

Session Chair Guidelines

NACIS Conference

Thank you for your acceptance of the role of session moderator for the NACIS conference. This packet provides some guidelines that will be helpful to you to facilitate a successful session.

General role

The quality and energy of the session depends on the active participation of the session moderator. You can build a network among presenters, set the tone for the session, and ensure a fair and smooth allocation of time, and promote professional exchange. As a position of leadership, presenters and audience members will look to the session chair to facilitate, problem-solve and build coherence.

Pre-conference preparation

Before the conference, it is helpful to begin building a network amongst the speakers in your session. You can encourage discussion, and help build a sense of coherence to the session ahead of time. TIP: In a group email, include the following:

- request that each presenter provides some brief biographical information
- describe the ground rules for the session (time allotted, showing up early, etc)
- inquire about technology needs (who is bringing a laptop, what OS, etc.)

At the session

Arrive early! It is very important that you show up early to the session to provide technical and logistical support to prepare for the session. Ensure each presentation is working properly in advance, and encourage speakers to minimize switching between laptops by copying files between machines. It helps if you bring a USB key to facilitate this.

Start on time! Encourage the audience to take their seats if they are mingling about. You may also need to adjust lights or shut doors.

Not all sessions are the same length, so it is important that you note the schedule. Be sure to let each speaker know exactly how much time they will have, and ask them what types of warnings they would like (e.g. 5 minutes until Q&A). You can use the included pages to create signs to communicate this. Bring your own watch/timer!

Please note that there will be people that will wish to change sessions mid stream. If all of the moderators can keep to the same schedule, this makes these transitions less disruptive.

Question and answer

During the question and answer period, it is helpful if you play a key role in facilitating questions. At a minimum, stand at the front and to the side of the presenter as the Q&A begins. In this way, you take a natural facilitating position and will be able to take the lead in bringing it to a close.

If there are not any audience questions, good moderators will be prepared with an appropriate one.

You can help facilitate questions by calling on individuals, keeping track of who has their hands raised, and repeating questions back to the audience if they are unclear. Good presenters will play these roles, but be prepared to step in if they are not comfortable doing so.

Introducing the topic and speakers

Good moderators provide a concise introduction and statement of significance of the session topic at the start of the session. The key with this is to help introduce the session as a coherent experience, not simply a sequence of unrelated talks. It has to be short and sweet.

Example introduction:

"Welcome everyone to this multipaper session on Terrain Representation. Thank you for joining us on this lovely Friday morning. My name is Tom Patterson and I work at the National Park Service, and I will be serving as the session chair.

We have ninety minutes for today's session and four presentations. Each presentation will be allocated 20 minutes during which time the presenters may take questions at their discretion. Please be aware that we do not have any extra time in this session, so I will stop presenters who run over time out of fairness to everyone.

Today we'll be hearing about innovations in how terrain is depicted cartographically. We have several excellent presenters who are leaders in this field talking about advancements in hillshading, hypsometric tinting, and presenting software to help automate hachure creation. Together, today's presentations offer a suite of theoretical and practical methods to designing terrain maps. Let's begin."

Introducing speakers is a way to mark the transition between talks and preparing the audience for a new flow of ideas. You may wish to ask presenters in advance for biographical information or how to pronounce their name. Only provide essential biographical information.

After the last speaker, it is nice to provide some closing remarks to denote the completion of the session. These can be substantive (regarding the topic area) or simply thankful to each of the speakers.

Tips for dealing with long-winded presenters

This will be much easier if you lay out clear ground rules at the start of the session, as typically presenters will defer to you as the chair. But, should someone go over the allotted time, and not heed your signs noting that time is up, you may try several things:

- initiate applause during the next pause
- stand up and walk to the front of the room
- gently interrupt the speaker, thanking them for their talk and noting that the session must move on to the next presenter
- state that there is only time for 1-2 questions

If a speaker runs long, you may ask the next presenter to begin setting up while the previous speaker takes questions. This can be somewhat disruptive, so do this with discretion.

Tips for dealing with audience members

While most audience members will be respectful and ask appropriate questions, it is possible that you will observe rude or harrasing behavior in the session.

NACIS has a no-tolerance policy for harrasing behavior. Please familiarize yourself with the NACIS code of conduct: <http://nacis.org/annual-meeting/code-of-conduct/>.

If you do observe any inappropriate behavior, please report it to the registration desk, or the NACIS president, vice-president or VP-elect as soon as possible.

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**SORRY,
TIME'S
UP!**