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# Tips for First Timers and New Attendees

Are you new to the annual meeting or seeing a program or session for the first time? Check out these tips to make the most of your first MLA meeting.

## Plan Your Time

* Have a plan: Access the MLA online meeting schedule and build your itinerary. Download the MLA ’18 meeting app and your itinerary to your mobile device. This is a good way to keep track of the papers, posters, and meetings you want to attend.
* Read ahead: Concurrent paper sessions and poster sessions are always very busy times during the meeting. To optimize your ability to see and hear the best of these presentations, read the paper and poster abstracts before the meeting (they’re on the app!). Mark the papers and posters of greatest interest to you, or reaffirm your pre-meeting selections through the online itinerary planner once you are onsite.
* Bring an ample supply of business cards: You can share these with colleagues and exhibitors to help you communicate again after the meeting.
* Schedule time to reflect: An MLA annual meeting can be VERY busy and can be a bit overwhelming. Sometimes you just have to go back to your room or find a calm oasis in the middle of the day to decompress or process.
* Review your schedule daily: Sit down with the meeting app each evening and review the following day’s schedule, especially the programs that interested you ahead of the meeting. Remember that you can move from one contributed paper session to the next, catching the first presentation in one, the second in another, and the third in another! You may not get a seat as you move from room to room, but if you can’t get into a session, you can use the time to visit the exhibits.
* Pace yourself! If you try to be everywhere in the first day or two, you will run out of energy (and interest) by the end of the meeting.

## Travel and Hotel

* Research your destination: There is probably something that interests you in the host city! Take advantage of being somewhere new and do something you might not have had a chance to do otherwise.
* What to wear?
  + Check the weather forecast for the meeting city a few days before you leave, then adjust your wardrobe plans. Layering is a sound strategy given the frigidity of some meeting rooms compared to the allure of outdoor activities on a nice day!
  + Participants seem to be dressing more casually in recent years for days on which they are not presenting papers or are otherwise a focus of the public eye.
* Hate to iron? Before placing meeting wear in your suitcase, encase each one (on its hanger) in a plastic dry cleaning bag. Your outfits will arrive wrinkle-free (we have tried this and it works). See more packing tips at [Fodors.com](https://www.fodors.com/news/11-tips-for-smarter-packing-1335).
* What can or can’t you bring in carry-ons or suitcases? Check the latest information from the [Transportation Security Administration](https://www.tsa.gov/travel) (TSA).
* Getting around: If you are not in the meeting hotel, map out the quickest route from your hotel to the meeting site as well as a more sheltered alternative in case of inclement weather, or consider how easily cabs may be available at certain times of day and in bad weather. Take advantage of the local bus and rail system. Instructions are available at the Hospitality Center.
* It doesn’t work: Don’t try to “make your own refrigerator” using ice and the hotel ice bucket. You’ll just end up with wet, room temperature food.
* Have plenty of small bills: it will make it much easier to deal with tips and paying your share of any group meals. If you will need receipts to document expenses, plan ahead and ask for these early rather than at the very end of the meal.
* What to tip? (see more at [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com/sites/garystoller/2018/01/19/to-tip-or-not-to-tip-or-how-much-to-tip-that-is-the-question/))
  + For bellhops and airport baggage handlers, $2 per bag; give more for great service or very heavy bags.
  + $2–$5 to doormen for hailing cabs (extra in bad weather) or helping with bags;
  + $3–$5 per night for housekeeping staff (extra for upscale hotels or if you left your room particularly messy)—and tip daily, not at the end of your stay, since employees change from one day to the next.
  + 15%–20% for taxi, Uber, or Lyft drivers; more if drivers help you with luggage and are great drivers!
* Enjoy the city! You will be busy with meeting activities, but take time to do something in the host city. Ahead of the meeting, watch for tours or library visits on the meeting website and blog. Visit the Hospitality Center onsite for good ideas from local MLA members. An extra day before or after the meeting, or even an afternoon or evening away from the meeting, can be a great experience.

## Exhibits

* Review the list of exhibitors before you arrive at the meeting and highlight the vendors you need to meet. This will help to use your exhibit time to your best advantage.
* Don’t miss the opening of the exhibits! First, it’s a great place to run into friends, colleagues, and vendors who you only see at the meeting. Second, you might avoid spending precious travel dollars on dinner since there are always “snacks” provided (head for the back of the exhibit hall to avoid lines at the food and beverage stations). Third, this is a great chance to cruise the exhibits, making mental notes of the vendors that you’ll want to visit in more depth later. This is also a good chance to talk one-on-one with that sales rep you’ve wanted to talk to.
* Bring plenty of business cards! Meet new people from near and far, zero in on issues of mutual interest, and swap email addresses and phone numbers. Address labels work well, too, and may be lighter weight to carry.
* Snack and learn: Some exhibitors provide breakfast snacks at Sunrise Seminar sessions (ideal for those on a low budget)—but more importantly, these sessions allow you to learn in-depth information and ask questions about products in a “non-sales” situation.

