

THAKUR COLLEGE OF SCIENCE & COMMERCE

Autonomous

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

CONFERENCE

Introduction:

A conference is a meeting for consultation, discussion, or an interchange of opinions or views. The word conference is derived from the Latin confer which means to consult together. As the definition suggests, a conference is the coming together of individuals who belong to a particular field. These individuals are invited to look at a particular matter in greater detail and communicate their view points and disseminate information among people belonging to that particular field.

Conferences could be held for a variety of reasons. They could be organized to raise general public awareness, or within the organization to study a particular problem, or to update the knowledge of the employees regarding the latest developments in the organization.

What is the difference between a conference and a meeting?

While a committee, as well as a conference, is a type of group communication, in a committee meeting the number of members is small, there is a well-defined agenda and decisions taken are legally binding on the organization. A committee meeting is therefore a very formal affair, as its members are appointed, or nominated, and the meeting is organized with a view to solving a pertinent problem, or to implement a decision.

A conference, on the other hand, is a relatively informal get-together of a larger group that meets in an informal manner; the decisions taken at a conference are of a consultative or advisory nature. Participants in a conference do not have any voting right. In a conference, a given problem/ subject is analysed from all angles in order to arrive at the best possible solution / option. These decisions are put forward in a recommendatory fashion.

For instance, a bank organising an in-house conference, before introducing the ATM facility to its customers, may invite general discussion on various aspects of the proposition, such as What is the profile of the customer? What would be their reaction to such a scheme? What kind of reception would this new facility receive? How should the bank break the news to its customers? What effort should it take to break their resistance? How should it address their security concerns? What should be the advertising strategy? It is only after a thorough study of all these aspects, and in the light of the recommendations received, that a policy decision on whether such a facility should be introduced, where it should be introduced first, what will be the task of the Public Relations Department etc, will be taken.

Organising a Conference:

I. A conference could be organized for in-house personnel or it could be for an external audience. It could be organized locally or at the state, national or international level.

For example:

1. All India Conference on the New Techniques in Dentistry.
2. International Conference on Feminism.

Organising a conference requires planning and effort. Generally, it is the task of the Public Relations Department to organize such an event.

- Preparation begins with deciding the subject or the area that the organization needs to explore.
- Depending upon the scope of the subject, a list of invitees and guest speakers is drawn up.
- The main subject could be divided into sub-topics and these could be discussed during several technical/plenary sessions.
- Depending upon the scope of the topic, the total period over which the conference would be held is decided. [It could be a One-day / Two-Day/Three Day conference.]
- Budget of the conference is worked out. At times, sponsors are contacted to raise the necessary funds for the conference.
- The date, time and venue of the conference are planned. Generally, the convenience of all those involved is taken into consideration.
- Programme for the conference is drawn up, after contacting the resource persons and ensuring their availability.
- Arrangements such as accommodation and transportation are made for out-station participants.
- Research papers / Extracts of papers from participants on the given topic are invited.
- A formal invitation outlining the details of the programme is printed A formal invite is sent to the invitees and the resource persons. Invitations, along with entry forms, are sent to participants who represent the organizations.
- PRD has to handle all the publicity for the event. This includes a formal intimation of the event to newspapers and news channels in order to organize press coverage of the conference.

On the day of the conference the following activities are undertaken by the host:

- A registration desk is arranged for the enrolment of the participants.
- They are provided with files containing the extracts of speeches / papers submitted by the guest speakers. Pens, badges etc are distributed along with the stationery.

Holding a Conference: A conference is inaugurated by the Chief Guest, who outlines the purpose, need and the possible outcomes of the conference. This speech is known as the Key-Note Address. This is followed by the Technical Sessions, in which the resource person gives his/her perspective/s and invites interaction from participants. Each session is officiated by a Chairperson who introduces the speakers, allocates time for their presentations, and sums up the key ideas at the end of the session. He/she also mediates between the speakers and participants during the interactive session. At every technical session there is a rapporteur, who records the proceedings as well as the outcome of the session. The Conference concludes with a formal valedictory function. The Chief Guest highlights the key ideas thrown up by the conference and comments on its overall success. All the participants are given certificates / souvenirs for participation, and these are presented by the Chief Guest. Organisers have to

make arrangements for certificates, souvenirs etc. Feedback from participants, including their suggestions are invited to bring about improvements, if any. Arrangements for food – breakfast, tea, lunch, snacks etc – are made by the host. Apart from these, arrangements for technological support such as mikes, LCD / and other visual aids are also made by the host. After the conference is over, a careful analysis of the feedback is made. Guest speakers are sent thank you letters along with copies of their photographs.

