How to ask good questions and form effective response: Suggestions and best practices

Conferences are not designed for you to sit back and listen; at least the good ones aren’t!

Although we like to tout conference attendance as another line on your resume, it should not be just that. Rather each conference you attend is also a time to explore new avenues for inquiry, to network, to find new resources and even to gain some feedback on your work and ideas. The best way to engage at a conference is to ask questions and put your ideas and reflections out there. Asking questions and participating in discussion is a good way to get noticed and is, in fact, just as good for your career as putting that “I attended [fill in the blank] conference” on your resume, (if not better).

Suggestions for how to ask a good question:

1. A good question will promote and inspire discussion, rather than shut it down, of course forming these types of questions is not as easy as we think. To start with ask your self the following questions during the presentations:
   a. **What did you learn?** Did the speaker present new ideas or challenge your assumptions?
   b. **What does the presentation have to do with the larger theme of the day?** Most conferences will have a general theme. It helps to put presentations into larger frameworks, histories, and broader theories that set up comparative questions or questions about applicability.

2. Listen for both explicit and implicit questions that the presenters pose but do not answer.

3. Listen for keywords and:
   a. Ask for clarification?
   b. Ask for further examples of applicability?

4. Listen for connections across presentations. Panel discussions are a popular conference form that offers the opportunity for synthesis of ideas and knowledge. Ask a question directed at all panel members. This promotes intra-panel discussion and can often times promote some interesting disagreement and/or discussion.

5. Reflect on what YOU know. Bring your own work into the conversation if you find a connection.

6. For long presentations, you may need to recontextualize your question, especially if the questions stems from the beginning of the presentation.

7. **ALWAYS ACT PROFESSIONAL!** In addition, always ask your questions in a professional manner.

http://www.gwu.edu/~capstone/symposium/asking_questions.htm