



TIPS FOR CONFERENCE BLOGGERS

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Blogging a conference is an intense and rewarding activity.
This document offers some basic tips on how to approach conference blogging.

TOOLS

Always start with the battery of your laptop fully charged, even if you're sitting next to a power plug. Remember that the laptop can get hot, so if you're holding it on your lap, put some padding under it (some experienced conference bloggers use a lapdesk – see laptopdesk.net). Sit down and get ready before the session starts, so you won't disturb other attendees with laptop unpacking. This will also allow you to check the WiFi connectivity before the speaker goes on stage. And keep a bottle of water handy – you will get thirsty.

LOCATION

Don't sit in the front rows (unless you're taking pictures of the speakers), because you distract people around you with your typing and those behind you with the light of your screen. Sit to the side or in the back, near the power plugs. Big events often have overflow rooms or media rooms where you can watch the speakers on simulcast TV and blog comfortably. Some conferences offer specific spaces for bloggers. If you're sitting in the main room, even in the back, minimize the disturbance for the people around you, and do let them know that you're blogging (so they won't think that you're just ignoring the speaker and doing e-mail).

PREPARATION

Conferences usually give out a program ahead of time. Use it to prepare for blogging:

Copy/paste or type the name of each speaker and the title of his or her talk into a text (Word) file.

Do a quick Google search for each speaker, and save (in the same text file) links to their sites, blogs, and the institutions they're affiliated with; write a one-or-two-sentences "biography" for each; and for the speakers you've never heard of, try to get a general sense of who they are and what they do.

To write the mini-biography, use also the speaker information distributed by the conference organizers (booklet, website, etc.).

For the key speakers, save a picture on your laptop (from their websites) and pre-format it for Web use, in case you will need it.

If you prepare sufficiently, you've got the first paragraph of each post almost written ahead of time.



SOFTWARE

You can choose to write your posts either directly in the blogging tool interface or in a text file:

- If you work directly in the blogging tool, you should remember to save the unfinished post as a draft (be careful not to publish it by mistake) a couple of times during the speech, just to avoid losing the whole text in case, say, Internet connectivity goes down or your browser quits unexpectedly.

- If you work in Word or other text editing software, you will have to add links, etc., later, when copying the text into the blogging interface.

SPEAKERS

It's relatively easy to blog good and great speakers: They follow a narrative path through their talks and speak at a pace the audience can understand. It's harder to blog inexperienced speakers (because they may be too technical, confusing, fast, etc.) and multi-speaker panels (because the discussion can take many different unstructured turns).

But you don't need to transcribe the whole talk, you need to capture the gist of it. A 20-minutes talk can often be summarized in a 20-lines post.

STYLE

Even on blogs, correct spelling and syntax are a requirement. But you're not writing a novel nor a magazine story, you're writing a summary, or a commented summary, of a speech.

Sometimes even just three key points will do, as long as they capture the relevant parts of the speech or of your analysis.



QUOTES

If you use quotation marks around something a speaker has said, make sure that you're getting the quote correctly. If it's interesting, it may be picked up by other bloggers, and you don't want to be the one starting a chain of misquoting a known speaker. Otherwise, use the indirect form: "The speaker said that she thought that..."

AUDIENCE

You're not blogging for the speaker, you're blogging for yourself and for the people who may read your blog. So if a talk is too hard, too bad, too uninteresting to blog, don't be afraid to give up on it. It's the speaker's fault if (s)he can't make the material interesting or intelligible. (This should never, however, be an excuse for laziness.)

CONTEXT

Always remember that what you're writing will be read by people who weren't in the room, so they haven't seen the slides, the video, or the gesture. Hence, you have to compensate for the lack of context. Don't be afraid to create a narrative by saying "He shows a slide with data on ..." or "She walks on stage carrying a big suitcase" or "He shows a YouTube video" etc. And if the speaker shows a YouTube video, or a picture, remember that you're online: Open another browser window, go to YouTube, find that video, and link to it; or go to the speaker's website, find that picture or another similar or related item, and link to it (or republish the picture within your post).

Yes, this requires effective multitasking. It's at the root of conference blogging.



LINKING

Link, within the post, all there is to link:

- speaker's personal homepage
- speaker's organization page (or a specific relevant section or document)
- speaker's blog (or a specific post within a blog)
- speaker's books (if mentioned in the post)
- videos the speaker may have shown that are available online
- past speeches by the same speaker
- other relevant posts and pictures from the conference (from you or from other bloggers attending)

TAGGING

Tag every post with all the relevant tags, starting with the conference name and its official tag (if there isn't one, agree on one with other attending bloggers, so you can find each other's posts easily), the name of the speaker, etc.

TIMING

Ideally, you should liveblog, which means that you write the post, and add the links, as the speaker is talking, and publish the post not later than 10 minutes after the speech or panel is over. Not everybody can do this; it takes a certain habit. Think of it this way: If you can publish right away, you will be able to network with the other conference participants during the breaks, rather than sitting at your laptop rewriting your notes.



MISTAKES

Acknowledge mistakes you may have made. If you have to correct something (because you misunderstood a speaker, for example) after you've published the post, don't use the delete button. Most blogging software has a "strike-through" option that allows you to cross out a word or a sentence, leaving it visible, so that readers know you've corrected it. It shows you're transparent. (This doesn't apply to typos – and don't worry too much if there is a typo in a post, as long as it's just one.) Sometimes your readers will be those pointing out your mistakes, by adding a comment to your post. In that case, acknowledge them when correcting ("thanks, Susan, for pointing this out").

COLLABORATION

If there are many bloggers covering a conference, do collaborate: you can divide up the speeches to write about; or one can blog mostly in pictures and another interview the speakers during breaks, etc. Cross-link to one another – it gives your reader the chance to see different perspectives on the event.

DIGESTION

If an idea sticks, and you have new thoughts on it hours (or days) after the original post, nothing should stop you from writing a new post elaborating on it. Just remember to always link back to the original one.

Never assume that readers have already read what you've written earlier.



**And don't forget to have fun!
Go to the conference's parties,
network with the other attendees,
etc.**



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