

**New York College English Association Guide for Conference Planners**  
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**Who May Attend**

NYCEA membership is required of conference attendees. Annual dues are five dollars per person. Ordinarily attendance at any given conference can be determined by counting the number of participants (presenters and panel chairs) and allowing for about ten more attendees. In addition, those in attendance are obliged to pay a registration fee set by conference coordinators to cover conference costs. Because we are a regional organization, attendance generally ranges from forty to eighty. However, given the membership list that we can eventually share with you, there should be a ready pool of scholars and teachers desirous of participating in the upstate NYCEA conference, in addition to other prospective participants whom we may attract through our promotional efforts.

**Conference Themes/Topics**

The conference coordinator(s) may set the conference theme, which customarily treats a literary topic having application to the literatures of all periods, authors, genres, and countries, from *Gilgamesh* to Steven Millhauser's *The Barnum Museum*. Not only are critical/theoretical approaches welcomed, but also pedagogical applications. Papers are generally fifteen minutes long and should be presented in English. Depending on the nature of the theme, scholars in other disciplines have sometimes joined us for the presentation of papers (e.g., history, psychology, philosophy), but most participants are usually English or foreign language faculty.

**On-Site Resources**

***Human Resources***

Conference planning and scheduling requires an on-site coordinator, someone familiar with the campus and its personnel. Some coordinators work with one or more committees that they have established; others have gone solo (except perhaps for the help of a secretary). It is generally assumed that all coordinators would have the backing of their department chairs and appropriate college administrators. You may find it helpful to define small, manageable roles for volunteers to play, as means of attracting support, not to mention an interesting entry for one's curriculum vitae, since opportunities to host conferences and to help plan them are not always readily available.

Sample activities include: 1) selection of a conference theme, with confirmation of conference site and date; 2) reservation of rooms sufficient for conference site (see "Physical Plant" below); 3) inviting guest speaker and establishing honorarium; 4) determining projected conference costs (with NYCEA input, if needed) as a basis for setting the conference registration fee; 5) preparation of a call for papers, with consideration of other promotional sources, if desired, like the UPenn Call for Papers list or the MLA Directory, and including a bulk mailing to NYCEA members and liaisons at New York colleges and universities; 6) preparation of a (bulk) mailing with conference information to NYCEA and other possible constituents, including information about local hotels and access routes to the campus; 7) selection from among abstracts received (by a pre-established due date) of conference participants, with notification of acceptance or rejection to all those submitting paper proposals; 8) establishing nominal chairs for all panels, 9) deciding on possible entertainment for Friday night — home-grown or otherwise —

and its cost, if any; 10) preparation of on-site conference materials (e.g., program schedule); and 11) engaging in correspondence (phone, mail, fax), as needed with on- and off-campus personnel assisting with the conference.

Most of these activities can be spread over time and possibly shared with any assisting faculty. The busiest time for an October conference would be the months of September and October, for a November conference, the months of September/October and November.

### **Physical Plant**

The conference site should have available a minimum of three classrooms for the simultaneous presentation of papers. (Not all may be needed.) A larger site (lecture room, auditorium) may be desired if the conference features guest speakers addressing all conference attendees at one time (plenary session). A registration site in proximity to the classrooms should be available for sign-in by participants.

A room for dining facilities (Friday dinner, Saturday lunch) would also be needed, unless dining reservations for meals are made at one or more off-campus sites. Also, an area adjacent to the registration site should be equipped with continental breakfast items (e.g., bagels, croissants, muffins, pastries, fruit; coffee, tea, sugar, artificial sweeteners, stirrers).

### **Conference Materials**

It should be possible for participants to sign in (name, address, institutional affiliation) and pick up at registration the following items: 1) name tags identifying participants by name and institution (with blanks available for late or unexpected registrants); and 2) a copy of the program schedule for the day's events. Sometimes the program is placed inside a folder containing promotional material related to the host institution, but this is optional.

### **Publicity**

The main sources of publicity are the call for papers, which should be ready for distribution at the preceding conference (the call for a spring conference should be available at the fall conference and for a fall conference at the spring conference). As soon as possible after that conference, a call for papers should be bulk mailed to the membership and contacts at area schools and posted to the UPenn Call for Papers mailing list. A "seed money" loan of up to \$200 is available from the NYCEA Secretary-Treasurer to accommodate mailings and material preparation costs in advance of registration fee collection.

