

CANADIAN DISABILITY STUDIES ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE D'ÉTUDES SUR LE HANDICAP

CDSA-ACÉH Congress Survival Guide

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With special thanks to ACCUTE for their helpful guides: [A Beginner's Guide to Attending ACCUTE](#) and [A Presenter's Guide to Best Practices at ACCUTE](#)

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CDSA-ACÉH Congress Survival Guide

A) Preparing for Congress

Schedule

Once you arrive at Congress the sheer number of events going on combined with the travel and change of scenery can feel overwhelming. You may find it helpful to draft a schedule for yourself ahead of Congress noting:

- Events you definitely want to attend each day
- Events you'd be interested in attending but would not regret if you missed them (e.g. sessions or keynotes at other associations' conferences)
- Social/local events organized by Congress that are of particular interest to you

You can find other associations' programs on the Congress website. The Congress website also includes a Calendar of Events that can be searched by day and other featured events and workshops (look under the "Program" tab). You'll be given a hardcopy of a Congress booklet with much of this information when you register at the conference in person, but it can be hard to skim and it's easy to miss something you would have loved to attend unless you know about it ahead of time.

Packing

General:

- Conference clothing – most academics like to wear business-casual clothing to conferences; however, this is not mandatory! Dress however you will feel most comfortable in an already potentially stressful setting.
- Comfortable clothing for the evenings and/or if you plan on doing athletic local activities (e.g. hiking, dancing)
- Comfortable shoes (you may be out and about around campus all day without returning to your accommodations until the evening)
- Umbrella
- Rain coat
- Bag large enough to carry what you want to bring to campus/conference sessions each day (this might include a notebook, laptop, tablet etc.)
- Water bottle
- Granola bars/small snacks (CDSA-ACÉH will provide snacks and coffee in the morning before sessions begin but these will run out later on)
- Various chargers (phone, laptop, tablet etc.)

- Personal toiletries (**try to pack unscented products** – some attendees have chemical sensitivities and are unable to share spaces when people have used perfumes, scented hand sanitizers etc.)
- Stim toys if desired
- Something to do in the evening that you find calming.
 - Conferences are often exhausting and it can be nice to have a low-key activity to do in the evening on your own that isn't related to academics. You might want to download your favourite shows or movies ahead of time and/or bring something fun to read, a journal, or a colouring book.

Academic things:

- USB with a copy of your presentation and/or slides on it
- Access copies of your paper in 12- and 16-point font already stapled (if need be)
- Notebook
- Pens (you'd be amazed at how hard these can be to find at a conference!)
- Printed copy of the conference schedule (it's always good to have a hard copy on hand). CDSA-ACÉH will have some copies available at their registration table as well.
- Business cards if you have them. (Note: most students do not have business cards. Please do not feel pressure to print business cards if you don't happen to have them already)

If you are staying in residence:

- Flip flops (for communal showers)
- Towel and face cloth (in case they aren't provided – however you can always call ahead and ask!)
- Hair dryer
- Ear plugs/noise cancelling headphones

Preparing Your Presentation

- Don't worry if your presentation topic has evolved since you wrote your abstract – this is expected.
- There are many different ways to deliver your presentation. Some people like to read a copy of their paper verbatim (i.e. word for word), while others like to use PowerPoint or Prezi slides or notes to present. Choose whatever feels best for you and appropriate for your presentation topic – there is no right or wrong way to present.
- Remember that a conference presentation is different from a class paper or other kinds of public speaking you might have done already. You only have a short amount of time to present your ideas to an audience. Think about what you want the audience to take away from your presentation as you prepare it; strong

presentations often leave audience members with a question to ponder or introduce them to a new way of looking at things. Remember you can't cover a whole research project in 15 minutes – and if you do, it often turns into a summary of your process rather than a presentation of ideas – so be judicious about how you choose to spend your time.

