conference to our list. We know that attending the right meetings is an important investment in your scientific career. A good meeting will bring you up to date in your field. If you decide to present your work, the feedback you receive on your presentation will enhance your research. Meetings are also great places to expand your network, which will help you establish scientific collaborations, find the next job, and the like. Participating in even a couple of meetings over the summer can be exhausting to the junior investigators, so here are some tips to get the most out of the experience and have some fun, too.

Pick a Nice Venue. If you are lucky enough to have a choice, pick a conference in a pleasant location. It's amazing how much science is discussed by attendees sitting by the lake, hiking a mountain, or walking the cliff side. A nice location generally puts attendees at ease, including the top scientists. Furthermore, it provides opportunities to network through a common nonscientific interest such as hiking.

Alas, selecting the right meeting to attend is trickier than just finding the right location. Large meetings provide opportunities to see a lot of different types of science and present your work to a bigger audience. However, they are less conducive to establishing close relationships with other researchers in your field. In contrast, conferences with fewer than 200 participants are ideal for networking and really getting to know people. If you are a junior scientist you may benefit from attending a small meeting first, before venturing to the larger conferences.

In addition to considering the size of the meetings, review the speaker list to evaluate what will be covered at that conference. Is your area represented at the meeting? Are the speakers scientists you wish to meet? Are there opportunities to present your work (either in a talk or poster)? Speaker lists are often updated after registration begins, so check the conference web site often to evaluate the appropriateness of the meeting. It's also beneficial to ask colleagues and collaborators their opinions of specific meetings; they can provide valuable insight on not only the science being presented but also the venue.

Find the Caffeine! Now that you are at the conference, it's time to focus on the task at hand: saturating yourself in your favorite scientific topic. Many of us need the morning jolt of caffeine to energize our brains, so find the local caffeine dispenser. Frequenting the café provides a great opportunity to network with equally groggy colleagues. It's also a great place to meet up with old friends attending the conference.

Be a Slacker. If you arrive the day before the meeting starts, take a few hours to review the abstract book and orient yourself to the venue. Plan to skip some of the program right from the start to get the most out of a weeklong conference, especially the larger ones (American Chemical Society, American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, etc.). Make a tentative schedule for yourself and arrange time to talk to others, relax, and digest the information. Poster sessions are great for absorbing the science at your own pace,

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so be sure to schedule a few into your time. Besides, the poster presenters will be overjoyed that someone stopped by to appreciate their work.

Prepare for Information Overload. If you are new to the conference circuit, pick a session to attend and stay for all the presentations. You never know what speakers will present, and sometimes they highlight a new finding that was not even mentioned in the abstract. Keep in mind that the presentations that are easier to digest may not be the most important. Some talks will be less interesting than others, but don't leave the session (unless of course the caffeine is having its diuretic effect). Deal with the less interesting presentations by treating them like background noise, rest your brain a bit, and then give your full attention to the next talk. Often speakers will refer back to previous talks and provide valuable insight on how their research links into other work, so sticking with a session can provide greater insight into a field of research.

Taking brief notes will help you distinguish what you understand from what you don't. If you have a question, write it down. It may get answered during the course of the talk, or you may wish to ask it during the Q&A. If you decide to forgo the Q&A, try to catch the speaker after the talk or during the break. Most speakers appreciate discussing their work when they are more relaxed. Regardless of whether you choose to ask your question or not, preparing questions will make you a more active listener, a very beneficial skill.

Find the Bar! The most important aspects of any meeting are the social events in the evening. Having dinner with colleagues, attending the reception by the waterfront, and going for a drink (alcoholic or otherwise) is essential for successful networking. It's often the case that conversations at the bar will summarize key sessions and begin to explore the limitations or inconsistencies between talks. If you skipped a session because it overlapped with another, you may be able to get the full story from colleagues who heard the talks. If you're lucky, you may also get a scientific history lesson from an established researcher who wishes to reminisce about the old days.

So what are you waiting for? Go to the *ACS CB* Events calendar and choose a conference. While you're at it, add a meeting to our list.

See you at the next conference,



Evelyn Jabri
Executive Editor