

# AMIA 2014

## Tips for Session Chairs

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### BEFORE THE SESSION

#### **Contact Your Speakers**

Before the conference contact your speakers to ask them if they have any questions about their presentation. Make sure your speakers know the date and time of their presentation. Ask them to give you a short biography with the relevant curriculum vitae material so that you can introduce them properly.

#### **Be Prepared**

It is assumed that the session chairperson is familiar with the topic of the session in general, and with the content of the presentations in particular.

#### **Meet Your Speakers**

Arrange to meet your speakers early in the conference.

#### **Session Format**

Although the overall time allocation and order of the speakers have already been defined in the Conference Program, it can be very helpful to spend some time preparing the format of the session. For example, try to think about a general introduction to the session and/or each speaker, to decide whether questions will be taken after each presentation, or after all presentations have been made, etc.

#### **Confirm the Laptop and Presentations**

Ideally, all presentations are loaded on a single drive or on a single laptop. No laptop is provided, so if you are not bringing one for your session, do make sure one of the other speakers has one. If the laptop is a Mac, bring a connection cable - some are proprietary and it isn't guaranteed that the AV technician will have a spare.

### DURING THE SESSION

#### **Get there early**

Arrive in the room at least 15 minutes before your scheduled start to meet your speakers. There will be an AV tech in the room and an AMIA staff person waiting for you.

#### **Introduction to the Session**

There should be an initial phase of making contact with the audience to get everyone's attention and to introduce the audience to the topic(s) that will be addressed in the session. Don't assume that everyone is familiar with the topic already. The initial opening of the should introduce the framework for the following speakers. This is also a good opportunity to present the format of the session, for example whether questions will be taken at the end or after each presentation.

### **Introducing the Speakers**

Introductions help create the audience's first impressions about a speaker and can make them more interested in hearing what s/he has to say. This is particularly true if the speaker is relatively unknown (young scholars, newcomers to AMIA, students). Be accurate and respectful in your introduction. If you know the presenter and have something nice to say about him or her, say it. Tell the audience something about the presenter's expertise, accomplishments or interests. These things will help establish their credibility with the audience, and make the session more enjoyable to both the audience and presenter alike.

You can do this best if you have gathered the relevant biographical information prior to the conference. Immediately prior to session, confirm with each speaker the accuracy of the information you will be using to introduce them and the correct pronunciation of all names. Ask if they prefer to be introduced using their formal name or by a familiar name (e.g., Samuel/ Sam, Deborah/Debby). The minimum introduction to a presentation should be a mention of the title and a few words about the speaker read from the information provided (beware of difficulties reading hand-written notes scribbled in a hurry), however, this can be tailored to requirements, for example if the speakers prefer to introduce themselves. In general, make the introduction short and accurate, so that the speaker doesn't have to correct you during his or her presentation.

### **Time Allocation and Control**

This is the most difficult part of the session, since speakers tend to forget about time as soon as they have the floor. There are numerous techniques for time control, for example cue cards with 10-, 5-, 2- and minute countdown or a session timer, but never rely on the speaker to have eye contact with you on a regular basis to determine how much speaking time is left as he or she will either look at the audience or stare into their notes. As a last resort you may have to speak up and remind the speaker that he or she is running out of time. If there is no sign of the speaker drawing their presentation to a close you should interrupt at least 2-3 minutes before their allocated speaking time is over in order to give them a chance to wind up their presentation. (To effectively interrupt, listen to the speaker's breathing pattern and be ready to jump in when they take a breath).

### **Coordinating Discussion**

After the presentations, announce that the floor is now open for discussion and explain the structure (one question-one answer, collected questions and then a period of extended answers, etc.). It is also a good idea to ask members of the audience asking a question to give their name and affiliation. 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 preference. 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. Sometimes, even 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.

### **Closing the Session**

It is good practice for the session chair to sum up the session after the last presentation, instead of letting the speakers and the audience discover that the session is over because the session chair is leaving the stage. A few sentences summarizing the content of the session, a final acknowledgement of all the speakers and the audience (for their participation), and probably an announcement of the next sessions are a good way to conclude a session.

## AFTER THE SESSION

There is really not much for the session chair to do after the session, but it's good practice to contact each of the speakers before they leave the room.