Notice of the conference is ordinarily sent to PMLA and also to the CEA (College English Association) to be added to their conference listings. Specialized journals with such listings are another outlet. An electronic copy of the call for papers should also be sent to the NYCEA web master for posting on the web. If you or your colleagues are aware of other relevant web sites, you would be welcome to publicize the conference through those.

For a bulk mailing, if handled on your campus, we shall provide address labels for all NYCEA members, to facilitate the process, to which you may add any further names of your own. The mailing list need not be limited to New York State. You may, if you choose, have conference materials sent to department chairs of any institutions that you wish, not only in New York, but also in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, adjacent New England states and Canada (Ontario). Addresses are obtainable in the PMLA Directory (September issue). Contact addresses for New York State colleges and uni-

versities are included in the labels provided by NYCEA. Any additions would be up to you.

### **Costs**

This is a conference of small to moderate size, and, with careful planning, should pay for itself through registration fees. Since you have no way of knowing early on how many will be attending, you may wish to begin by considering a tentative registration fee of \$65 times thirty persons (a safe minimum attendance estimate, which you may readily exceed). That would produce a total of \$1950.

If your expenditures should actually come close to or exceed that figure, then you may wish to increase the fee, but the more you increase it, the more your conference should be offering to justify the added expense to attendees.

### **Advance Expenditures**

The call for papers and the bulk mailing would be undertaken before any registration fees are received. Some institutions provide dedicated funding to meet early costs in the understanding that the promotional benefits on behalf of the institution are worth the expense. However, the need for advance funds can also be met through the \$200 seed money available from the NYCEA in the form of a loan, to be repaid when the conference is completed, along with any other monies (registration fees) in excess of actual expenses. (Such funds support the NYCEA web site, stationery, and the graduate student award.) Some host institutions remit a sizable sum; others have very little left to remit. In either case, the NYCEA is also receiving membership dues (\$5 apiece) from all conference participants as a condition of attendance.

A smaller mailing after proposals have been accepted will also be needed, to provide all those whose papers have been accepted for presentation with conference registration materials and information on lodging and travel. WE ASK THAT YOU INCLUDE NYCEA BOARD MEMBERS IN THIS MAILING.

### **On-Site Expenses at Conference**

These expenses include continental breakfast items, conference materials (name tag and conference schedule) and the honorarium for a guest speaker and any forms of entertainment requiring remuneration. It should be possible to use registration fees for this purpose.

### **Selection of Papers**

Prospective conference participants are not required to submit papers, although some do. Instead, they are required — in the absence of a paper — to submit a paper proposal in the form of an abstract (one to one-and-a-half double-spaced typed pages would be sufficient) for an approximately fifteen-minute paper. The call for papers and the follow-up bulk mailing should specify a deadline date for receipt of the abstracts. Requiring only an abstract reduces reading time and facilitates the selection process.

Past experience suggests that most submissions are of reasonably high quality, so that acceptances will probably exceed rejections by a considerable number. Reasons for rejection would include inappropriateness of proposals/abstracts to the conference theme; unprofessional work; unmanageable topics. Those submitting proposals are not vying for, say, one of three places on a particular panel, but for a place on one of the numerous sessions accommodated by the conference schedule, which also contributes to a higher acceptance rate.

The selection process can be undertaken by one or more individuals, perhaps in committee. Decision letters need to be sent out promptly to give prospective participants

as much advance notice as possible of acceptance/rejection in the month or so remaining before the conference date.

### **Conference Program Schedule**

It is usually good to plan on hour-and-fifteen minute sessions with ten minutes between sessions. Many fifteen-minute papers have a way of turning into twenty-minute papers. An hour-and-fifteen minute session should accommodate such papers and still leave room for a modest question-and-answer period. The number of papers accepted for the conference will determine how many simultaneous sessions will be needed for the day.

Each session should have its own separate title, usually based on the grouping principle by which you put particular speakers (already selected) in the same session (usually three speakers for each classroom site). Each session should also have a chair, someone to introduce the session, introduce the speakers, initiate the q-&a period, and keep the session on track with respect to time. The introductions do not need to reproduce more than what the conference program actually provides (name, institutional affiliation, and title of talk). Often, faculty from the host institution may wish to serve as chairs, as the task is not demanding. NYCEA officers are usually ready to help out and fill in as needed in this respect.

### **Guest Speaker**

A guest speaker may be represented by in-house personnel or by a scholar from outside the area. It may take place as a keynote address on Friday evening or at a separate plenary session during Saturday's events. When the Saturday lunch is held on campus, the speaker may appear at the luncheon site for the latter part of it. You would know better as to whether an off-campus luncheon site would work as well for a speaker. An honorarium should be set aside for this person. The talk should probably run anywhere from 45-60 minutes.

