Session Chair Guidelines

How to Lead a Successful Session

GSA is indebted to our Session Chairs for their role in making our meetings exceptional. These guidelines are intended to help Session Chairs prepare for and carry out successful sessions. Chairing a session at a GSA meeting is a privilege and a responsibility. A good session chair establishes a respectful, professional atmosphere in the room, makes speakers and participants feel welcome, and ensures that presentations stay on schedule. We thank you for your effort and are grateful for your understanding of these expectations.

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SESSION CHAIR OBJECTIVES

- **Set a respectful, professional, welcoming tone.**
- **Help keep the audience engaged in the topics being presented.**
- **Make sure the session runs smoothly and on time.**
- **Facilitate respectful Q&A and discussions.**
- **Be prepared to ask questions of a presenter if the audience has no questions.**
- **Show appreciation for presenters.**
- **Manage issues and challenges that arise during the session.**

Before The Meeting

- Read GSA's Events Code of Conduct.
- Familiarize yourself with the presentations in your session. In the case of multi-author abstracts, make sure you know who will be presenting.
- Contact presenters in advance to confirm their availability, find out if they have questions, and gather basic information needed to introduce them properly.
- Read these guidelines in their entirety to learn about the steps you need to take on the day of your session.
- Learn how technology will be handled during your session by attending a Session Chair Orientation during the meeting.
- Become a RISE Liaison.

Before Your Session Starts

- Arrive 30 minutes in advance so you are ready to start on time.
- Familiarize yourself with applicable technology and controls.
- Make sure all presentations have been uploaded onto the drive or system being used for your session.
- Meet the student volunteer(s) assigned to help with your session. Student volunteers are available to help you address any technical or logistical problems and to bring the mobile microphone to the audience during the Q&A portion.
- Greet the presenters in your session and confirm the correct pronunciation of their names.
- Discuss logistics with presenters so everyone understands how time-keeping and questions will be managed during the session.

During Your Session

INTRODUCE SESSION

Plan to start with a five-minute introduction. GSA will supply a slide to be displayed as you make your introductory remarks. Please cover the following points:

- Introduce chairs/moderators.
- Recognize student volunteer(s).
- Describe the session theme and structure.
- State time limits for the session.
- Describe how questions will be managed to make the process efficient and equitable:
  - All questions should be concise and on topic. The Q&A session is not intended as a forum for discussions or comments. GSA encourages participants to engage in such conversations informally while they are attending the meeting.
  - It is GSA's practice to repeat each question before it is answered and to consistently use microphones, regardless of whether they appear necessary.
- Remind the audience that it is up to each presenter whether to allow pictures and recordings. If a speaker communicates that no pictures or recordings are allowed, honor the presenter's wishes.
- Remind the audience of GSA's Events Code of Conduct and that you and GSA want to ensure that the session is respectful and inclusive—where all participants can participate fully in an atmosphere that feels safe, professional, and promotes a sense of belonging.

INTRODUCE SPEAKERS

- Provide name and presentation title only; speaker titles and affiliations are not necessary.
- For special presentations (e.g., plenaries, keynotes, distinguished lectures), title and affiliation may be customary; confirm in advance, along with how the speaker wishes to be introduced.

MANAGE TIME TO KEEP SESSION ON TRACK

- This likely is the most difficult aspect of chairing a session. Despite briefings, written expectations, multiple advance communications, and a set of colored lights directly in front of the speaker, it's easy to run long. GSA provides neither a shepherd's crook nor an orchestra with "get off" music, and the audience is unlikely to start rhythmic applause, so aside from pre-session briefings and reminders, here are some options:
  - If the speaker is still talking with 30 seconds left, stand up; if the speaker is still talking at the time limit (light changes from solid red to flashing red), consider moving closer to the speaker.
  - It may be necessary to interrupt the speaker, e.g., "I'm sorry, but we don't want to take time away from other speakers. Thank you for your presentation. Our next presentation is…"
  - If the speaker goes to the last minute (light changes from yellow to red) but finishes within the allotted time, it's your discretion whether to allow a single question but in general it's best not to risk penalizing ensuing speakers.
  - Know where you are in the schedule: You have more leeway for Q&A if the next slot is vacated, a scheduled break, or the end of the session, but don't cheat the audience (or yourself) out of a break and be mindful of what's coming up next in that room.

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FACILITATE RESPECTFUL, INCLUSIVE AUDIENCE INTERACTIONS

- Once presentations have ended, announce that the floor is open for questions.
- Remind the audience how questions will be managed, emphasizing that the goal of the Q&A is to provide an opportunity for people to ask concise questions on the topics presented, not to make comments or dominate the limited time available.
- As a Session Chair, you play an important role in promoting an inclusive environment where more junior and less vocal attendees can get a word in. Intentionally elicit questions from multiple types of meeting participants. Invite everyone to ask questions even if this is their first meeting or they focus on a different area of research.
- If there are no questions, which often happens for a variety of reasons, you may help the speakers and the audience save face by having one or two questions to ask, but in general questions from the audience should have precedence. If there are just a few questions, don't artificially extend the session.
- If there are too many questions or the questions are too difficult to understand or answer, you may step in and remind the audience that such specific issues can be discussed after the session. Request that follow-up questions from the same questioner wait until others ask theirs. Sometimes, questions from the audience can turn into small presentations. It is your responsibility to keep this under control and to interrupt the questioner if necessary.
- As session chair, it is your responsibility to monitor and manage the Q&A within the spirit of the Events Code of Conduct. To that end, you can and should interrupt someone from the audience who:
    - Dominates discussions by making comments, not posing questions.
    - Intentionally talks over or interrupts others.
    - Makes comments that are biased, demeaning, exclusionary, or hostile.
    - Engages in personal attacks or bullying.
    - Takes pictures or makes recordings after a presenter has clarified that no pictures or recordings are allowed.

GET HELP FOR ISSUES THAT ARISE DURING YOUR SESSION

If you need help managing any issues that arise during your session, please use the following resources:

- ***Student volunteers*** (tech support issues)—If there is no tech support in the room, ask the student volunteer assigned to your room to request help from the A/V technician found in the hallway.
- ***Ethics Office or GSA's Meetings Staff*** (inappropriate conduct)—If someone in your session is being disruptive or acting in a way that appears to violate GSA's Events Code of Conduct and you want help, please notify GSA's Ethics Office via email at ethics@geosociety.org. (As noted above, GSA encourages you as Session Chair to interrupt anyone in the audience who exhibits inappropriate behavior as soon as possible to keep our meeting safe and professional. If you need help right away or wish to report misconduct after your session ends, notify the Ethics Office or Meetings Department using the above contact information.)

CLOSE THE SESSION

- End on time.
- Thank speakers and audience for their time and engagement
- Thank the student volunteer(s).
- There's a good chance that the meeting room will be in use after your session, including cleaning/prep for a meeting or the next session; please encourage ongoing discussion to move into the corridor (or elsewhere).
- After your session, promptly report any behavioral problems to the Meeting Department or Ethics Office as detailed above.

Your time and effort make our meetings exceptional. THANK YOU!