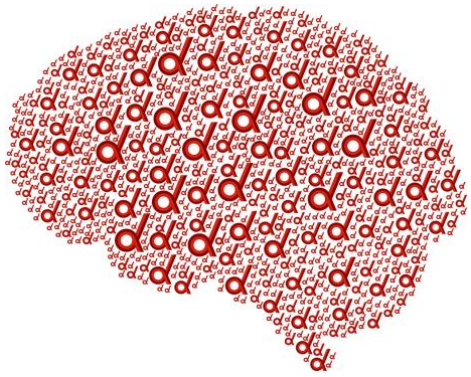

Decision Neuroscience Laboratory

HANDBOOK

Version 3. Last reviewed on 1 July 2026 by Catalina Ratala & Alan Sanfey.

Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition and Behaviour, Radboud University

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"The fundamental goal of the lab is to explore and understand how people make decisions in social settings."

Welcome to the lab!

Welcome to the Decision Neuroscience Lab (DNL)! We're happy to have you join us!

This document is meant to serve as an initial guideline about the goals and structure of the DNL, what roles you will fulfil, and what you can expect from the PI and other lab members. We assume all new lab members will read this guide within the first several weeks of joining the lab. However, this guide is not designed to answer all the questions you might possibly have, so we (strongly!) encourage you to ask your fellow lab members if anything is unclear to you.

A little bit on DNL

The fundamental goal of the lab is to explore and understand how people make decisions and choices. *The lab* has traditionally been comprised of people from mixed academic (and cultural) backgrounds who together share a desire for conducting high-quality scientific research in a collaborative and supportive environment. As a multidisciplinary and multicultural lab, we aim to cultivate an inclusive, diverse, and open environment for sharing knowledge, exchanging ideas, and for making new discoveries. An important goal of the lab is to inspire its members with regard to their career objectives, aspirations, and scientific development, and as such we value everyone's input regarding the structure and the function of the lab.

A beneficial consequence of our diversity is the wide range of knowledge we possess as a group, which spans many theoretical and methodological approaches to our questions of interest. To maximise this benefit and generate a stimulating work environment, cooperation is the cornerstone of our identity, and absolutely requires you to bring an open and respectful attitude to the lab, as well as a willingness to invest both time and mental resources to our collective work. We don't have time (or energy) for people who are trying to demonstrate how smart they are, who feel in competition with their lab mates, or who don't want to put effort into assisting each other's scientific endeavours.

Academia is hard work, but it can also be extremely rewarding, and, when done properly, can also be quite fun. We all need to play our part in creating an environment where we can take advantage of the wonderful opportunities we have in the lab, at the DCCN, and in our field.

DNL structure

Our group typically consists of students (bachelors and masters), PhD candidates, postdoctoral fellows, and a PI. At times the group will also have a dedicated lab manager, depending on the current research needs and resource availability. Each of these roles brings with it certain responsibilities, expectations, and opportunities. For clarity and consistency, you will find a (non-exhaustive) description of these roles below. The aim is to help you calibrate your expectations realistically, and to understand the various functions of your fellow lab members.

As a student (bachelors or masters), most of your time in the lab is dedicated to your own research project. Especially at this stage of your scientific journey, the emphasis is on growth and learning. This means you are encouraged to actively engage in developing both theoretical and practical research skills. To best achieve this goal, we recommend that you immerse yourself in a broad and varied range of topics, attending talks, participating in experiments, and learning about ongoing research projects. A good place to start is by regularly checking the DCCN, Donders Institute, and the Radboud University calendars for upcoming talks, workshops, and other events that align with your research interests. You're also expected to contribute to the collective research goals. As an example, lab meetings are a great opportunity for expressing your ideas, asking questions, receiving feedback, and for being exposed to other relevant work in your field of interest. Keep an open and curious mind as you navigate your project. You're encouraged to be proactive in requesting support and feedback from your fellow lab mates and from your supervisor. Additionally, providing regular updates to your supervisor can help in managing expectations, dealing with pressure, ensuring good communication and a productive workflow. Learning oftentimes involves challenges and mistakes. These can be overcome and they are part of any academic journey. The lab is a space where you can discuss your challenges!

