

Moderator Tips

There is no one set way to moderate effectively. Moderation styles differ depending on who the panelists and moderator are, and who is in the audience. Regardless of moderation style, there are some common elements to good moderating. Using these guidelines will improve the experience for the audience, the panelists, and the moderator. Keep them in mind before and during a panel to make it more interesting and memorable for everyone.

Panel Timeline

This is the suggested timeline for any panel:

- **Start the panel on time** (at the top of the hour). An LTUE committee member may be there to give announcements at the beginning, but this doesn't happen every hour.
- Give the title of the panel (if the committee member did not already do that), then briefly (1-2 minutes, at most) summarize the topic of the panel.
- Allow the panelists to each introduce themselves (about 1 minute each).
- Ask **open ended questions** (who, what, where, when, why, how) to guide the panelist conversation.
- Ask **pertinent follow-up questions** if needed (using the same who, what, where, when, why, and how questions), especially if a panelist brings up an interesting point.
- When there are about five minutes left, ask each panelist to give final thoughts (about 1 minute each)
- Thank the panelists and the audience for participating and attending.

Following this timeline, and using the tips below, will help the panel flow more smoothly.

Prepare for the Panel

Be (or become) familiar enough with the topic to bring up interesting questions, points or topics for panelists to discuss. Contact them ahead of time to learn about anything they really want to discuss, and then during the panel, judiciously ask questions tailored to that advance expressed interest.

Try to think of more questions than only the seed questions you are given. This helps keep an interesting discussion going. Have a notepad where you can write new questions that come to mind during the panel. If you are aware of a controversial issue regarding the topic (a point on which people do or may disagree), come up with one or more questions to address the issue. Have a digital or print copy of the seed questions and your own questions with you for easy reference during the panel.

Give Panelists Equal Opportunity

Some panelists will be inclined to speak more than others, and some may be less inclined to speak up. Invite panelists by name to comment so that all panelists have the opportunity to contribute comments and opinions about each topic.

If any panelist starts dominating the time or talking over other panelists, firmly and politely interject and bounce the time to another panelist. Letting any one (or two) panelists dominate the discussion makes a poor experience for everyone. If the overly-enthusiastic panelist is very

passionate and knowledgeable about the topic, suggest (afterward, privately) that it may be a good topic for a presentation where they can go more in-depth than a panel discussion allows.

Manage the Audience

In some cases, encouraging good questions from the audience can help the panel move more smoothly. However, some very enthusiastic or opinionated audience members may attempt to become unannounced panelists by launching into an extended opinion instead of asking a question. Comments can also be abusive and/or combative at times.

If this happens, thank the audience member for their comment/question, then firmly and politely direct the focus back to the panelists. If relevant, restate the comment or question in a non-combative, non-abusive manner to the panelists. Attendees came to hear panelists, not other audience members. If the audience member sounds knowledgeable on the topic, encourage them after the panel to respond to the Call for Panelists in the future.

Setting expectations for audience questions can help eliminate the above behavior, too. Something along these lines can help: “We are going to take a few questions from the audience now. Please keep your questions concise and to-the-point so we have plenty of time for the panelists to answer them.”

Keeping on Topic and Changing Topics

Pay attention to what panelists are saying. If the comments are starting to veer too far off the stated topic of the panel, gently (or sometimes less gently) guide the discussion back to the advertised topic. Generally speaking, the audience is there to hear about the announced topic, so going off-topic can create a poor experience for them.

The discussion and opinions of panelists may also dwindle. If there are lulls in the conversation, ask a question that changes the topic or takes another interesting angle. If a panelist doesn't have an opinion on a topic, don't press further; ask another panelist or ask a new question. Try to keep the conversation from focusing too heavily on a single point or topic.

Moderate Yourself

Attendees come to hear the panelists' thoughts, not yours. If the panelists speak most of the time, attendees have a better experience. Moderators lead interesting discussion among the panelists, and should be very judicious with expressing their own opinions. If the panel is much smaller than originally planned (such as only two panelists instead of four), then it can be acceptable to dual-class as a moderator/panelist.

During the panel, avoid checking your phone or looking disinterested in what the panelists are saying. Look at the panelist who is speaking. Keep the focus on them.

Keep an Eye on the Time

Panel's have a set, limited time (45 minutes for a single slot panel, or 1 hour 45 minutes for a two slot panel). Be aware of passing time and how long each topic is taking. It's important to give each panelist a minute or two to offer a final opinion on the topic. Symposium staff or volunteers will generally notify you when you have five minutes remaining (watch for the “5 Minutes” sign at the back).