

It is always difficult to know what to say when writing about giving a conference paper, after all, everyone is different. Some people reading this will be able to write an abstract, give a paper and write it up afterwards without stopping to think about it. Others may have never presented before and are quite happy to share their knowledge in other ways. All I can do is tell you my experience and hope it might be vaguely interesting!

I gave my first full-length conference paper at the Cataloguing and Indexing Conference, held at Swansea in 2016. I emphasise the 'full-length' as in 2012 I presented a lightning talk of 10-15 minutes. Also, it was not the first time I had stood up in front of a CIG conference audience. Having been on the committee, I had chaired a couple of sessions at a conference and given the 'housekeeping' type notices at the start of the day. I will say though, that giving a conference paper was very different to anything I have done before and getting to that point took a little bit of work and preparation.

There had never been any big intention or burning desire to speak at the conference. With the 2016 paper and the lightning talk in 2012, it was more thinking that the work I had done might be interesting/useful to other people. Of course, there are always (hopefully) elements about our jobs that are interesting! After a training event where we were encouraged to be more vocal about sharing what we do, I started to wonder whether a small project I was undertaking on workflows and reducing unnecessary tasks might be something I could write/speak about. After all, I had written up and talked over quite a few reports for internal committees, so a lot of the work was already done and I was familiar with the language used to describe what was going on. I ran the idea past a librarian friend as I was aware that my solutions and work might be very standard practice to others and thus appear boring. They assured me that it would be interesting and another friend suggested writing for a publication such as *SCONUL Focus*. Looking over all the reports and data made me realise that whilst I had a lot of it written up, there was a lot that people external to my organisation would need to understand and trying to explain all the charts in written form would take up quite a chunk of any word count! Therefore, the only logical conclusion was I would have to present it.

By this point the 2016 CIG Conference was on the horizon and when the call for papers came out I submitted an abstract. I think I picked CIG as it was so familiar to me. Of course, all conferences should have supportive delegates and CIG is certainly not the only forum I could have presented it to. I think though that being on what felt like 'home turf' would help allay some of the fears I had about presenting.

When I sent off the abstract, the conference seemed a long way off and I thought I would 'get around' to writing the presentation at some point. However, as time grew closer and my inspiration for what to actually put on the slides seemed to fade, I began to panic that I would stand up with a totally blank screen. Even if I did have slides, I did not trust that I would be able to pull it all together and just present it without running it though – perhaps my amateur dramatics side kicking in, feeling I needed a 'dress rehearsal'.

To give myself both a deadline to work to and a chance to run it, I asked about 5 or 6 colleagues from work if I could present it to them. I picked people who I knew would be supportive but constructively critical, and mostly from different teams so the material would be relatively unfamiliar.

Trying to decide what to put on the slides was difficult – 40 minutes feels like *ages* but I did not want to talk for the full time, mostly to allow plenty time for questions. Of course there is the obligatory 'stuff about my institution' slide. I felt it was also important to introduce how we do things (relevant to the topic) as I know from previous discussions at conferences that the division of tasks in the ordering process differs from many university libraries.

I found a visual way to explain some parts of the process was best, with arrows going all over the place (and added to my point about it being confusing and inefficient!). I tried to keep text to the minimum, with enough to keep people on track, but not so much that I would have to give them lots of time to read it. With about 3 years of data, there were a lot of graphs I could have included but I chose ones that showed trends – especially those going over key points in the timeline where benefits could be seen. I was not afraid though to include graphs where things had not quite gone to plan. Putting them in gave me a chance to show how processes had to be refined further or where unintended events affected the results.

There was, when it came down to it, very little that I had to create from scratch. Most of the graphs existed in internal reports, as did many of the key figures. Most of my time was spent thinking about how much to explain to those people unfamiliar with either the team's work or the institution – this can come right down to what we call collections or teams (and what is unique or unusual about each).

I will admit that I was incredibly nervous when I came to talk to my colleagues. I thought it would be of little interest to them or I was going to be wasting everyone's time but it was honestly the best thing I could have done. I got great feedback that helped on practical things. One suggestion was to alter the layout of a couple of slides and another to change some of the colouring in the graphs. Also, when I did practices on my own, I did not have to be as clear in my explanations as my brain filled in the rest, but actually running it with others showed areas where I was not being clear or that needed a bit more detail. From an internal communication point of view, it had the additional benefit that we discussed how their teams could help this work too.

Finally it was conference time. I was presenting on the first day, but was presenting after a break so I had time to settle into the room a little first. Again the familiarity with CIG helped in that I knew the chair of the session, and even though I had a back-up USB I could trust that they would have the slides already loaded. I was also blessed to have a very supportive colleague with me who ran and got me a drink so I did not have to queue up in a different room instead of preparing. They also went and sat at the back of the room to make sure I could be heard and watched whilst I whizzed through the slides in the break to make sure they were legible on the very huge screen they had there (and I had time to change them if needed). Having people 'on your side' does help me a lot – when I had presented the 10-minute talk in 2012 I got a friend to sit in the audience and signal if I was speeding up too much (a fault I have when I get overexcited about what I'm talking about!).

I had not known that the presentation lectern was a bit fancier than what was used to and had the ability to show the speaker notes separately so I still had scribbled handwritten notes and I worried that the rustling would get picked up on the microphone. However, once I got started I realised I barely needed them. I knew the layout, I knew what the content of the slides and the work that lay behind it. That is not to say I wasn't nervous or shaking quite a bit inside though! Hopefully it was not evident to anyone watching and it sounds clichéd, but it really was over before I knew it. I had a few questions which were fine – enough to reassure me people were interested, but not the sort that meant it was not clear. I have even had people ask me questions via email after the event, so that has been a lovely bonus.

All in all, I am glad I did it. It was great to have a chance to pull together strands of a project that had spanned about 3 years and realise just how much work had been achieved. Presenting felt like a wonderful way to round it all up, something I had not realised I needed to do. Of course, as I said at the start, my experience is likely to be very different from yours, but if presenting at a conference is something that tempts you, then give it a go!