



## ICLR 2023: Reflections and Recommendations

As a fortunate recipient of the ISTRC scholarship to attend the International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR) 2023 in Rwanda, I am happy to share my impressions and recommendations from this valuable academic event.

One of the most captivating aspects of this year's ICLR was its relatively smaller size compared to other major conferences in the field, such as NeurIPS. This allowed for more meaningful interactions and discussions with fellow researchers. The friendly atmosphere made it easy for attendees to approach and interact with one another, enabling novice PhD students like myself to engage in insightful conversations with experts in the field and to build valuable connections that are important for an academic career.

The oral presentations at ICLR were engaging and insightful. Most speakers explained their research findings well, making complex topics accessible to most. I appreciated the thoughtful organization of lectures into different topics, allowing participants to navigate the program efficiently and attend talks matching their research interests. This grouping also enabled me to explore new areas within the field of machine learning.

The poster sessions were well-organized, providing an excellent platform for researchers to showcase their work. The posters were organized based on research domains, making it easy to find relevant posters. The one-on-one discussions with poster authors offered opportunities for valuable feedback exchanges. Additionally, I found that the poster sessions were not too big, which meant that attendees had enough time to visit most of the posters that interested them. This allowed in-depth conversations with the authors in similar fields, and to gain deeper insights into their research.

A new concept of "Office Hours" was added to this year's program. This allowed young researchers like myself to have meaningful conversations with senior members of the community. We could discuss important topics related to research, job experiences, and any questions on our minds. "Office Hours" enriched the conference experience by creating a space for valuable interactions and knowledge sharing.

From a logistics perspective, this year's ICLR had a variety of food and refreshment options that catered to various dietary restrictions. This kept everyone well-fed during the conference. They also had plenty of coffee breaks, so attendees didn't have to leave the conference area. This created more chances to meet and talk with others, making the conference feel lively.

One aspect that I found slightly disappointing was the relatively small expo at ICLR compared to some other conferences. This meant there were not as many industry representatives present. While the intimate setting was beneficial to meaningful academic interactions, having a more significant industry presence would provide valuable opportunities for researchers to learn about real-world applications and potential collaborations outside academia.

Other than that, ICLR 2023 exceeded my expectations. I am grateful to the organizers, sponsors, and fellow attendees for making this conference a memorable event. I believe that preserving the relatively intimate atmosphere can further elevate the ICLR experience for future participants. It was a remarkable experience that left an impact on my academic journey.

I would like to sum up with a few tips for fellow young researchers attending such conferences: (1) Engage in conversations. Don't hesitate to strike up conversations with fellow attendees. Sharing ideas and perspectives can lead to valuable insights and potential collaborations. Conferences are all about networking. (2) Before poster sessions, pinpoint relevant posters to engage with authors and have meaningful discussions. (3) Explore diverse topics. Even if the current oral sessions don't seem directly related to your research, consider attending talks from different fields. (4) Plan your schedule. Conferences can be overwhelming with so many sessions happening simultaneously. Take some time before the conference to plan your schedule. (5) Be prepared with a concise elevator pitch about your research, making it easier to introduce yourself and your work to others. (6) After the conference, connect with people you've met through professional platforms like LinkedIn and follow up via email to solidify connections.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be part of ICLR 2023.