As a PhD candidate, you will spend several years as a lab member. Your focus is research (and completing your thesis), but you also need to develop further skills necessary for your career, whether this be within or outside of academia. You'll be encouraged to develop your own research projects and by doing so, you will contribute to the lab's overall goal with creative and novel research ideas. As you grow in your role, your responsibilities will include taking the lead on projects, mentoring students, expressing your scientific opinions, and actively interacting with the rest of the lab. At this stage, it is important to consider your academic citizenship, and to contribute to the broader community by adopting open science practices, presenting your work at conferences, and publishing your research findings. Part of your training is to develop both technical and interpersonal skills that revolve around time and project management, effective communication, handling pressure, and developing a sustainable work-life balance. You are encouraged to discuss your professional goals at the beginning

of your PhD with your supervisor(s) / Alan. This helps to align expectations, and gives them the opportunity throughout your PhD to explicitly support you in reaching these goals. The Institute and the University have a series of useful courses in this regard which you can access through the *Donders Institute webpage*.

As a postdoctoral researcher you are on the path to become a fully independent researcher, focusing on a broader range of projects and more peer collaborations. In addition to your own research, you are expected to lend your knowledge, experience, and expertise to group members, and to lead by example. You have an important role to play in the lab's culture by guiding students, providing feedback, and promoting a supportive and open environment. Your tasks will also require occasionally supporting the PI, by for instance, taking on organizational tasks, participating in committees, working on grant applications, or various project proposals. You will find useful resources within the group but also on the *Donders Institute web page*, especially pertaining to the challenges of managing workload and the uncertainty of academic life at this stage.

From time to time people are appointed to the role of lab manager. The lab manager ensures the well-functioning and coordination of the entire group. Your focus in this role is on supporting the lab, while there is often space for also developing your research ideas with the PI's guidance.

As the PI, Alan aims to promote a positive, open, and collaborative work atmosphere while conducting high-quality research in the area of decision-making. You can expect Alan to provide you with feedback on your research, but also support with career guidance and development (both in or outside of academia). Alan is committed to working with each of the lab members to arrive at a supervision style and frequency which best works for them. For some, this entails weekly (short) meetings, for other, less frequent but more detailed interactions. The main principle is open communication -- it is each lab member's responsibility to communicate their needs (and struggles) with Alan in a timely manner, and it is his responsibility to work towards meeting these needs (and resolving the struggles where possible). Alan's time is divided across multiple and diverse responsibilities involving research projects, administrative tasks, supervision, and teaching. As a consequence, he is quite busy and therefore you are encouraged to inform him well in advance of specific deadlines that will require his attention. However, he is (almost) always available by email, and will strive to meet at short notice if there are urgent items for discussion.

How we operate

You are expected to work the hours that are indicated in your contract (or internship agreement), but there is no necessity or expectation that you will exceed these. You should feel comfortable to complete this work within a schedule that best suits your individual work style and leverages your strengths. As a lab, we have no strict office hour expectations, which means there is flexibility to get our work done whenever it best suits us. In general, the principle is that while getting your work done within the allotted time is necessary, there is flexibility in when (and to some extent where) this work is done. Work-life balance is important, and within the DNL you are encouraged to be mindful of your own needs. One point to note is that Alan often works a somewhat non-traditional schedule -- therefore, you may sometimes receive emails and documents from him at odd hours of the day or on weekends. This schedule suits his work style and family life, but this does not mean you are obliged to work similar hours or reply to these emails outside of your own work schedule. Again, if you have particular questions about work schedules, you are encouraged to talk with Alan about this.

However, an important qualification to the above concerns when we meet communally, both as a lab and with the broader academic community at the DCCN, the Donders Institute and the University. An important part of our academic development, and a responsibility we have, is communicating with each other and with the broader scientific community. To facilitate this transfer of knowledge both within and beyond the lab, there are various meetings we attend as a group. These serve as a space where you can both be informed as to current developments in the lab and beyond, and to practice valuable skills. In general, our meetings are in-person unless there are particular exceptions agreed in advance.

Within the lab, we have several regular mandatory meetings:

- **Weekly Lab Meetings:** Once a week (currently Wednesdays 9:30-11:00) we get together as a whole group to discuss various topics. These meetings have a flexible format which serves the goal of ensuring optimal dissemination and feedback. Given the diverse expertise and background available in the lab, these meetings are a valuable tool for brainstorming, for polishing ideas, getting feedback at any stage of your work, talking about a new research technique, or paper... the sky's the limit here!