## Sessions, Programs, and Even Committee Meetings

* Is a session not what you expected? Don’t be surprised if the content of a presentation isn’t quite what you expected based on the title or abstract. These are usually prepared months before the actual presentation is prepared.
* Delight in the randomness! The presentations you may get the most from may not be the ones that you thought. Sometimes random, second-choice talks turn out to be the best ones!
* Multiple sessions: Every meeting attendee has different obligations and many places to be, so you will routinely see people moving in and out of program sessions. Speakers expect this and are not offended if you get up and leave.
* Sit in! Don’t hesitate to take full advantage of MLA’s open meeting policy that allows you to sit in on almost any committee session. You will learn more about how your association works, you can explore which committees might be potential places to volunteer your time, and meetings can set the stage for friendships that will span many years.
* For a “big picture” review try to catch the National Library of Medicine (NLM) Update. At this session, you’ll hear NLM leaders fill you in on everything new at NLM.
* See the plenary sessions: Attend as many of the keynote sessions as you can. These sessions are of general interest, usually about current trends. Don’t be afraid to sit near the front. Speakers are always more interesting when you are sitting up close!
* Start a conversation: Use topics that arise in plenary sessions and contributed papers to start dialogues with different folks, then see whether those conversations can lead to sustained contact after the meeting.
* Have a chance encounter with a colleague: Some of the most interesting new ideas and information that members gain at an MLA meeting have been learned during a chance encounter with a colleague in a hallway or a discussion that began at the end of a contributed paper session and was continued following that session.
* “Closed out” of a session due to a room being overfilled? Maybe you’ll end up in a discussion with a colleague who also did not make it into the session. Serendipitous encounters often are the most memorable parts of MLA’s meeting (and if you really want to hear the missed sessions, they will be available online and in the meeting app).
* Hunger+line=networking! If you find yourself in a waiting line or in front of a poster with other folks you don’t know, introduce yourself! You may have something in common (other than hunger) or share similar interests.
* Get involved! Join a section or special interest group (SIG) and go to the business meeting. This is a good way to get involved in MLA.
* Volunteer for a committee! Besides the obvious benefit of being more likely to receive funding from your institution to attend the meeting, serving on a committee involves you in association business and is a good way to meet people. Most committees look for new members to help support their work. Do a good job on a committee and others will notice you!
* Ask questions! There are all kinds of MLA terms and jargon that you will come across, such as “sections,” “chapters,” “councils,” and “SIGs.” Don’t be afraid to ask other MLA members about the MLA organization and to get their advice on which sessions you should attend. Or contact MLA staff at websupport@mail.mlahq.org. They’ll be happy to answer your questions about MLA organization.

## Social Events

* Attend social events! Librarians do know how to let their hair down, and you never know when you’ll make an amazing connection.
* Meet and greet: You can meet quite a few people at social events, such as the Welcome Reception, the New Member and First-Time Attendees Program and Breakfast, or the vendor-sponsored events. The social events are a great opportunity to meet other new members and veteran meeting attendees. They also give you an opportunity to network and meet people who share your interests or even broaden your knowledge of the profession.
* Start the ball rolling: If you don’t have dinner plans with colleagues for one of the MLA evenings, the Welcome Reception is the place to initiate that important networking option...while some explore the exhibit hall, others plant themselves in a central area (we recommend an area close to libations or appetizers) and wait for colleagues to pass. It’s amazing how many people you will see and have the chance to interact with. Don’t be shy about approaching someone and introducing yourself. The exhibitors are always engaging and knowledgeable and sometimes even entertaining!
* Go to lunch or dinner with new people: Opportunities abound (e.g., lunch during a continuing education course, dining options through the MLA Hospitality Center). Consider joining one of the Dine-Arounds hosted by the Hospitality Subcommittee to explore a new restaurant and meet new friends. At some meetings, a lunch area is available in the exhibit or registration area, and sitting down with someone you don’t know and striking up a conversation can be very rewarding.

## After MLA

* Follow up: Don’t be shy about following up after the meeting by contacting interesting people you have met—it’s a compliment to them, and MLA members are warmly welcoming to new folks.
* Renew your enthusiasm: MLA’s annual meeting has always been a way to meet new people, enjoy reunions with “old” friends and colleagues, keep up with what is happening in the profession, and learn about new ideas that can be adapted to your library. Each year, many members return home with renewed enthusiasm for their jobs and the profession.

## Have a Meeting Tip?

We would be delighted to include it! Send your MLA meeting tips, travel insights, or sage advice to Kate Corcoran, corcoran@mail.mlahq.org. Thanks to all the members who helped build this site over the years by contributing their favorite tips.