APA Virtual Meetings: Advice for Chairs

Adapted from a guide by Bradford Cokelet

As chair, your job is mainly organizational—to help the session run smoothly, professionally, and pleasantly. Chairing is a great low-stakes way to get used to professional meetings and service.

**Before the Session**

- **Read the paper(s) and come up with a backup question or two.** These should be designed to open up space for the person to talk in case questions are slow to come in or die out early. No need to do research (unless you want to). Just take an interest in the topic and come up with a reflectively revised question or two.

- **Email participants about a week before the event.** Introduce yourself with name and affiliation. Say you think it would be good to touch base before the event. Ask:
  - How would you like to be introduced (name, title, affiliation, etc.)?
  - Do you want a reminder of time left? If you do, do you prefer a chat message, a text message, or a card being held up in my video? More than one reminder?
  - How would you like me to run the Q&A? Do you want to call on people or shall I? Do you want to use chat or allow people to unmute themselves?
  - Ask for contact info for day of in case of emergency (e.g., if the person does not log in as planned).

- After you hear back, devise a Q&A Plan, including a plan for how to use the chat function. See the APA’s Virtual Meetings: Instructions for Program Participants for more on Q&A.

- **Email everyone the Q&A plan** as soon as it’s ready and say you are of course open to changes before the day of the event.

- **Register for the meeting and go to the Virtual Meeting Hub.** Once you’re signed into the virtual meeting hub, find the session(s) you’re chairing and star (favorite) them. This will create a tab in the meeting schedule with your starred sessions, making it easy to find them during the meeting.

- **Get all participants’ papers and comments in written form in advance.** That way, if someone can’t present during the live session (for example, if their internet connection fails or they get sick), you or another participant can read their paper/comments.

- **Find out whether any participants plan to pre-record their presentations.** If so, make sure to plan who will play the recording during the session, and have them send you the video just in case.

**Day of Session**

**Set up**

- Log in 15 minutes before start time.

- Your session should have a session host who will make sure that everything goes smoothly. (In some cases, you may be asked both session host and chair.)
• You should see an option to “Join as Co-Host” and an option to “Join as Attendee.” Select “Join as Co-Host.” If you only have “Join as Attendee,” use that and the session host will let you in from the waiting room and make you a co-host.

Prep with participants
• Once all arrive, say hello and mention the minutes left until the session’s start time.
• Go over logistics: speaking order, time for each person’s remarks, Q&A plan, etc.
• Ask each person to pronounce their name so you can pronounce it correctly when introducing them. Practice pronouncing names as needed.
• At start time, the session host will let attendees in from the waiting room. Welcome everyone and introduce the speaker(s): name, institution, and title of paper (short and sweet).

Keep time
• You are the timekeeper. Watch the time and do the time reminders as planned.
• If a speaker goes over, be ready to gently interrupt. You may let it go a minute or so at first and try to remind them time is up (via chat or whatever method you agreed upon in advance). If you do have to interrupt, say something like, “I am very sorry to interrupt but I wanted to encourage you to wrap up so we have time for some questions.”
• Introduce the commenters in the way you did the main paper, and keep time the same way too.

Facilitate Q&A
• You oversee the Q&A portion of the session. Consider starting with a short summary of how Q&A will be run (e.g., submit questions via chat, use Zoom raise hand function). It can be good to do this at the start of the session and then again when it’s time for Q&A.
• If questions are slow to come in, ask one of the backup questions you prepared.
• If lots of people want to ask questions, mention how many are waiting and the minutes remaining.
• When selecting question(er)s, keep in mind the value of calling on people you think will ask good questions and the value of calling on a diverse group (women, people of color, grad students, etc).
• Be on top of unmuting and muting as needed.
• From the APA’s Virtual Meetings: Instructions for Program Participants: “Chairs are empowered to interrupt or mute questioners that go on too long, ask inappropriate questions, or otherwise violate professional norms or the Q&A rules established for the session.”
• If questioners are waiting and one goes on a long time with their question, tactfully remind them (and others) to be brief. For example, you might say: “Before the next question, I want to note that X people are waiting to ask questions, so everyone please try to be brief.”

End session
• From Instructions for Program Participants: “Chairs will also be responsible for ending the session, since the session host will usually need to leave a few minutes before the end of the session.”
• To end the session, close the Zoom window and click the “End Meeting for All” button. If you only have a “Leave Meeting” button, click that instead.