This meeting is essential for our individual and collective progress and for our collaboration as part of a research group, and as such we each volunteer for a convenient timeslot. Everyone is encouraged to participate and speak their mind, no matter what their background or experience, and also to feel empowered to challenge other's viewpoints and to remain open to feedback. We want a respectful

but open atmosphere, where the focus is on the questions and ideas we are currently working on. As individuals we each play an important role in order to collectively create and support such an environment. You can do your part by following these guidelines:

- **Punctuality:** Please arrive promptly so we can start (and end) on schedule, and come prepared so you can benefit the most.
- **Active Participation:** Everyone's input is valuable. Feel free to share your ideas, ask questions, and provide feedback. Only by active participation can you train yourself for scientific communication. To do so, give your full attention to the speaker and avoid multitasking, such as checking emails or working on other tasks.
- **Respectful Communication:** Scientific debate often involves discussing opposing viewpoints, challenging assumptions, and holding different opinions. We require you to treat everyone with respect, regardless of their position or level of experience, and focus on constructive discussion. You can do so best by allowing speakers to finish their thoughts before responding. If you have a comment, wait for the appropriate moment. An essential skill to develop in academia is giving feedback: challenge yourself to offer feedback that is specific, actionable, and focused on the work, not the person. Our aim is to improve each other's ideas and projects, not to criticize.
- **Supportive Environment:** Our meetings are a safe space for sharing ideas and challenges. Support your colleagues by offering help, advice, or just a listening ear. Our emphasis is on progress and development, not perfection. Learn to acknowledge progress, both for yourself and others. Feel free to share both your successes and your challenges or concerns. The purpose of these meetings is not just to showcase success, but also to support each other in overcoming difficulties.

Time is precious, and it's up to you to take advantage of the opportunities you have. Make these meetings a meaningful time for progress and shared learning!

- **Round Table Meetings,** once a week (currently Wednesdays 11:00 -- 12:00), after the Lab Meeting, we have time together to discuss more practical issues, for example the structure of a draft thesis, discussing a current paper, how to plot the time-course of a BOLD signal, what to wear at a conference, and so on. These meetings are meant for you to bring your daily challenges, so you can benefit from the collective knowledge of the group, and we can all learn from each other. The format is flexible and informal, which serves the goal of ensuring optimal dissemination and feedback. Feel free to tailor this time around your needs and interests: for

instance, these can be brainstorming sessions, or meetings where we collectively discuss new and exciting ideas from our field, or journal club meetings. Alan typically does not attend these meetings, but can be there if informed in advance. The topics and duration will vary as a function of immediate demand, and you can find information on the Mattermost channel.

- **Supervision and Update Meetings,** these are meetings between you and your supervisor(s). They will be scheduled when you and your supervisor make an appropriate plan soon after you join the lab. These meetings can be weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly depending on the needs of you and your project. In the meetings you would typically review recent progress on the relevant project(s), receive feedback on your work, ask any questions you may have, and plan the work for the period until the next meeting. This is also a good moment to discuss professional growth (academic skills, career plans, goals, and expectations) that goes beyond the specific projects, which means a good planning can help to get the most out of this time.

- **Lab Retreats,** these are lab-wide events where we get together for a day (or two) once or twice a year in order to reflect and grow as a group. Every group member is invited to these events, and you will be notified well in advance when planning starts. This is useful time for the whole lab to be together for an extended period, facilitating the discussion of larger scientific issues of interest, lab goals, future projects, and academic life. Everything, from the retreat logistics to the topics that will be addressed is flexible, and you will be encouraged to bring your own ideas and creativity into such an event. Overall, a lab retreat is a valuable tool for you as a member and for the group as a whole, adding to the healthy, productive, and open atmosphere of our work environment.

Since DNL members are also embedded within other Institutes (typically the DCCN, DI and/or BSI) there are many other very useful talks about the field more broadly. There are a series of lectures and talks specifically addressing Donders members (more information *here*). The below events (PPMs, RUMs, and Centre Meetings) are all specific to DCCN, and are mandatory for those with a DCCN affiliation (i.e., almost everyone in the lab).

