Keys to Holding a Successful Session

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Early Preparation, 1 month – 1 week out
- Develop session overview slides
- Prepare for possible session gaps
- Encourage session attendance
- Contact authors

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A Session Chair can make the difference between a successful session and one that appears pointless and disorganized.

Session Chair’s Role
- Form a coherent theme for the session
- Set a positive tone and maintain momentum
- Encourage audience participation and lively discussion
- Assist and support the presenters

You’ve graciously volunteered to be an AIAA Session Chair.

THANK YOU!
Chairing a Session: Early Preparation is Critical, Preparation 1 month – 1 week out

- Develop a session overview
  - Find a unifying theme.
  - Develop focused questions to stimulate discussion.
  - Formulate session rules.

- Prepare a session agenda slide that can be projected prior to the start of the session or during gaps.
  - Provides a professional feeling to the session.
  - Provides a good visual for session gaps.

- Prepare a TC “advertisement” slide to project during gaps.

- Prepare a “stand-in” presentation for last minute withdrawals.
  - Sponsoring TC overview
  - Relevant topic that pertains to the session theme.

- Invite audience members who could enhance the quality of the session.

- Maintain contact with your presenters
  - Motivate them to prepare early and well
  - Be sure you have content and biographical information from presenters.
  - Offer to review their papers/presentations.
    - Verify that presentations will project well (colors, font sized, content)
    - Ensure the material can be covered comfortably in 20 minutes
    - Ensure papers are submitted prior to the deadline. No Paper, No Podium
  - Tie separate contributions to a main theme
    - Guide presenters on their contribution relative to the theme
    - Inform each presenter of other contributions to the session
  - Remind authors to attend the Speakers’ Briefing at the conference.

Your diligent preparations will help get the best out of your presenters and minimize last minute withdrawals and no-shows.
• **Speakers’ Briefing**
  o Meet with your presenters in your session room at the specified time the day of your session. Check the program for times.
  o Review biographical information. Verify pronunciations.
  o Establish time-keeping rules
    • Signaling procedures
    • Ensure presenters understand the importance of keeping the session on track.
  o Review and agree on session protocol—Q&A format.
  o Have presenters load their presentations on the session room laptop and check that the files run on the laptop software.
  o Check the session room sign for changes (i.e. last-minute withdrawals).
  o Familiarize yourself with the room. Do you have any IT issues: Sound? Equipment?
Chairing a Session: At the Conference

- **Run the Session**
  - **Open**
    - Have session agenda on screen.
    - Welcome audience and invite participation.
    - Give a brief overview of the theme and how each talk contributes to it.
    - Remind all attendees of time limits.
    - Involve the audience from the start.
      - Invite them to note and ask questions.
      - Provide guidance on number of questions.
      - Tell when to ask questions.
  - **Manage Presentations**
    - Follow the schedule. If there’s a no-show do not move later presentations up. Fill in with open discussion or other pre-arranged activity.
    - Update the session room sign with a no-show sticker.
    - Help with technical issues and emergencies
    - Introduce each presenter in turn.
      - Proper introduction: name, position title, biographical/other relevant information, presentation title
  - List questions or topics that the audience should consider.
  - **Control Q&A**
    - Invite questions at the proper time.
    - Repeat questions or rephrase for clarity, if necessary.
    - Exclude or parry off-topic questions.
    - Stimulate discussion.
      - Ask focused questions when appropriate.
      - Call on specific people, if necessary.
      - Suggest ranges of questions.
      - “Connect” questions and comments to important themes.
    - Manage hostile or off-topic questions.
      - You are in charge – protect the presenter.
      - Be gracious but firm with the questioner.
      - Use well-meaning humor to deflect, or rephrase the question.
  - Enforce timing rules.
    - Signal presenters on the time remaining.
    - Politely bring a talk to an end, if it’s running long.

**Prepare well and be accurate.**
Give presenters the best possible start.

**Question Types:**
- Focused: What is the trade-off between simulation fidelity and transfer of training?
- Open: What can you tell me about flight simulation?
- Closed: Is flight simulation effective for training?
Close

- Allow enough time for a closing statement.
- Present a “take-home message” for the audience. Craft your session summary using:
  - your initially prepared notes and questions
  - audience comments and questions
- Inform the audience of other sessions with related focus or relevance.
- Thank the presenters for all their good work.
- Thank the audience for listening and contributing.
Poster Sessions

- Before the session
  - Ensure authors know when they are expected to be with their posters.
  - Inform authors how long they may leave posters on display. Frequently this is longer than just the presentation day.

- During the session
  - Check attendance of all presenters. Note no-shows.
  - Engage authors in conversation about their presentations. This helps attract other attendees to poster presentations and may help put authors uncomfortable with this format at ease.

- Post-Session
  - Request feedback from presenters and selected attendees.
  - Complete the AIAA Session Report and submit it electronically.