

# Keys to Holding a Successful Session

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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!**

- **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' Prep Session**

- Meet with your presenters in your session room at the specified time the day of your session. Check the program for times.
- Review biographical information (will be provided to you by AIAA through your Chair invitation). Verify pronunciations.
- 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?

- **Run the Session**

- Open
  - Welcome audience and invite participation.
  - Remind all attendees of time limits.
  - Involve the audience from the start. Invite them to note and ask questions during the designated Q&A time.
- Manage Presentations
  - Help with technical issues and emergencies
  - Introduce each presenter in turn.
- 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.
  - Manage hostile or off-topic questions.
    - You are in charge – protect the presenter. Be gracious but firm with the questioner.
- Enforce timing rules
  - Signal presenters on the time remaining.
  - Politely bring a talk to an end, if it's running long
- Close
  - Allow enough time for a closing statement.
  - Thank the presenters for all their good work.
  - Thank the audience for listening and contributing.
  - Complete the session chair report and submit it electronically.