Outcome of a Conference: A well-organized conference gives a sense of satisfaction to the host as well as to the guests / participants / delegates. In a conference a given problem is looked at comprehensively. This creates understanding of the problem. Solutions are worked at. Interaction among the delegates helps in the broadening of understanding. Professional interaction helps in the strengthening of bonds, creation of network and fraternity feeling. Organising a conference is a major Public Relations exercise. It builds the image of the organization and earns the good will of the public. It also accords leadership position to organisations that host conferences on a regular basis. Nowadays many companies organize conferences as a business-cum- pleasure exercise. The purpose of such a conference is to hold the thought-generation exercise in a relaxed atmosphere. Such a conference is held off-site or off-locale, at a place where members can go sight-seeing or shopping. Pharma companies holding conferences for doctors in places like Singapore or Cape Town are examples of such conferences.

Example of a Schedule for a Conference: One Day State Level Conference on Searching New Directions in Education: Creating an Interface between Education and Industry.

11th August 2008 Venue: Hotel Ambassador Registration: 9:30a.m. to 10:30a.m.

1. Inaugural Session: 10:30a.m. To 11:15 a.m. Chief Guest: Dr. A. Ramaswami, Vice-Chancellor, Mumbai University Vote of Thanks: Mr. A. Jadhav, Principal, D.B.College

2. Technical Session: 11:20a.m. To 1:30 p.m. Chairperson: Mr. A.N. Sane, Industrialist.

Guest Speaker: Mrs. Nina Thaper, CEO, ICICI Bank.

Topic: Careers in Banking and Insurance Sector

Time: 11:30a.m. To 12:15p.m.

Guest Speaker: Dr. L. Fernandes, X.Y.College

Topic: Careers in Retail and Subsidiary Sectors

Time: 12:15p.m. to 1:15p.m.

(Interactive session: 1:15p.m. to 1:30p.m.

Vote of Thanks.

Lunch Break: 1:30p.m. To 2:30p.m.

Technical Session: 2:30p.m. to 4:30p.m. Chairperson: Dr. N.S.Mohanti, Director, IIT.

Guest Speaker: Mrs. S. Garg, Principal, Teachers 'Training College

Topic: Need for Teacher Training and Orientation.

Time: 2:30p.m. To 3:30p.m.

Guest Speaker: Mr. K. R. Sahu, CEO, Power Chain Stores

Topic: Logistics and Methodologies.

Time: 3:30p.m. To 4:30p.m.

Interactive session: 4:30p.m to 5.00p.m.

Vote of Thanks

Valedictory Function: Time: 5:00p.m .to 6:00p.m.

Chief Guest: Dr. A.P.Sarang, Pro-Vice-Chancellor,

Mumbai University

Distribution of certificates.

Vote of Thanks.

Other Forms of Group Communication

- **Seminar:** A seminar is a discussion by a group that gathers to analyse a research paper, or an advanced study, presented by a participant orally, or in a written manner. Presentation of material is followed by discussion of the report or material in greater detail. It is possible that at a seminar more than one paper or subject is presented.
- **Symposium:** This is a get-together of people at which people belonging to a specialized field make presentations to which the audience can respond. This is an interactive activity between general audience and experts from a specialized field.
- **Tele-Conference /on line conference:** Two or more persons conferring with the help of telephones at an appointed date and time is known as teleconferencing. Teleconferencing with the help of the internet is another way of conducting conferences or meetings. Yahoo, Skype are some of the popular networks that offer teleconferencing facilities. The advantage of this mode of communication is that participants can participate from their own geographical locations, at a commonly agreed time.
- **Video Conference:** Fibre Optic Network Connection in conjunction with Satellite makes it possible for persons to use web-cams and confer with one another at an appointed day and time. Since people can see each other this becomes a live, face to face communication. This mode of communication is used by business houses that have a global presence.