



Attending your first TaPRA conference: a guide for postgraduates

What is TaPRA?

The Theatre & Performance Research Association is a membership organisation for researchers and practitioners in theatre and performance studies. It is made up of 13 working groups, each of which have a specific thematic focus. They form smaller research communities within the annual conference, deciding a topic to pursue, and several organise interim events in the spring.

Current working groups are: Applied & Social Theatre; Bodies & Performance; Directing & Dramaturgy; Documenting Performance; Performance and New Technologies; Performance & Science; Performance, Identity & Community; Performer Training; Popular Performance; Scenography; Sound, Voice & Music; Theatre History & Historiography; Theatre, Performance & Philosophy.

What happens at the conference and how can I take part?

The annual TaPRA conference occurs in early September. Working groups issue their own calls for papers in the spring; there is also a call for the Practice Gallery, where you can showcase and present your practice. Postgraduate students are welcome to submit an abstract (proposal for a paper) to any of the working groups or to the practice gallery - but you must choose one to submit to, so it is a good idea to choose the Call for Papers that sounds most interesting to you and is the best fit for your proposed presentation.

Once you are accepted to present a paper at the conference, you are a member of that working group for the duration of the conference and for that year of membership. Some people choose to stay with the same working group every year. Other people may present at different working groups in different years, depending upon the call for papers. The working groups are scheduled at the conference in parallel. However, at least two sessions will be Open Panels, which provides the opportunity to listen to the conversations that another working group is having.

In addition to the panels of presentations organised by the working groups, the conference programme features keynote speeches, events specifically for postgraduate students organised by the TaPRA postgraduate reps, a panel curated by the executive committee of TaPRA responding to issues in the field, TaPRA's Annual General Meeting, a dinner and networking opportunities.

Do I have to be giving a paper to attend TaPRA?

No. Even if you don't feel ready to give a paper on your research yet or don't have the time to write one, the annual conference can be a great place to meet other postgraduates and researchers with similar interests, find out about the latest research in the field, and to get your voice heard. If you're not presenting a paper, you might like to try out a few different working group sessions to see which groups are having the conversations most relevant to your research – working groups will often choose to build on discussions had at the annual conference for the following year's CfP. TaPRA's annual postgraduate symposium in the spring offers a supportive environment to present your research for the first time or try out an idea before the main conference.

What financial support is available to help me attend?

Like most conferences, TaPRA charges a fee to attend (even if you're speaking) to cover the costs of catering, venue hire, keynote speaker etc. This fee is reduced for postgraduate students and also includes a year's membership to TaPRA. You also need to think about the costs of travel to the conference and accommodation during the conference (generally you can book a university room at the same time as you register).

If you're a postgraduate student or an early career researcher and you are giving a paper, you can apply for a bursary from TaPRA to contribute up to £200 plus conference fee waiver to the cost of attending. See the TaPRA website for more details. If you are studying in a SCUDD-affiliated drama department, you may also be eligible to apply for the Glynne-Wickham scholarship of up to £220 through SCUDD. It is also worth checking with your university/ department/ funding body if they offer grants towards attending conferences.

I don't know anyone else going - help!

There is always a strong postgraduate presence at the conference – about 50% of attendees. The postgraduate reps host a meet and greet lunch on first day, as well as a training event on the second day of the conference. You should find the atmosphere at the conference to be friendly and people approachable – everyone was new to TaPRA once. Twitter can be a good way to connect with other attendees before and during the conference – follow us at TaPRA_PG; we also have a Facebook group called the TaPRA Postgraduate Forum.

We look forward to meeting you at the conference!

Hannah Greenstreet and Cathy Sloan
TaPRA Postgraduate Representatives