- You might want to consider adding personal notes to a copy of your presentation for yourself if you plan to read it verbatim, or including notes below PowerPoint slides if you plan on using those so you remember things you want to highlight or mention off-hand while presenting.
- **Time your presentation in advance!** You will not be given extra time to present if you exceed your allotted time (unless you have organized an accommodation with the association for this in advance).
- **Refer to the CDSA-ACÉH accessibility guidelines** to maximize the accessibility of your presentation.
- **Some accessibility guidelines highlights include:**
 - Providing access copies of your presentation in 12- and 16- point font
 - Orally describing any visual contents of your presentation (pictures, slides, diagrams etc.)
 - Orally indicating when you are reading a quotation (“open quote” “end quote”)
 - Using trigger warnings where appropriate
 - Ensuring videos have closed captioning
 - Additional resources: Congress Accessible Presentation Guidelines

B) Presenting at Congress

What To Expect

- Remember conferences are places where we present works in progress. Association and audience members want to support and encourage you!
- **Each presenter in your session will be given 15-20 minutes to share their presentation.** As they near the end of their allotted time (typically 15 minutes), the moderator for your session will hold up signs indicating they have 5 minutes left, 1 minute left, and when they have no time left and need to wrap up immediately.
- **Your moderator is an experienced individual who is not presenting on your panel but instead is in charge of helping to ensure it runs smoothly.** They will do their best to ensure your session begins and ends on time, and will help direct the flow of audience questions and comments.
- Typically, after all presenters have given their presentations, either the moderator will make some general comments about them or the “floor” will be opened directly for audience questions and comments. **Audience members may direct**

a comment or question to a particular presenter or they may ask all presenters in a session to respond if they feel comfortable.

- Sometimes more experienced audience members will recommend readings or related topics to presenters that they think you might want to explore. They might also think aloud and bring up rhetorical questions (tangentially) related to your topic.
- Don't worry if you don't have an answer to a question or if you haven't read what they recommend. Conferences are largely about getting feedback from peers and are intended to help support students in progressing with their work (not to quiz them about what they know or have read).

Every session is unique – each will have different numbers of audience members; involve different levels of audience interaction; and have a different feeling. Sometimes the papers presented will blend well together and at other times they will challenge each other or simply be on unrelated topics. Sometimes a presenter or moderator won't show up, requiring a bit of improvisation. Keep in mind that all of these variables are unpredictable – whatever happens during your session is not a reflection of you or your presentation.

Tips for Presenters

- **Rehearse your presentation in advance** with slides and other aids if you plan on using them to ensure it can be delivered in full within the 15 minutes allotted to you (unless you have been given more time as an accommodation). With a busy conference program, sessions cannot afford to run late; if you do not finish your presentation during your allotted time, you will be asked to end it wherever you are in order to allow other presenters their time to present.
- **If you plan on making use of the audio/visual (a/v) equipment provided, ensure you bring your laptop and charger, any adaptors/dongles you need, and a backup USB with your presentation on it with you to your session.** Test the a/v equipment in your room to make sure it is compatible with your electronics before your session begins (you might consider testing it during a break between sessions). Ensure your equipment is properly set-up and ready to go before your session begins as well.
- **Arrive a few minutes early** to your scheduled session – leave more time if you have slides you need to upload/project. Introduce yourself to the moderator and other presenters if possible before the session begins.
- **Always use the microphone** when giving your presentation and answering questions. It is beneficial to all, and you should always assume that there are people in the room who need you to use it.
- **Provide access copies of your presentation in 12- and 16-point font** – you may want to print these ahead of time at home and bring them to Congress, or you can try to find a printer on campus - though this can be harder than you might expect. Access copies may be verbatim copies of your presentation;

copies of your slides; or a basic outline of your presentation that will help audience members follow along. You may ask that access copies be returned to you at the end of your session if you do not want people to leave with them.

C) Attending Congress

When You Arrive

- **Make your way to the Registration Table at the “Congress Hub”** to pick up your registration package including your nametag, President’s Reception ticket, and Congress booklet. Depending on what time you go, there may be a long line, so consider bringing a book or something to do in line (without seating provided) while you wait.
- During conference sessions, you can always find a volunteer at the CDSA-ACÉH Registration Table, located in whatever building the CDSA-ACÉH conference is taking place in, who can help direct you.
- The host university will have volunteers wearing the same coloured t-shirts scattered around campus in pairs or under small tents or umbrellas. Don’t hesitate to approach them for directions or advice – they are there for you! It’s always nice to thank them for volunteering in general as well.

