Keys to Holding a Successful Session

Contents

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

At the Conference
- Speakers’ Briefing
- Run the Session
  - Open Session
  - Manage Presentations
  - Control Q&A
- Close Session
- Post-Session
- Poster Sessions

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

- Meet with your presenters in your session room at the specified time the day of your session. Check the program for times.
- Establish time-keeping rules
  - Signaling procedures
  - Ensure presenters understand the importance of keeping the session on track.
- Review and agree on session protocol—Q&A format.
- Have presenters load their presentations on the session room laptop and check that the files run on the laptop software.
- Check the session room sign for changes (i.e. last-minute withdrawals).
- 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?
Chairing a Session: At the Conference

- **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.
  - Complete the session chair report and submit it electronically.
Poster Sessions
  o 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.
  o 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.
  o Post-Session
    • Request feedback from presenters and selected attendees.
    • Complete the AIAA Session Report and submit it electronically.