

Quick Tips for Moderators



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Quick Tips for Moderators

Moderator: Someone who presides over a debate or discussion.

Moderators of panel discussions play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of continuing education sessions. Speakers may draw the audience but how the moderator orchestrates the session can make the difference between an event that is mediocre and one that is exciting, engaging and productive for both audience and panelists. Below are a few tips:

Preparation:	Making sure the panel discussion is enjoyable and effective requires preparation.
Tip #1:	Familiarize yourself with the topic before the event and be prepared with questions that can “stir up the pot”. Try to come up with current controversies or issues you know the audience will be thinking about.
Tip #2:	Have a discussion with all the speakers together before the event (if feasible) about what you want to create i.e. a lively audience discussion offering as many opportunities as possible for the audience to ask questions and for all of the speakers to respond. Hopefully debates between speakers will also occur adding more to the energy and interest in the room. Spending this time will help speakers feel more relaxed which in turn will relax the audience and make for a more informal and enjoyable experience.
Tip #3:	Provide question cards to members of the audience for them to write their questions as they are listening to each speaker. This will allow more people to articulate their thoughts and questions and increase the likelihood of greater variety and volume of questions asked.

Tips for Moderators (cont'd) - Facilitation:

Conducting the Session

Tip #4:	Welcome the panel and introduce the panellists BUT rather than reading long lists of accomplishments and qualifications – have each speaker introduce themselves in 30 seconds.
Tip #5:	Make an enthusiastic statement yourself about your interest in the topic and your intention to keep the discussion lively, informative and engaging.
Tip #6:	Use your prepared questions to set the tone as the audience collects their thoughts about questions they would like to have answered. Look at the panel, ask a question and then look at the audience in order to encourage the panel to speak directly to the audience, not the moderator.
Tip #7:	Involve the audience. Remember that panel discussions are regarded as an opportunity for active involvement of the audience and therefore at least 25% of the time allocated needs to be questions from the audience. If you have used question cards and demonstrate an attitude that emits a sense of confidence and informality, there should be plenty of questions to fill the time. In case there is a lull, use more of the questions you have prepared yourself or consider creating a controversial question to the audience that will encourage them to vote for one side or another. The panelists can then share their view on the controversy.
Tip #8:	Listen carefully to the panelists and tie in what they say to questions from the audience.

Tips for Moderators (cont'd)

Manage trouble spots

Tip #9:	Manage trouble spots. Panelist who does not share the time: It is the moderator's role to ensure that all speakers have equal time. If someone is taking up more than their share, interrupt respectfully. "I am just going to ask you to pause for a moment and ask the other panellists to comment on what is being said."
Tip #10:	Member of audience "posing". A panel discussion can be tricky in terms of managing the audience. There are some participants who simply like the attention and being able to stand in front of a microphone. There are others who would like to ask a question but feel intimidated. Again – acknowledge the contribution of the person asking the question (or stating their opinion) and ask others in the audience to comment.
Tip #11:	Keep a close eye on time -do not allow speakers to go beyond the allotted time – this is an opportunity for the audience to learn and asking questions is vital.

Ending

Tip # 12:	Summarize the key points and what you personally are taking away from the discussion.
Tip #13:	Thank the audience and thank the panelists.

Contacts

For a helpful description of the multiple roles a moderator is expected to assume go to:

<http://www.masshightech.com/stories/2004/07/26/focus5-Avoiding-event-agony-The-roles-of-a-good-moderator.html>

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