

Moderator and Discussant Guidance

Successfully serving as a moderator or a discussant on a panel requires some advance work. Read on for guidance on the moderator's and discussant's roles and key tips.

THE ROLE OF THE MODERATOR

The moderator provides a brief overview, introduces each speaker, and facilitates a general discussion by the audience and speakers through a Q&A session. Moderators do not make presentations, submit abstracts, or have a formal speaking role.

Here are some tips to successfully moderate:

Managing Time

- Ask panelists to introduce themselves (in 30 seconds).
- Keep the speaker and audience needs in mind. (e.g. balancing presentations with audience questions)
- Announce time limits to the audience. (You or the organizer should have already communicated them to panelists in advance).
- Politely announce what you want to happen, rather than trying to be subtle.

Managing Questions

- Ask the questioner to state their name and affiliation. Repeat the question before directing it to a speaker.
- If a question is long or unclear, ask speakers to give just one example. Break a long question into two or rephrase.
- If the questioner gives a long-winded statement, politely interrupt and ask for their question.

Encouraging Discussion

- Guide the panel with a clear, specific question rather than a vague, open-ended topic. Consider ways to structure the discussion.
- Start off with broader, easier questions; ask about overall importance, benefits, and risks. Then get into the details with more difficult questions such as “what if...” or “why is (or isn't) that the case?”
- Helps the audience make sense of what the panelists say, highlighting themes and connecting the dots.
- Limit the use of any slides; in most panels, the focus should be on the discussion.

THE ROLE OF THE DISCUSSANT

Discussants provide a brief review of, or counterpoint to, the main topics or issues covered by the panel. They do not make presentations or have a formal speaking role.

Here are some tips on being a successful discussant:

- Summarize the presentations and offers evaluative comments on the arguments posed.
- Highlight greater implications for society at large based on the ideas raised in the session.
- Provide a framework for discussion, with potential topics for the audience to explore in their questions.