- **PPMs (Project Proposal Meetings):** Centre researchers briefly present their upcoming projects for the broad audience of the DCCN, offering an excellent opportunity to interact and network, and to keep apprised of new studies and approaches in the field of cognitive neuroscience. This is part of the ethical approval process at the DCCN, meaning for each new project the lead researcher will present an overview of the study. They happen most Thursdays (12:00-13:00) in the Red Room of the DCCN.

- **RUMs (Research Update Meetings)** feature more senior researchers (final year PhD students, postdocs, and occasional PIs) summarizing their current projects in an accessible manner, which enables you to learn what's happening in the wider field, to get valuable tips on how to present to a broad audience, and to support your fellow DCCN researchers. These are occasionally interspersed with colloquium talks from leading international scientists. These happen most Thursdays in the Red Room of the DCCN (14:00-14:45).
- **Centre Meetings** take place four times per year, and convey important DCCN-related information relevant for all researchers.

Additionally, there are Donders Institute-wide talks, where researchers from across the field of cognitive neuroscience are invited to Nijmegen to present their work.

- **Donders Lectures** are a series of Donders-wide colloquia on cognitive neuroscience, where prestigious speakers in the field of brain and cognition are invited to Nijmegen to present their work. The speakers are also usually present a lunch for early career researchers. These are great opportunities to meet scholars and interact with the broader academic community, so keep an eye on the *Donders agenda*!
- **Donders Sessions** are monthly meetings for everyone in each theme of the Donders Institute (we are members of Theme 2, Perception, action, and decision-making). These two-hour morning sessions, starting at 10:00 and followed by lunch at 12:00. The Sessions are in principle scheduled every 3rd Thursday of the month during the academic year. With varied topics, the goal of this meeting is to ensure that we keep connected as an academic group with shared interests, and benefit from opportunities to present and discuss our ideas and work.
- **Donders Focus Groups** are meetings on specific topics, that cut across the donders themes, with the general purpose of connecting people across the Donders Institute who are interested in a specific topic. You can find more information about the meetings and who organizes them on the *Donders research stimulation funds webpage*.

You are strongly encouraged to make good use of the expertise and resources available to you. Go to talks, ask questions, be curious about other research, talk about your design or analysis to your fellow researchers!

One final note on how we operate is about communication. One aspect of our academically diverse lab is the fact that not all our members are centrally located at DCCN. Rather, our members are spread throughout Trigon, Maria Montessori, and hospital, with offices in different buildings and floors, diverse office hours, and different affiliations and commitments. In order to facilitate communication

between lab members, and to ensure that you can easily be in touch, we use two main channels: your academic email (or the email address you provided as contact), and the *Mattermost platform* (login with U / E number). In addition, *here* you can find out each lab members office and hours, so you know where everyone is (primarily) located.

Work atmosphere: a place to learn, contribute, and develop

Within DNL we value cooperation and collaboration. Academia can feel isolating, and one goal of our lab is to help individual researchers navigate their path to help each other develop in line with their career stage, as well as with their respective strengths and talents. In order for everyone to perform at their best, we promote a work environment where we all support, encourage, and sometimes challenge each other. This can mean giving feedback on drafts when requested, asking questions about someone's design or analysis when you don't understand, volunteering for piloting studies, helping with data collection, sharing experimental or analysis code, giving short presentations about skills or experiences you have, or taking part in various lab related activities.

Open Science: We promote high-quality, open, and reproducible science. DNL upholds the highest standard of professionalism and transparency. This means all lab members are required to adhere to the guidelines and regulations of the Radboud University and the Donders Institute for academic conduct and data handling (information *here* on research data management across Radboud University). We require comprehensive documentation of your research process and code (both experimental and analysis) - more information *here* on the Radboud Data Repository. On the *intranet* of the Donders Institute, you can find an excellent guide for Research Data Management, with all the specific details for running a project (handbook *here*). Once a year the DCCN organizes a research data management workshop which you should attend at least once during your time in the lab.

Public Policy and Outreach: The DNL's connection to the *Radboud Center for Decision Science* provides a unique opportunity for expanding the outreach of your research, for engaging in thought provoking conversations about the span and impact of your work beyond the academic circles, and to inform interested groups, policymakers and stakeholders about your decision science research findings.

