Moderators and Discussant Guidelines for the Virtual Conference

MODERATOR

As a moderator, your job is to oversee and facilitate a session at the conference. You will serve as host, welcome attendees, introduce participants, segue between presentations, and handle questions from the audience – while keeping everyone on time.

Before the Conference

Learn more about the session format and time allotments. If it’s a panel, check with the panel organizer to find out if separate presentations will be given or the session will be an open discussion.

Typically, traditional refereed research sessions have four presenters for 90-minute session, in which each presenter is allotted 10-12 minutes. The remaining time is divided between the discussant and audience questions.

For a high-density session or panel, check with the Division/Interest Group head for the preferred format.

Once you know the format, email presenters in your session with a reminder of the format and specify the amount of time they will have for their presentations. Ask about preferred names and pronunciation, as well as pronouns.

Preparing for the Virtual Session

Before the session begins, you should have three items in front of you:

1. The conference program for introducing session participants.
2. A time-keeping device
3. Cards that indicate how much time remains (5 minutes, 2 minutes, 1 minute, STOP)

Using the conference platform, enter the Zoom session 5 minutes prior to the session to test audio and video for yourself. As your presenters enter the session, resolve any technical difficulties and let them know the cues you will use to indicate time.

An AEJMC staff member will be in the Zoom session and transfer the hosting duties to you. Everyone will have screen-sharing and audio/video capabilities.

Throughout the session, watch for any unprofessional behavior. (Note: AEJMC staff will also be in the sessions and will have the authority to remove anyone who is unprofessional.)

Welcoming and Logistics

At the appointed time, welcome everyone to the session. Provide a quick overview to attendees of Zoom logistics and etiquette. Remind people to stay muted until the appointed Q&A time, point out the chat feature (lower toolbar of Zoom window) which will enable them to ask
questions at the end of the session. You may also wish to point out the “reaction” feature on the toolbar which they can also use to raise their hand, provide a thumbs up or applause for speakers. (You may encourage attendees to use the chat box for questions and submit these when they think of them, as these can serve as the order of questions to be answered when the Q&A portion of the session starts. You can take the questions in the order they appear and just read them aloud for presenters to answer.)

Then introduce the first presenter(s). During presentations, you need to KEEP TIME and monitor the chat (questions answered after presentations and the discussant finish).

**Q&A**
Monitor the chat box feature in Zoom for questions that come in. Use this as your starting point for questions to ask of presenters. (Attendees can stay muted this way, too.) In addition, watch for raised hand icons, as some people may ask this way as well (or even raise their physical hands in their video window).

**Wrapping Things Up**
Once all speakers have gone, the discussant has spoken, and the Q&A portion is complete, thank everyone for their contributions and for attending. Then end the session on Zoom. (Be sure to end on time, as the next session needs to enter the Zoom room and get set up.)

**Tips for Moderating**
- Be organized. Enter the session early, know who you need to introduce, and how the session will run.
- Act as a facilitator. Your objective is to create a smooth session, not to offer opinions on papers or let the session drift into an audience member’s storytime. Be polite, but also take charge.
- Enforce time limits! Give your time cues. If a presenter won’t stop talking at TIME, you should politely end the presentation (“That’s all the time we have, thank you.”) Nothing is ruder than when one presenter dominates a session, eating up the time of other participants.

**DISCUSSANT**
As a discussant, you provide constructive feedback to paper presenters and serve as the segue between presentations and audience discussion.

**Preparing for the Virtual Session**
Prior to the conference, read the papers for your assigned session (available through All-Academic). Make notes as you read.

When you’ve read all of the papers in the session, create talking points for yourself of the shared traits across papers. Distinguish between what you plan to say during the session and what feedback you intend to share privately.
As with other participant roles, try to be on Zoom early (3 min.) to test audio and video for yourself. Ensure your moderator can hear and see you fine. Then mute your microphone and keep it muted until it is your appointed time to speak. For general information about using Zoom, please see the AEJMC Best Practices.

Your Role in the Session

For traditional paper sessions, panels, and colloquia, once the other speakers have presented, the moderator will introduce you and you can share your feedback. Your job is to highlight commonalities across papers, provide at least one positive attribute for each paper, and then give 1-2 constructive recommendations or questions. Do not use this time to give detailed feedback (send it in an email) or to provide overly-critical suggestions.

Be sure to unmute yourself first. Once you are done, mute yourself again.

Discussants at the Scholar-to-Scholar (poster) sessions will individually give feedback to presenters in their breakout sessions (available through the conference platform).

Tips for Serving as a Discussant

- Be prepared. Read the papers before the session. If you have difficulty accessing them, email either the author or the research chair. Outline what you’d like to say in the session.
- Your discussant speaking part should not consist of a list of the paper’s flaws. If you’d like to offer detailed, constructive feedback, email the author after the session with suggestions.
- Feedback should be helpful. Don’t focus on what you would have done and definitely don’t embarrass authors.
- Set the tone for the audience Q & A with positive, reflective comments that don’t use up all of the remaining time.
- Embrace your role! Your recommendations matter as authors transform conference papers into journal submissions.