Tips for Pacing Yourself

- Make sure you eat enough and stay well hydrated.
- Leave yourself some downtime each day.
- You **DO NOT** have to attend every session (the only session you have to show up to is your own if you are presenting).
 - The number of sessions you attend is entirely up to you (and no one will be keeping track of your choices).
- Prioritize your health and well-being as best you can.
- **Don’t be afraid to take an afternoon or a day off from the conference!** It is exhausting trying to follow and absorb information all day long in sessions and to be constantly prepared to socialize or network.
 - You can explore the city where the conference is taking place; have a picnic; or check out the local university’s bookstore, the Congress Expo, or some of the social and arts events organized by Congress. Or you can always go back to your accommodations and take a (probably much needed) nap. This is your Congress – how you want to spend it and make the most of it is up to you!
- Try not to be too hard on yourself if you aren’t able to make it to as many sessions or events as you hoped to.

Attendee Etiquette

- **Always use a microphone when posing a question during a session.**
- Keep your questions and comments relatively short if posed during a session, panel, or keynote – there is limited time allotted for questions and comments and likely others will want to ask questions then as well.
- While it is at times inevitable, try not to leave a session early. If you are arriving to a session late, if possible, try to wait until the person currently presenting has finished before you enter the room to minimize interruption.
- Be mindful and respectful of others and their comfort and needs.
- **The quiet room is a space reserved for silence.** If you would like to converse with someone, please do so outside of this room.
- **Feel free to live tweet conference sessions so long as you credit the presenter you are referencing in each tweet.** You can also check out other Congress Twitter conversations by searching for the year's hashtags, like #cdsaYEAR or #Congressh.
- **Wear your nametag!** It'll help people recognize you, start conversations with you, and remind you of who they are as well (if they are wearing theirs).

Networking

Networking is optional!

You might have heard that conferences provide a good opportunity for networking. Networking refers to the chance to meet and make connections with others in your field and/or who share your interests. These are people you can contact in the future who may be able to offer you resources like reading suggestions, research help, advice, mentorship, or jobs. They can also introduce you to others who can offer the same if they cannot.

Don't be surprised if you are approached by others after your presentation, or if academics you already know (like your professors) introduce you to others they think you might want to connect with. Depending on your level of comfort, you can chat with them on the spot and/or exchange e-mail addresses to establish that you are open to connecting with them in some capacity later on.

Networking is often difficult and feels somewhat uncomfortable for everyone involved – neurotypicals included! – so do not feel badly if you don't feel like you are doing the networking you expected to once at Congress.

If you are so inclined, here are some suggestions for ways to network:

- Feel free to approach and introduce yourself to scholars whose work you admire!
- Ask a presenter questions about their presentation/work after a session is over, or if you see them at another event.

- Let someone know if you're interested in communicating further about their work and ask if you can exchange contact information (e-mails).
- Attend informal social events and introduce yourself to those you recognize from your conference (or wait to be introduced by others).
- You can always introduce yourself with a standard script that looks something like this: "Hi. My name is X. I'm a student at Y and I really enjoyed your presentation/appreciate reading your work/am looking forward to hearing your talk/share your research interests/am looking at applying to the department you teach in/have been accepted to the graduate program in your department..."
 - The person you approach will then be aware of your interest and will let you know if they are open to engaging in conversation or if they have to take care of their own needs/schedule. Academics often have busy personal agendas when they attend conferences so do not feel discouraged if they do not stay to talk – you've established your interest and a connection and that's a start!
- Please be mindful of your own comfort and others'. **Some conferences use a coloured sticker system to indicate interest in socializing and networking.** A green sticker indicates someone is open socializing, yellow indicates they are *sometimes* open to it, and red indicates you should not approach them for informal socializing.