Donders Support Staff: As part of the DCCN, we benefit from having dedicated and expert support staff who can answer all sorts of questions relating to administration and the procedural aspects of research, but also specifics such as experimental programming, statistics and data analysis, experimental design, fMRI design, data collection, and much more. We are lucky to have several staff scientists, each with their own *expertise*. Do reach out to them when you need support related to your work. You can use e-mail or *Mattermost* (note that on Mattermost there also channels for specific issues related to Matlab, Python, R, fMRI, MEG/EEG, and mixed models among others). Finally, the support staff play an invaluable role in facilitating our research, so please treat them with respect and patience.

AI in Academic Work: There are an abundance of AI tools available for use. As a research group, it is important that we uphold both the ethical and quality standards of our academic work. AI can assist with a broad array of tasks, such as aiding in literature search and organization, code generation and debugging, etc. However, in the DNL we do not use any AI to replace essential parts of our work process, such as critical thinking or writing. If and when you do use any AI tools, you will properly cite it, in line with the *guidelines of Radboud University* for academic integrity.

Mistakes: As most of our work involves learning and discovery we all need to be aware that mistakes are bound to happen. While it is forgivable to make mistakes, it is not forgivable to cover them up. There are mistakes of different magnitudes: you can accidentally share confidential information about your participant, delete participant data, miss a datapoint in your analysis script, and so on. It is essential that you communicate these incidents to Alan. Use these incidents as tools, and ensure you minimize the chances of unpleasant events. For instance, thoroughly check your experimental code before you begin data collection, and make sure you have it reviewed by someone else from the lab. We learn not only from our own experience, but also from the experiences of others. For this reason, we encourage everyone to speak openly about mistakes.

Inappropriate Behaviour: Within the DNL we uphold the highest standards of professionalism, integrity, and collegiality. Inappropriate behaviour can range from overt and malicious to more subtle forms of behaviour, and acts as a threat to the social safety of an individual. Intended or not, even subtle disrespect, such as consistently interrupting or talking over someone, dismissive attitudes, or excluding individuals can undermine the collaborative spirit of our lab, affecting both individual well-being and scientific productivity. Inappropriate behaviour includes excessive criticism, bullying, excessive pressure, especially if it disregards the individual's well-being, intellectual and scientific dishonesty, harassment (sexual or other), and discrimination. If you observe any of these behaviours, please act, ideally by contacting Alan. If you are unsure how to proceed or if direct communication seems difficult, consider seeking advice from a colleague or mentor within the lab. You can also contact one of the trusted advisors at the DCCN or Radboud (see *here* for information page on available resources at the Donders Institute). Should any issue arise, please communicate it.

Authorship Guidelines: In order to ensure transparency, clear communication, and reasonable division of the workload, authorship order is generally determined at the beginning of projects. This reflects the contribution of each individual in the project, including conceptualization, methodology, data collection and analysis, and writing. Of course, the order may change as a function of altered responsibilities during the process. If you have any concerns, please bring them up with Alan as soon as possible.

Dissemination Guidelines: When considering the submission of a manuscript, either for a conference or for publication, the submitting author should notify all co-authors of the intent to submit the work, and provide enough time for them to give their feedback, should that be desired. This ensures everyone is in agreement with the nature of the content to be presented or published. Additionally, the project team should be informed in a timely manner about any change of status, such as rejection, reviews, requested revisions, and acceptance. This applies also for promoting work on social media or elsewhere.

Career Development and Dutch Academia: Our lab members follow different trajectories in their academic and career development. Our lab can support you in your career progression in different ways, by offering feedback or practice help with job talks, by giving feedback on various drafts, bouncing off career path ideas, and so on, to the extent to which help is desired and requested. We do not adhere to the idea that career paths should be anything but personal, and acknowledge that they are rarely, if ever, linear. Some useful information about the Dutch academia, organizational structures, teaching, and what to expect can be found *here*. In addition, follow the Donders Growing Up in Science series, for more (informal) details about academic career paths.

