

Guidelines for Session Chairs at Digital Humanities Conferences

Approved by the ADHO Steering Committee on June 18, 2011

Sessions of submitted papers normally consist of three presentations which have been placed in the same session by the Program Committee (PC). Papers should be timed to last 15-20 minutes and allow an additional 5-10 minutes for questions; the other fifteen minutes in the session are meant to allow for introductions, changing speakers, etc. Some sessions are proposed as panels, and these are normally chaired by the proposer. Chairs for regular sessions will be appointed by the PC. Chairs, in either case, should get in touch with speakers well before the conference starts.

General meeting support should be provided by the local organizer, to make sure that local equipment is functional, that there is water for speakers, etc.

The presentations are normally made in the order that they appear in the programme, and presenters should be introduced briefly by name and affiliation, by the session chair.

The principle responsibility of the session chair is to start the session promptly and keep speakers to the agreed-upon schedule. If a session unavoidably starts a few minutes late, each presenter should still be allowed 20 minutes. As far as possible, session chairs should do their best to keep their session synchronized with others, so that sessions begin and end at the same time. Presentations that run long unfairly reduce the time of other speakers and encroach on time that is intended for questions from the audience.

It is normal to take questions at the end of each paper rather than at the end of the entire session, but the session chair, in consultation with the panelists, may elect to hold questions to the end of the session. In any case, speakers should still observe the 20-minute time-limit. The chair will hold up one 5-minute warning at 15 minutes in, and one 1-minute warning at 19 minutes in; if the speaker has not concluded at the 20-minute mark, the chair should intervene, in order to allow questions or start the next presentation.

If there are scheduled presenters who do not show up at the conference, and no other presenter has been added to the session, the chair has discretion whether to finish early or leave a gap. Finishing early may seem preferable from the point of view of those already in the room, but leaving a gap in the session will benefit those who plan to attend the second or third paper in a session.

The chair should always be prepared to ask a question or two of each presenter, in case no one else does. And finally, the chair should remember to thank all the participants and the audience at the end of the session.