

FAQs and Tips for Panel Chairs

What duties are expected of me as a panel chair?

- Panel chairs have three primary duties: 1) introducing the presenters in a session—just the presenter’s name, position, affiliation and paper title, 2) keeping time during the session, and 3) facilitating the Q & A at the end of the session.
- Panels are generally groups of three or four presentations, with each presenter allotted 12 minutes.
 - Please note: this amount includes time for reading the paper and playing clips, etc.)
 - Presenter pairs (two people presenting a co-written paper) are allotted the same amount of time as an individual presenter.
- At the conference, you should plan to arrive at your presentation “room” at least 5-10 minutes early so that you can meet the other panelists and make sure you know how to pronounce their names, titles, etc. Introductions should be brief. Some chairs introduce all presenters at the start of the session, but we encourage you to introduce each presenter right before s/he speaks – to help audience members joining the session late to easily understand which presentation is underway at a given time.
- Presenters should adhere to the printed order of presentations in a given panel. Of course, if a presenter is late/absent or there are extenuating circumstances, you may switch the order with the other panelists’ agreement and at your discretion.

Should I give the presenters time signals?

- Yes. Generally, chairs alert presenters when they have 5 minutes remaining and again when 2 minutes remain, although you may indicate other times at your or a presenter’s preference. Chairs should advise presenters ahead of time that at the 2-minute warning, the presenter should start to wrap up their argument. Please convey to presenters how and when you will give them time signals before the panel starts.
- You may keep time for yourself if you are comfortable doing so. However, many individuals find it easy to lose track of time while presenting and ask another panelist to give time signals during their presentation.

If a presenter runs out of time but has not finished presenting, what should I do?

- You don’t have to stop the presenter at exactly 12 minutes. However, if you have indicated to the presenter that their time is expired but s/he does not immediately conclude (say within a minute or so), you can and should kindly interrupt the presenter and verbally ask them to finish quickly so that the other panelists will have time for their presentations. If you are the presenter who runs out of time, please adhere to the time guidelines.

Should the Q & A occur after each presentation or at the end of the session?

- At the end of the session. Please ask the audience to hold all questions until all panelists have presented. This provides a richer discussion time, and it prevents enthusiasm for discussing one presenter’s paper from causing other presenters to run out of time.

What is expected of me during the Q & A session?

- Given that all the presenters keep to time constraints, there will usually be 25-30 minutes at the end of each panel for questions. As chair, you will moderate the Q & A, which means you will “call on” audience members who have questions. You should also prepare a backup question or two about each presentation to ensure that all presenters are included and addressed in the Q & A. Sometimes the audience will be very excited about one presentation and ignore the others. It is appropriate for you to ask if there are questions for other presenters (and ask your own if there are not), even if there are remaining questions for the presentation that has already received questions. Further, if an audience member or panelist begins to dominate the Q & A, you should thank that person for their contributions and then redirect the conversation to ensure all are able to participate.

What do I do if the session time ends but the Q & A is still going strong?

- Please be aware of the starting time for the next round of sessions. There is a scheduled break in the program between sessions. Even if your session started late or there is great enthusiasm during the Q&A, you need to dismiss the panel at its scheduled conclusion time. This prevents attendees at your session from being late to the next session. You can certainly recommend that folks can adjourn to an open space to continue discussion.

References:

- <https://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/pubs-and-publications/2017/06/12/top-tips-chairing-conference-panel/>
- <https://rmitchel.uoregon.edu/tip/presenting1>
- <https://southwestpca.org/conference/faqs-and-tips/faqs-and-tips-for-panel-chairs/>