Work-life interaction

As much as we are invested in our research projects, it is perhaps a helpful reminder that this is only one part of our lives. We function best when we keep a balance between our work and non-work time. Investing time now in developing and maintaining healthy and sustainable work-life balance habits will pay off in the long run! This may look different for everyone, so you should be mindful and respectful of the situation of others. Some useful strategies for managing this could entail:

- **Open communication:** Talk to your lab members and to Alan if you face challenges in terms of scheduling and if your work impinges on your personal life. We encourage an environment where these conversations are open, and your concerns will be addressed with understanding and flexibility whenever possible.
- **Support:** Cultivate a group of friends, colleagues, and mentors, who understand the demands of academia and can provide guidance, encouragement, and support. Keep in mind there are various avenues for support: within the lab, within your supervisory team, within staff scientists at the institute, within PhD/postdoc committees, councils, and peer-groups, and within the broader University. This means there are many opportunities to seek out and find the right support for you!
- **Setting realistic targets:** Make sure you keep your to-do list up to date, but also that your targets are realistic as a function of your time and skills.
- **Handling adversity:** Our work lives can feel competitive and high-pressure. If this happens, it is important that you take a step back, and make sure you prioritize your tasks accordingly and that your goals are broken down into manageable steps.

Remember, achieving balance is a continuous process and a shared responsibility. Together, we can promote a lab culture that supports each of us in doing our best work, while fostering personal well-being!

Resources

1) Starting your internship project

Beginning a research internship can feel both exciting and overwhelming. This section is designed to help you navigate the initial stages of your project with realistic expectations and a sense of direction.

Developing your research question: How specific should your research question be at the start? When you first join the lab, your research question does not need to be highly specific or perfectly formulated. In fact, it's expected that your question will change and evolve quite a bit over the first several weeks of your internship. Think of your (initial) research question as a starting point, rather than a final or fixed project. In an early stage, it's more important to identify a general area of interest within decision neuroscience that excites you and aligns with the lab's ongoing work. Talk to your lab members, ask about their studies, and reach out if you feel stuck. This can be a good moment for presenting at our Round Table Meeting! Also, keep in mind projects can be very different: some start from an existing idea, or dataset, or a specific method for data collection or analysis.

What does a good (initial) research question look like? It should identify a broad phenomenon or topic you want to explore; it should connect, at least marginally, to existing literature or ongoing lab projects; it should be feasible within your timeframe (and available resources). Very important, a good initial question should have space for improvements and adjustments as you learn more!

What's a good timeline for my project? This depends very much on the temporal constraints associated to your study program / internship / grant. Keep in mind that the process of adjusting your research question is iterative and typically spans over the first 4-6 weeks of your internship, though this can vary depending on your project complexity and prior experience. Generally, you'd go through exploring the literature and topic of interest, where you'd make sure to interact with the lab members, attend lab meetings, and familiarize yourself with relevant methods and theories. Next step would be to start narrowing your focus. Here you'd try to identify specific gaps in the literature, or feasible methodological approaches, and concrete questions you could address. Finally, by interacting with your supervisor, you'll become more specific about what you are investigating, how it fits in the lab, the literature, and also develop a clear plan for how to address it. You'll probably continue refining aspects of your design and analysis throughout your internship, but the core question should be established. Remember that some projects go more quickly, while others require more exploration

and patience. For systematic progress It is essential to maintain regular communication with your supervisor about your progress and also about your challenges!

2) Navigating your first conference

Attending your first conference is an exciting moment, and it's completely normal to feel a mix of excitement and a bit of nervousness. Conferences are a great opportunity to share your work. Apart from this, you can get feedback from outside the lab and meet other researchers. All of this helps to see the bigger picture of where your project fits in. Within DNL you'll be encouraged to attend and present your work early and often, as this is an important part of your development as a scientist. If you're unsure which conference might be the right fit for you, ask your supervisor(s) or Alan, or bring it up at a Round Table Meeting. Other lab members will often have good suggestions based on your topic and career stage.

- **Before you go:** Once you know which conference you'd like to attend, check abstract submission deadlines early. Many deadlines are easy to miss as they come many months before the conference itself. Submit the abstract early. Discuss funding and reimbursement with Alan well in advance, since conference travel is usually covered through the lab or Radboud/DCCN or own grant funds, but this needs to be arranged ahead of time. It's also worth registering early, as fees often increase closer to the deadline, and looking into accommodation and travel options together with other lab members who might be attending, travelling as a group is always fun.

- **Preparing your talk or poster:** Use the lab! Lab meetings and Round Table Meetings are the place to do a practice run of your poster or talk. Rehearsing in front of a friendly audience will help you refine your storyline, anticipate difficult questions, and feel prepared. Aim to know your talk well enough that you're not reading from your slides, and prepare a short one or two sentence summary of your work (an "elevator pitch") that you can use in more informal settings.

