

GUIDELINES: MODERATING A NASFAA CONFERENCE SESSION

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Moderating a session at the NASFAA conference is a privilege and a responsibility. A good moderator can establish a friendly atmosphere in the room, make the speakers feel welcome, and go a long way toward ensuring that interesting questions are asked and a solid discussion ensues. Here are some of the steps a moderator can take to encourage an effective session:

- **Room Check:** Make a concerted effort to be the first one to arrive in the room. Check to be sure everything is in order and working. Conduct a brief sound check to make sure all the microphones are working. A room monitor will come by to check your room. Tell him or her if any of the AV equipment is not set up or the sound equipment is not working.
- **Making Introductions:** Be sure to get biographical information from your session's speakers well before the session. Review the bios carefully and pick out a few highlights. Contact the speaker and ask if your summary is OK. Relating a personal relationship or anecdote, as long as it is brief, is always a welcoming gesture. Be enthusiastic; enthusiasm is contagious and will help the speaker hit the ground running. If there is a panel of speakers, ask if they'd like to all be introduced at the beginning of the session or if they'd prefer being introduced as they get up to speak.
- **Running the Clock:** It is your responsibility to keep speakers within the time limit so they all get a chance to talk. It's a good idea to gather your panel for a few moments before the session starts and review the ground rules. They will each have a certain amount of time to speak; agree to a signal you'll give three minutes before the end of their allotted time and again when time has run out. If the presenters are sharing the time rather than following one another, they may want to know when they are 10 to 15 minutes from the end of the session so they can stop and take questions. They may indicate that they'll take questions as they go; if it appears that questions may make it difficult for them to finish the presentation, remind the audience that there will be time at the end for additional questions.
- **Conducting the Discussion:** After the last speaker, it is likely he or she will invite questions but if not, it is your role as a moderator to welcome questions. If you are lucky, someone will ask an interesting question but it is possible that the audience will be silent. You can avoid the unfortunate dull, anxious silence or a series of narrowly framed questions by taking three preparatory steps:
 - While you are listening to the presentation, prepare a question or two of your own.

- If you know a friend or colleague will be in the audience, ask him or her to prepare a question or two to get the discussion started.
- As a moderator, you may call on people in the audience who have their hands raised. Often the questions are evenly directed among the panelists. But sometimes it happens that one panelist gets no questions. If you see that developing, you may want to ask one of your questions of that person or direct a question from the audience to him or her.
- **Ending the Session:** Let the presenters and audience know that the session is coming to an end by announcing, “We have time for one last question.” Be alert to the substance of a response to a good question. Sometimes a good response can serve as a summation of a major theme in the panel. If that occurs within a few minutes of the end, you might want to say, “That seems to be a wonderful/wise/constructive note on which to bring this panel to an end. We thank you all for coming, and we thank our speakers,” and then lead a round of applause. It’s always better to end a little early than a little late.

- *This guide was based on an article by Linda K. Kerber, who is a professor of history and a lecturer in law at the University of Iowa in an article published in The Chronicle of Higher Education on March 14, 2008.*