Instructions for Panel Moderators

A moderator is an important part of a panel presentation session. Moderators assure that sessions run smoothly and that all presenters have adequate time to speak.

Before the Session

It is important to arrive at the panel session about fifteen minutes early. The presenters should arrive at the same time as you, in order to load their presentations onto the computer or to set up any audio-visual enhancements to their presentation. Use the time before the session to introduce yourself to the presenters.

During the panel session, you will be introducing each of the presenters and announcing their presentation title. Therefore, be sure to ask each presenter about the appropriate pronunciation of his or her name and/or any words or names in the presentation title that you are unsure how to pronounce. Ask each presenter if his or her presentation title, as listed in the conference program, is up-to-date and accurate.

Beginning the Session

Begin each session on time. Do not wait for stragglers to be seated. If people are milling around, stand about 30 seconds before the session begins and ask people to take their seats. Remain standing and then begin the session on time. If people are seated, you can simply stand up at the beginning of the session and begin.

Moderators should begin the panel session by briefly welcoming everyone to the session. Ask people in the audience to hold their questions until all of the presentations are finished. Also ask that everyone check their cell phone to ensure that they are turned off.

Timekeeping

One of the most important duties of the monitor is to serve as timekeeper. Being a strict timekeeper is essential to assure that all presenters have adequate time to speak and that there is some time for questions and discussion at the end of the session. We will provide you with cards to hold up to each presenter to indicate that his or her presentation time is coming to an end (the cards indicate when presenters have three minutes remaining, one minute remaining, and when their time is up). It is very important to be strict in timekeeping during the presentations. If a presenter continues to talk for more than one minute after his or her time is up, you will need to stand, interrupt him or her, apologize that the presenter is out of time, and introduce the next presenter.

All presenters have been notified to arrive 15 minutes early to load their presentations. If, despite this instruction, a presenter needs to load his or her presentation during the session, the time it takes to load the presentation should be deducted from the presenter’s allotted time.

The amount of time allotted to each speaker may vary from session to session. We will inform the speakers and the moderator about the time for each speaker when the final schedule is distributed.
Facilitating Discussion

After all of the presentations are finished, the Q&A and discussion portion of the session begins. This part of the panel session allows people in the audience to ask questions and make comments about the presentations.

It is helpful for the moderator to stand at the beginning of the Q&A and remain standing until the end of the session. Open the Q&A by thanking the presenters and opening the floor for questions or comments that can be directed to the panel. In most cases, audience members will have questions for the panel. However, if after a significant pause there are no questions or comments, offer a few questions or comments of your own to jump-start the conversation.

If the conversation is lively, the moderator should make sure that it does not get too heated (rare, but it does happen). An effective strategy is to interrupt at the end of an answer and say that you need to move to questions for other speakers. Then look to the audience to see if someone has a question for another speaker. Make sure that everyone who wants to ask a question or make a comment has a chance to speak.

Keep an eye on the time. If the conversation fizzles out before the end of the session, it is appropriate to thank everyone for coming and close the session. On the other hand, if the conversation is lively, it is appropriate to let the group continue to discuss or ask questions for a couple of minutes after the session is technically over (please allow no more than 2 minutes after the end of the session). Allowing the session to go over the allotted time takes set-up time away from the next panel of presenters using the room. After the conversation has gone two minutes over the session time, it is necessary to stop the conversation. Stopping the conversation may seem disrespectful, but it is necessary in order to keep the conference running smoothly. Interject into the conversation (interrupting speakers or audience members if necessary) and say, “I’m sorry, but our time is now up. The next panel of speakers needs to use the room. You can continue the discussion in the Atrium.” Then proceed to close the session.

Closing the Session

At the end of the session, thank the presenters and the audience and offer one final round of applause for all. Make a brief announcement about the next event in the conference schedule, including a brief directional statement (for example, “we hope that you will join us for a poster session and refreshment break in the library Atrium.”).