Tips to be an effective session chair

What is the role of a chair?

Your role is to see that things run smoothly, on time and are as intellectually stimulating as possible. Specific tasks include:

- introducing presenters or panellists
- providing context around the topic
- conveying enthusiasm
- managing the session time
- adding value through insights or observations
- facilitating question and answer sessions
- controlling proceedings (including encouraging verbose or disruptive delegates to allow the presentation to continue)
- ensuring feedback forms are completed
- communicating other key messages as provided by QLS.

Before the event

- **Make contact with the presenters** individually or as a group to reconfirm the session timing, content, audience level, order of proceedings and to answer any questions they may have. Confirm their details and ensure you are comfortable with pronunciation of their names and are aware of their preferred name or title. QLS can arrange meetings or teleconferences to assist. If appropriate, confirm the time of each presenter's component of the session and if the presenter/s is/are amenable to answer delegate questions during the presentation or would prefer questions at the end of the presentation. If questions are to be reserved to the end of the session, then we suggest that no more than 5/10 minutes be allocated.

- **Familiarise yourself with the topic** and individual presentations by reading abstracts (full papers if they are available). If you think two presenters are in danger of covering the same issues, contact them in advance to give them an opportunity to tailor their presentations.

- **Review chairnotes** provided in advance via email by the QLS events organiser. These will include housekeeping notes as well as session times and details to assist you in introducing each session and presenter.

On the day

- **Arrive early and arrange to meet your presenters** ahead of the session. Introduce yourself to the presenters and the presenters to each other.

- **Familiarise yourself with the room** layout, lighting, equipment and facilities.

- **Confirm that presenters are ready** and are aware of the sequence, format and time limitations and how you will enforce them and are comfortable with using the equipment.

- **Raise any problems or special requirements** with the QLS events organiser.

At the session

- **Start on time and introduce the session.** Get the attention of the audience and follow the chairnotes provided by QLS events organiser prior. You may also make any other comments here regarding personal interest, experience or stories in relation to the event topic - however be mindful not to talk too long as presenters usually prepare precisely enough content to run for the entire allocated session time.

- **Introduce each presenter** with brief details such as their title, role and area of specialty, in order to establish their credibility. Keep introductions short, off-the-cuff and avoid reading. Biographies are provided to delegates electronically prior to the event so there is no need to read out a biography for each presenter. Perhaps pick out selected achievements. We suggest no more than one minute.

- **Monitor and control timing** for each presenter and have a pre-agreed method for reminding them when they have only a few minutes of speaking-time left.
  *Remember that presenters typically spend a considerable amount of time preparing papers and presentations and it is a matter of professional courtesy to ensure each presenter has the allocated time available to them.
  Techniques for time control include visual signals such as cue cards with 10, 5, 2, a countdown on a session timer, hand signals, or audible signals such as a bell or tapping a pen on a glass. Don't rely on the presenter making eye contact with you on a regular basis.

- **Facilitate questions and discussion.** If the presenter has allocated time during the session to answer delegate questions then start by announcing that the floor is open for discussion. In large rooms or where the session is being filmed, ask audience members to wait for the microphone before proceeding with their question. If a delegate is quietly spoken when asking a question, you may wish to repeat their question for the benefit of the audience and the presenters. Direct questions to the most relevant presenter if there is a panel. Have one or two questions prepared in advance in case there are none from the audience. If there are too many questions or the questions are complex, suggest that more detailed issues can be discussed after the session. Encourage discussion within the time frame but don't let one person dominate. Please ensure that the session finishes on time.

Facilitating Q&A

- **Questions using Slido.** Slido is an online tool which allows us to maximise the effectiveness of Q&A time as participants are able to submit questions anonymously from their personal mobile device (e.g. smartphone, tablet or laptop) and decide which questions they'd most like to discuss using a "like" function. Your chairnotes will include information to assist you to explain Slido to the audience and invite them to connect and participate.

  You will need to monitor the questions submitted throughout the session on a supplied iPad and read them out to the presenter at an appropriate time in the presentation, whether that be at the time the question is asked if relevant, or at the end of the session.

  Access further information on Slido [here](#).

- **Questions and discussions from the floor.** If there are no questions through Slido, you may wish to ask for questions and discussion from the floor. In large rooms or where the session is being filmed, ask audience members to wait for the microphone before proceeding with their question. If a delegate is quietly spoken when asking a question or does not wait for the microphone, please repeat their question for the benefit of the audience, presenters, and filming. Encourage discussion within the time frame but don't let one person dominate. Please ensure that the session still finishes on time.

- **General tips.** Direct questions to the most relevant presenter if there is a panel. Have one or two questions prepared in advance in case there are none from the audience. If there are too many questions or the questions are complex, suggest that more detailed issues can be discussed after the session.

Closing the session

- **Summarise the content** of the session with a few sentences.
- **Acknowledge and thank** all the presenters for their preparation and the audience for their participation and initiate applause.
- **Request completion of evaluation forms** and ask that delegates submit these on exit or leave on the tables.
- **Make any other announcements** as per chairnotes or requested by QLS events organiser.

After the session

- **Thank** each of the presenters.
- Give them an opportunity to **debrief**.

Dealing with problems

Equipment failure
- Call for technical support from the QLS events organiser or venue AV staff.
- If no solution is available, can the presentation go on without the technology?
- If it can't, either move on to the next presenter or call a short break.

Inaudibility of presenter
- Ensure the presenter is speaking into a microphone.
- If the presenter is still inaudible, check the microphone is turned on and the microphone is as close to the presenter as possible.
- Promptly and politely request that they speak up.

Incomprehensibility / incompetence of presenter
- Roll with it, try to summarise what is being said or ask questions to clarify on behalf of the audience.

Interchanges with presenters or delegates that become heated or abusive
- Close down discussions.
- Identify and place in a queue people who all want to speak at once.

Disruptive audience members
- Request the audience refrain from talking during presentations.

Non-appearance of a presenter
- Move up the next presenter or call a short break so that you can consult with QLS staff.

Emergencies, power cuts, evacuations
- Achieve as much collective calm as you can in the circumstances.