

Notes for Symposium Chairs

The function of the Chair is to support the contributors and to facilitate their communication both with the audience and between each other.

The following suggestions are to help maximise opportunities for as many people as possible to communicate effectively about their research. Inevitably, some parallel concurrent symposia will be running. In some sessions there will be more participants than others as symposia are offered on the basis of free choice to delegates.

The Preparatory Meeting

The Conference Scientific Committee have collated individual paper proposals into symposia using the abstracts submitted during the 'Call for Papers'. Chairs will be informed of the presenters in their symposium, their abstracts, their institution and their emails. We would recommend that the Chair and all the symposium contributors have contact by email, discuss abstracts, look for possible links and if needed exchange power points or full papers.

It's good to have a preparatory meeting or discussion before the session. Many contributors are fairly tense immediately before their sessions and when initial meetings are left until the last minute they are less open to suggestions and less likely to make adaptations.

Agree on a timetable: how long each is to have, the order of appearance and whether questions and discussion will be allowed at the end of each paper or at the end of the session. Presentation time is short and the 20 minutes allotted to each presenter is to communicate the essence of their work. Further communication can often take place after the session with those who express an interest. Agree on the time signal to be used notifying contributors that they have 2 minutes remaining and confirm that, to be fair to all, agreed times will be strictly enforced.

Discuss possible strategies to save time and remain within the time limit. Suggest that they might time themselves doing a dry run. Suggest that they try not to just read from a text and avoid speaking faster in an attempt to say all they wish to say. Recommend that, if necessary, they restructure their text and focus on essentials. Suggest they have an emergency procedure prepared to curtail their talk at the two minute warning if they are over running, e.g. mark paragraphs on their paper that they could skip or prepare a conclusion that captures the essence of what they wish to say.

Check that everyone feels comfortable and talk about it.

During the Session

Begin on time and be as brief in your introduction as you can. Explain the format you have agreed with presenters regarding the timing of presentations, questions and discussion. Inform the audience of the order of presentation (if different to the one printed in the programme) and introduce the first speaker paraphrasing the title. Before your symposium write down the time each presenter: (a) starts, (b) has 2 minutes left and (c) must finish. Keep a close eye on your watch.

Be attentive to the content, take short notes and intervene briefly if you think something needs clarification. During the discussion, try not to dominate but facilitate. Be ready to formulate a question or remark that might stimulate debate, particularly to break the initial ice. Invite questions or comments.

Make sure questions are understood by both audience and respondent. Don't let one person dominate the debate.

Participants who request more information on a presentation, copy of presenter's handout or paper, etc. should make individual arrangements with the symposium presenter(s).

Thank all the contributors and participants at the end and invite applause.

After the Symposium

Have a personal word with each contributor but make sure that members of the audience have access first.

Give each of the presenter private, positive, constructive but critical feedback on content and on presentation and communication skills (e.g. pace, quality of presentation, etc.). This can be left until later in the conference, if necessary. Ask them how they felt it went and respond.

Make sure the room is left tidy and ready for the next session.

Enjoy chairing your symposium session and thank you for facilitating the work of the Conference.