Morning Coffee/Networking, Lunch, And Breaks

- Coffee and light snacks (such as muffins or fruit) are available during the morning coffee/networking slots in the program. Any leftovers will be left out for attendees arriving later until these are finished.
- Morning "networking" tends to be quieter than other opportunities to network at the conference as it's early and people are still waking up and getting ready for the day.
- Lunches are typically not provided EXCEPT for those who attend the Annual General Meeting. Plan to bring your own lunches to campus or to buy food during breaks.
- Breaks in between other sessions are 15 minutes long. There's usually just enough time to get to a restroom, quickly compare notes with others coming out of different sessions, or decide where you're going next, but be mindful of how quickly this time goes by.

D) Congress events

Congress runs its own programming each day and evening, including lectures, debates, concerts, arts performances, tours, and more. These events are typically open to the public but can be easy to miss if you don't plan to attend one in advance since many run simultaneously.

President's Reception

The President's Reception is a busy social event that typically also offers the best quality free (finger) food of the conference. However, since multiple associations are invited to the President's Reception it can be quite crowded and sometimes difficult to find members from CDSA-ACÉH once there (although if you walk over together after the last session of the day you're less likely to get lost). Behind your official Congress name tag is a ticket that entitles you to one free alcoholic or non-alcoholic beverage; however please note that you can only attend your association's President's Reception so your ticket is only good for one night. You can also use others' tickets if they choose not to. There are no structured social activities at this event; instead it involves a lot of mingling and sometimes background music as well.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

An Annual General Meeting is open to ALL of an association's members – students included! CDSA-ACÉH typically provides a free lunch for those who attend the AGM.

- At the AGM, the current CDSA-ACÉH President will provide a summary of activities that took place during the previous year, and the current treasurer will present a budget summary of the previous fiscal year.
- These are followed by open discussion that sometimes takes place in smaller groups who are given targeted questions to consider (e.g. how to make the CDSA-ACÉH conference and board more accessible and inclusive; what to prioritize in next year's budget etc.). **While participation in these discussions is voluntary, it is strongly encouraged and provides a rare opportunity for members to give the board feedback directly and to voice their ideas and concerns.**
- **The next year's Executive Board will also get elected at the AGM.** While it's recommended you let a current board member know about your interest in a position in advance, it is not required and members are welcome to self-nominate for open positions at the AGM. **A new Student Representative gets elected every year.** Other Executive Board positions are listed on the CDSA-ACÉH website.

Keynotes

CDSA-ACÉH typically hosts both a national and international keynote presenter.

Keynote speakers are chosen for their accomplishments, innovation, experience, research, activism, and more.

- The international keynote provides an opportunity to hear directly from a leading scholar who is unlikely to be present at other Canadian conferences.
- There are no other CDSA-ACÉH sessions scheduled at the same time as CDSA-ACÉH keynotes.

- Keynotes are typically presented with CART, or live-captioning, and sometimes with ASL as well. However please note that the provision of access copies is uncommon for these presentations.
- Keynotes are scheduled in larger conference rooms as they tend to attract bigger audiences. They are sometimes co-hosted with other associations, meaning other associations' conferences' members may attend as well.

Other Associations' Conferences

You are welcome to attend sessions at other conferences!

- You can find other association's programs by clicking on different associations' names under the "Program" tab on the Congress website. Unless space is limited, which is rare, you do not need to ask permission to do so; just show up as you would to your own conference session.
- Oftentimes other conferences will have thematic sessions that overlap with your areas of research/interest, like disability, but will approach them from a different disciplinary angle. You may find new or unexpected areas of interest by attending other associations' conferences.
- Other associations' conferences CDSA-ACÉH members have presented at in the past include: the Canadian Sociology Association (CSA); Women's and Gender Studies et Recherches Féministes (WGSRF); Canadian Philosophical Association (CPA); Society for Socialists Studies (SSS); Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE); Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) and Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education (CSSHE).

Congress Expo

The Congress Expo features a large number of publishers selling academic books situated in the social sciences and humanities, as well as some fiction and non-traditional academic work and/or merchandise. The Expo can be fun to browse for a break from sessions, and is often the only location where you can find free "swag" like pens, pins, and stickers at Congress.