



Tips for Annual Conference Session Chairs

The following are some general tips to help you in your role as a session chair at an IAIA annual conference.

Session Chair Objectives

- Pique the audience's interest in the session topic.
- Establish the presenter's credibility with the audience with an introduction.
- Make sure that the session runs smoothly and on time.
- Facilitate Q&A and discussion.
- Contribute to the overall findings of the conference.

Before the Conference

- Familiarize yourself with the conference and the presentations in your session by thoroughly reviewing the final program and the abstracts in your session.
- If you think two speakers in your session are in danger of covering the same issues, contact them in advance to give them an opportunity to tailor their presentations.
- Read and review all information and instructions provided by the Program Chair.

Introducing the Session

- Get the audience's attention, welcome them, and tell them how the session is worth their time.
- Give a short overview of what the session is about, show how it relates to or differs from other sessions at the conference so the audience can form a global view of both the session and the conference as a whole, and explain how the session is structured and how questions will be handled.
- You may want to or need to include some general announcements; these could include a reminder that recording is not permitted, a reminder to turn off cell phones, encouraging attendees to sit close to the lectern to facilitate discussion.

Introducing the Speakers

- In addition to announcing the speaker's name and affiliation, try to connect each speaker's topic to the other speakers' topics — just like you connect this session to other sessions at the conference.

Time Allocation and Control

- Before the session, remind speakers of their time limit and agree with them on time signals. A visual cue is less disruptive to the audience than a verbal cue. For example, you might sit in the front row of the audience and indicate when the speaker has two minutes left by raising your hand with two fingers up. A sign held up at the right time is also usually fine; you could have one saying "5 minutes to go" and another saying "1 minute."
- Write down the start and finish times of speakers throughout the session. (If you don't know what time a speaker started, it is difficult to know when to ask them to stop.) Or prepare a timetable for yourself to refer to during the session.

- If you have indicated to the presenter that her/his time is expired but s/he does not conclude within a minute or so, you can stand up to indicate that closure is needed. If a speaker tries to continue, press him or her to finish, for example by saying "Can you please come to your conclusion?" If all else fails, interrupt the speaker, such as by politely saying "Your time is up; I must ask you to stop." (To effectively interrupt, listen to the speaker's breathing pattern and be ready to jump in when the person takes a breath).
- Announce the end of the session in advance, such as by saying "We have time for two more questions" or simply "Last question."

During the Presentations

- Be alert to your speakers and ready to assist if they are having problems. If the speaker's voice is hoarse, provide water. If the speaker's presentation is not displaying well, help adjust the equipment. If lights need to be dimmed, either do it yourself or ask someone else to do it. If the speaker cannot be heard or cannot be seen, you should try to correct the situation.

Coordinating Discussion

- At the appropriate time, announce that the floor is open for discussion and remind attendees of the structure (one question-one answer, collected questions and then a period of extended answers, etc.).
- Ask audience members to include their names and affiliations when they ask their questions. This facilitates personal communication and overall networking.
- Make sure you are the one who selects the next questioner. It is difficult for you to keep things on time if the speaker is in control of taking questions.
- Be prepared to step in if the speaker and questioner are getting into a long discussion or minipresentation. Remind the audience that specific issues can be discussed after the session.
- It can take an audience a few minutes to think of questions. So it is always good to have one or two ready to ask. You can prepare them beforehand from the abstracts or write them down as they occur to you during the presentation. Before the conference, you may even wish to ask each speaker for a potential "seed" question.

Closing the Session

- If some attendees did not get a chance to ask their questions, encourage them to talk to the speakers after the session.
- Be prepared to provide a few sentences summarizing the content of the session and again connect the session to the rest of conference, for example, by announcing related upcoming sessions.
- Provide any final pieces of practical information to the audience, such as how to submit their feedback on the best presentation or where the coffee break will take place.
- A final acknowledgement of all the speakers and the audience for their participation is a good way to conclude a session.
- End on a positive note, with a sentence such as "Enjoy your lunch" or "I hope to see many of you at the reception tonight."

After the Session

- Personally thanking each speaker for his/her contribution is good practice.
- Be sure to review any follow-up instructions from the Program Chair, such as completing a session report.