- **While you're there:** Conferences can be a lot, and depending on which one you go to, the schedules are usually very dense. Pace yourself: use the schedule in advance to make sure you don’t miss posters or presentations that are really relevant to your work, so have those marked down. Prioritise sessions most relevant to your work and interests, but also allow yourself to wander into talks purely out of curiosity. Take notes, you won’t remember everything! Meeting new colleagues who work on similar topics is an exciting part of conferences, so do

introduce yourself to people whose work you admire, ask questions after talks, and don't be afraid to approach people during poster sessions or in coffee breaks. Most researchers are happy to talk about their work, and remember that everyone was at some point for the first-time at a conference.

- **Presenting your own work:** The goal is to communicate your ideas clearly. For that, keep your message focused and treat questions (even challenging ones) as an opportunity to think together with your audience rather than as an attack. If you don't know the answer to a question, it's perfectly fine to say so and write it down for further thinking, maybe together with your supervisor.

After the conference, it's a good idea to share your experience and takeaways with the rest of the lab, so have a few highlights noted down for the next lab meeting. This helps the group stay up to date with developments in the field, and your reflections and updates about new work might be useful for other lab members.

3) Your first poster presentation

Poster sessions are one of the most common ways to present your work publicly, and they're great for scientific communication. Unlike a talk, a poster session is interactive: people will walk up, ask questions, and expect you to briefly guide them through your work. This back-and-forth style can feel less formal than a talk, but it takes just as much preparation to do well.

- **Designing your poster:** Keep it simple and visual. A poster is a support for your ideas, so aim for a clear story that someone can follow in a few minutes from a couple of metres away. Use large fonts, minimal text, and as many figures as possible. A typical structure includes a short introduction/motivation, your methods, key results, and a brief discussion or take-home message, but feel free to adapt this to what best communicates your specific story. Ask a lab mate (or at the Round Table Meeting) for the Donders template. Make sure you show it to your supervisor(s) for feedback well in time, as it can be easy to underestimate how long poster revisions can take.

- **Preparing your pitch:** Prepare a short pitch of about 30 to 60 seconds that summarises your work, and a slightly longer 2-3 minutes version for people who want more detail. Practice both out loud, ideally with a colleague, so that walking someone through your poster feels natural. A great practice is to try to anticipate the questions people are likely to ask, and think through how you would answer them.

- **During the session:** Stand near your poster (rather than behind a laptop or off to the side) so you're approachable, and make eye contact with people who slow down to look. It's fine to let people read for a moment before offering your pitch. You can say: "would you like me to walk you through it?". Expect a broad range of questions, from very technical to very simple, and try to adjust your explanation to the audience. If a question surprises you, treat it as an interesting angle you hadn't considered, and remember that this is exactly what these sessions are for! On the practical side, poster sessions are long and can be tiring, so bring water, wear comfortable shoes, and don't feel you need to be "on" every single minute. Finally, keep in mind sometimes the locations can be narrow, a bit uncomfortable, or in isolated corners. Don't take it personally, organising poster sessions is challenging, and there are always better and worse spots, it's all part of the experience!
- **Afterwards:** Take a moment to write down the relevant questions and feedback you received, while they're still fresh. These could be useful next steps for your project, or things to clarify in a future talk or paper. As with talks, sharing your experience with the lab afterwards is part of the best practices in the lab.

4) Useful

New employees: *https://www.ru.nl/en/staff/new-employees*

Personal development: *grow-online-learning-environment*

Research integrity: *research-integrity*

Handling conflict: *conflicts-and-undesirable-behaviour*

Handling pressure: *identifying-and-addressing-high-working-pressure*; *reducing-your-workload*

Social safety: *action-plan*

Final thoughts

We all thank you for your commitment to our group's culture, and wish you an engaging and fruitful time within the DNL!

The current manual was inspired by several, such as: the WIN Physics Group Handbook, the Whitaker Lab Handbook, and the Aly Lab Handbook. If you have ideas about things to add or what to clarify, talk to Alan.

"... life is far too important a thing ever to talk seriously about it"

Oscar Wilde, Lady Windermere's Fan, 1893

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