

How to Get the Most out of the TABE Conference

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Every year, the Texas Association for Bilingual Education holds a professional conference that is attended by up to 2000 people. The conference offers general sessions with keynote speakers, concurrent sessions, a luncheon, receptions and the exhibit hall. To get the most out of your conference experience, consider following these tips.

1. Plan ahead. Read the conference program carefully. Examine the structure of the program. Tab the page that marks the beginning of each day. Look at the map; knowing where sessions are being held will make it easier for you to quickly find your sessions. Decide on a way to keep track of the sessions you want to attend. For example, if you are using the paper version of the program, tab the pages that describe the sessions. Or, you could list the sessions by day and time on an index card. Whatever you decide to do, make sure you read the program so that you will know what is going on. If you use the program app, you can mark the sessions you want to attend directly on the app.
2. Choose alternate sessions. Once you have decided on the sessions you want to attend, choose alternate sessions. Sometimes the session you want to attend is full. Every once in a while, presenters cancel sessions after the program has gone to press. You will want alternatives for these scenarios. If you use the program app, you'll be notified if a session is cancelled. If you are in a session and you figure out that it is not what you were expecting, try not to disrupt the presenter. Presenters do not appreciate people getting up and leaving in the middle of their sessions.

3. Arrive early. An early arrival to sessions means that you will have a seat close to the presenter. This means it will be easier, once the session is over, to meet and/or ask the presenter any questions you may have.
4. Use the divide and conquer strategy. To get the most out of the conference, sit down with a friend and decide on different sessions to attend. That way, you can share information with one another. This gives you information from double the number of sessions!
5. Dress appropriately. You do not need to wear a suit, but you should be dressed nicely. A rule of thumb is, if you would wear your outfit to a club, it isn't appropriate for a conference. Other inappropriate clothing includes beachwear, fitness clothes worn as every day clothing, and anything tight and/or revealing. Remember, you will be interacting with a lot of people, some of whom could be potential employers. You want to be remembered as someone these employers would want to hire. In addition, you will be doing a lot of walking. Wear comfortable shoes (and you might want to bring some band aids in case you get blisters).
6. Talk to people you don't know. You have the opportunity to meet so many people at the conference. Keynote speakers enjoy meeting audience members; just remember that you should not monopolize their time. Concurrent session speakers may be good contacts for you; ask for business cards. You are important to the TABE Executive Board members, so introduce yourself to them. Take time to meet BESO students from other universities. Finally, take a moment to meet and thank the people who served on the conference planning committee. Planning a conference takes a lot of time and effort; committee members appreciate your acknowledging their efforts.
7. Volunteer to help. If you find that you have some extra time, head over to the TABE registration area and volunteer to help out. There are always tasks that need to be done. Even if you just have an hour to give, let the TABE staff members know. Your help will be appreciated.

8. Visit the exhibit hall. There are so many great exhibits, you will probably want to visit more than once. A good strategy is to begin by quickly walking the aisles, scanning the booths and getting an idea of what is being exhibited. Then, start at one end and work your way to the other. Look at the materials. Fill out information cards; publishers will send you catalogues and announcements. Go to the exhibit hall on the last day an hour or so before the exhibits close. Some publishers do not want to carry their materials back and will give away resources. Just keep in mind, you may need an extra suitcase to bring all the resources back home!
9. Attend special events. Special events give you another opportunity to meet other students, presenters, and school district personnel. Sometimes publishers hold events and this can be a good way to see the publishers' materials while also getting something to eat. Finally, attend the President's Gala. If you get there early, there will be finger foods. Be ready to dance the night away! You won't need a partner; there are lots of opportunities to dance in a crowd.
10. Have fun while you learn. The conference is a wonderful opportunity to learn. You will also have some time when there aren't any sessions. Use this time to explore the area. Meet other people (otherwise known as networking), share ideas, and talk about attending next year's conference.