### **Entertainment**

It is important to have attractive events occurring both days (Friday and Saturday) to discourage conference-goers from skipping one of the two days. Some session can be held on Friday afternoon, perhaps preceded by an optional campus tour for early arrivals, but after the Friday dinner, it is helpful to have an event scheduled, whether on- or off-campus (drama or music presentations are among the possible options.) If you have a single guest speaker, you may wish to schedule his or her talk for Saturday, so that in addition to a Friday night attraction, you also have a special Saturday attraction, in addition to the presentation of papers at the various Friday/Saturday sessions.

### **Meals**

Aside from continental breakfast trimmings, the meals to be planned are the Friday dinner and the Saturday lunch. These meals should pay for themselves through special dinner and luncheon fees, maintained separately (for those who want dinner but not lunch, and vice versa), in addition to registration fee.

If one or more meals are conducted off campus, reservations should be made well in advance with the restaurant(s) in question and agreement should be sought as to choice of dishes. Usually the restaurateur or the personnel of the campus dining facility will come up with two or three standard items, at least one of which should be vegetar-

ian. Prices should be established for each entrée, so that attendees can make an appropriate selection in advance of the conference.

### **Hotels/Motels**

It is helpful if the names and rates of several neighborhood hotels and motels can be provided. Some establishments will offer group rates through prior reservation of a block of rooms, to be held for a specified period of time. The bulk mailing of conference materials will benefit from a short listing of several hotels, their quoted prices, and their approximate distance from the conference site. It should be understood that conference participants are expected to make their own arrangements regarding lodgings.

### **Flight Information**

You may wish to identify the closest airport and its distance/location from the school. However, it should be made clear that it is up to conference attendees to take care of their own flight arrangements.

### **Benefits to the Host Institution**

Because many scholarly events are hosted at hotels, there are correspondingly few opportunities for colleges and universities to serve as hosts for on-campus conferences. The NYCEA conference provides such opportunities for self-promotion by the host institution (e.g., press releases, public service announcements, in-house publicity) as well as NYCEA-sponsored promotion through its web site and prior fall or spring conference. The host institutions faculty and/or graduate students will themselves have the opportunity to submit abstracts under favorably competitive conditions, in addition to serving as session chairs, if they wish. Conferences also provide an opportunity for service. NYCEA also gives a hundred-dollar award for the best paper delivered by a self-identified graduate student.

### **Checklist for Conference Organizers**

- ✓ Create list of hotels and nearby attractions and restaurants for attendees.
- ✓ Send e-mail to all participants with last-minute information, reminders.
- ✓ E-mail reminder to conferees to register at conference hotel(s).
- ✓ Create conference poster.
- ✓ Distribute conference poster to interested departments.
- ✓ Commission van/make shuttle run for hotel participants.
- ✓ Invite honorary participants (School Administration, etc.)
- ✓ Put together PR materials for conference packet: local restaurants, sites, etc.
- ✓ Organize students to staff registration tables.
- ✓ Create name tags and distribute to registration table.
- ✓ Create directional signs on campus and in buildings used to host conference.
- ✓ Create program and photocopy/print.
- ✓ Create cash collection system for last-minute registrations.
- ✓ Get biographies and prepare introductions for keynote speakers.
- ✓ Reserve room for NYCEA Board meeting.
- ✓ Arrange catering for Friday dinner, Saturday breakfast, and Saturday lunch.
- ✓ Notify English department and other humanities faculty of conference.

- ✓ Provide water at tables for speakers and in session rooms.
- ✓ Check with bookstore about making keynote speakers' books available for purchase by conference participants.
- ✓ Arrange microphones & a/v equipment for speakers and conference participants.
- ✓ Staff registration table on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning.
- ✓ Evaluate graduate student papers and choose prize winner, inform NYCEA treasurer of choice, and announce prize at Saturday's lunch.
- ✓ Arrange honoraria checks for speakers.
- ✓ Provide moderators with biographical information about panel participants.
- ✓ Remind moderators to enforce time limitations in fairness to all participants
- ✓ Check that all conferees have registered.
- ✓ Remove directional signs after conference.
- ✓ Send NYCEA proceeds, if any, to NYCEA treasurer.
- ✓ Get list of NYCEA members from NYCEA treasurer to crosscheck at registration.