

First Time Attendees MLA 2019 Annual Conference

Tips for making your MLA Annual Conference a success.

First Time at Annual Conference? Start Here!

The MLA Annual Conference is the perfect place to expand your skill set, learn best practice tips and tricks, make some new friends while catching up with old ones, and most importantly have some fun. As an MLA staff newbie, I am so excited to get to Novi, but I also know the hesitation and uncertainty that can arise for many first-time conference attendees.

We want everyone to have an amazing experience at **#mla19ac**, but that is particularly true for our first-time attendees, who comprise approximately 20% of our overall attendance. In order to help get the most out of your first MLA conference, I have created my top ten suggestion list. I hope it helps **#opendoors** to a fantastic time in Novi this October.

1. Make a few connections before you arrive

Building a network should be one of your primary goals as a first-time attendee, but walking into a session or reception can be daunting to tackle alone. Before you leave home ask around to see who might also be attending or visit the MLA [Facebook](#) page or [Twitter](#) feed to see if you find some familiar faces chatting about the event. You may even find a carpool buddy if you're lucky! Making these connections early can build an extra layer of excitement before arrival.

Even if you don't know anyone when you arrive the conference is a great place to connect with fun and influential people. You may arrive not knowing anyone, but you're sure to leave with a new friend or two after the event.

2. Set goals and chose sessions accordingly

Each year MLA works to provide a wide range of quality educational sessions presented by a diverse range of professionals, and one of the toughest jobs as a conference attendee will be to choose which events to go to. Chances are there will be a time that you must make the choice between two sessions you really want to attend. Some will sound more entertaining, some will be great for your career advancement, and some will have a speaker that you just don't want to miss.

Take some time to read through all the [descriptions](#) to determine which are going to be the best options for you. Everyone will have different goals and there is no right or wrong answer about what to attend, but it can be very helpful to go in with a game plan in mind.

3. Be fully present

It's easy to focus on what you have going on at home or at your home library, but this time is important for your professional development. Try your best to set the rest aside and commit to making these few days a fun and rewarding experience.

If you need a little help practicing some mindfulness consider attending [morning yoga](#) with former MLA President Kathleen Zaenger to get yourself in a revitalized and open mindset.

4. Be punctual

We are proud to say that MLA Annual Conference is a popular event, but with that popularity comes a few side effects. Sometimes sessions fill-up quickly and if you are running late you may miss your chance to snag a seat. Try your best to arrive early to get the most desirable spots. Oftentimes you may be able to chat with the presenters for a few minutes before the session begins, and that can help with your networking (see tip #1)

5. Make time to chat with MLA staff and board members

Everyone from MLA is truly excited you are here! Even if it's a little intimidating take a moment to introduce yourself. MLA [board members](#) and [staff](#) will be stationed at several locations throughout the event. We want to hear your feedback and your ideas for the future of MLA. I promise we're not as scary as we look, and we really want to meet you!

6. Think of a good 'elevator pitch'

Since this is your first time at MLA Annual Conference, your first and foremost job will be to establish yourself. You will chat with lots of different people who will likely ask very similar questions. Have your elevator pitch ready for questions like, "What do you do?" and, "Where are you from?" That way you can quickly and confidently answer and not feel bombarded. Networking can be intimidating, so come as prepared as possible.

7. Don't forget the exhibition hall

MLA would not be able to produce this event without the support of our [vendors](#) and strategic partners. Take some time to wander the exhibit hall and meet with some new faces. Chances are you'll walk away with some swag and hopefully some ideas and knowledge that you can bring back to your library. Rumor has it the more booths you visit the higher your likelihood of winning a prize or two!

8. Bring multiple outfit options

Dress at MLA could be described as 'spunky casual librarian chic'. Not sure what that means? Neither do we. You will see people in jeans and people in suits and dresses. Business casual is always a safe bet. We suggest you wear comfortable shoes for walking, and because temperatures in October are unpredictable layers are a good idea. I also suggest some flexibility. You might decide to grab dinner with a colleague after a reception and may not want to wear your conference attire so pack an extra outfit for backup.

9. Make time for fun

Make the most of your time with MLA to have a good time with other library professionals. We have a variety of [events](#) including the opening reception, fashion show, professional connection poster reception, and the trivia night. We want you to learn and network, but having a good time is just as important of a priority.

10. Expect to feel a little overwhelmed

I saved this one for last because I think it is most important. Even as an event and conference professional, I still feel overwhelmed during some events. This is especially true for introverts, but there are none of those in library-land, right?!

It's okay to say you feel overwhelmed and it is okay if you want a break. Take it slow and don't burn yourself out. There are a lot of events at the conference and you do not need to attend every one of them. Select the ones that really appeal to you and spend your time there. You will only stress yourself out if you run from room to room and try to absorb everything the conference has to offer. Lots of other people will probably be feeling the same way you do, and it is important to recognize your limits. Just remember growth doesn't happen in your comfort zone so try to push yourself whenever you can.

FAQ's

What should I pack?

Bring comfortable, business casual outfits for each day of the event, a notebook and pen, and a smile. Feel free to bring your laptop but consider leaving it in your hotel room rather than lugging it around all day. Take notes the old-fashioned way and reflect after the event. You'll likely have a few action items and ideas to type up in the evenings so you can share them with your colleagues back home. You may also consider bringing business cards for networking.

What should I wear?

Wear what makes you comfortable. If you would wear it to your library, it is appropriate for Annual Conference. Business casual with layers and comfortable shoes is recommended.

How big is this conference? (How many other attendees should I expect?)

Expect a total of approximately 500 attendees from across the state and about 70 exhibitors on Wednesday and Thursday.

Do I need to pre-register for sessions or will there be plenty of room?

Some sessions require pre-registration, but most are first-come, first-served. Arrive early to snag the best seats.

How can I best stay in the loop onsite? (Should I be following any particular social media accounts? What hashtag should I be using and following?)

Follow MLA on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) , and use the hashtags **#opendoors** and **#mla19ac**