

# Guidelines for session chairpersons <sup>1</sup>

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## **Introduction**

This document aims to provide some basic information on the tasks a chairperson should ensure during a conference session. If the chairperson is also the rapporteur, he/she should read the companion document describing the tasks of a session rapporteur. However, as much as possible, it is recommended to have two persons, one for each position.

The main objective of the chairperson consists to manage the conference session in a smooth way and a kind atmosphere, by introducing the session and the speakers, by facilitating and managing answers from the audience and answers from the speakers, and by keeping the time schedule.

## **Before the session**

### **Reading the papers**

The chairperson should read the papers of the conference session he/she will chair. This will help him/her to introduce the session, to know its content and how some links and transitions may be suggested between the papers, and to prepare some questions for the authors.

### **Collecting information about speakers**

As the chairperson will have to introduce the speakers during the session, it is recommended to collect some basic information about them : name and first name (always check with speakers how to pronounce properly their name and first name, especially for speakers who are coming from regions of the world the chairperson is not familiar with), institution, diploma and/or cursus, present and (if appropriate) former positions, mains research interests and activities, activities in national or international working groups, etc.

### **Checking presentation supports**

Typically a half-day before the session (and at least 30 minutes for the first session), the chairperson should ask the speakers to check that everything is OK with their presentation : overheads and overhead projector, slides, PowerPoint files and computers, etc. Frequently,

(1) Published in "Sewer networks and processes within urban water systems" (Bertrand-Krajewski et al., editors).  
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this checking is made with a specific person from the conference staff, but it is the responsibility of the chairperson to remember this to the speakers. In case of problems, he/she will have to re-organise the session.

## **During the session**

### **Checking the presence of all speakers**

Typically 10 minutes before the session, the chairperson should be present in the conference room and check that all speakers are present with ready material and supports. This is the last moment to re-organise the session if necessary. It is also the moment to remember the speakers how much time they have for their oral presentations.

### **Introducing the session**

When it is time to start the session, the chairperson should ask for silence if necessary, welcome the audience, declare the session opened, and give some words to present very briefly its topics and its main themes. The chairperson should also explain (if necessary) if questions will be asked after each presentation or grouped after the full set of presentations.

### **Introducing the presentations**

For each presentation, the chairperson should introduce the speaker (with the information collected previously) and his/her presentation. During this short introduction (1 minute maximum), the first speaker of the session should open his/her PowerPoint file or prepare his/her overheads.

### **Watching at time**

The chairperson is in charge of keeping the time schedule. If some speakers speak too long, the last ones will have less time, or the sessions will not end on due time, or it will lead to problems if participants want to listen to presentations in parallel sessions. Keeping time is thus a very critical aspect.

When approx. only 2 minutes remain for the speaker, the chairperson should inform him/her about that (by oral announcement, or by showing a sheet of paper, or by any other appropriate means). And when allocated time is elapsed, the chairperson has, if necessary, to ask the speaker to conclude. The chairperson should do this kindly, but firmly. In case the speaker is not able to conclude after 1 or 2 additional minutes, the chairperson has to stop him/her.

### **Discussion**

After the speaker has finished his/her presentation, the chairperson should open the discussion phase and ask if some participants have questions or comments about the presentation. If no questions are asked during the next seconds, the chairperson may start himself/herself: this is the reason why it is important for him/her to have prepared some questions in advance after having read the papers.

The chairperson should look carefully at the audience in order to look at participants who want to ask questions, and to give them their turn to ask questions. Under some circumstances, the chairperson should re-formulate some questions or help for mutual understanding when participants and speakers are facing to translation problems.

The chairperson should ask the participants to introduce themselves briefly (name, institution, city and/or country) before they ask their questions.

If a microphone is necessary to ask questions, the chairperson should wait until the participant has access to the microphone before he/she asks his/her question, so that all the audience can understand it clearly.

The chairperson should keep questions and answer under control. Questions or comments should be relatively short in time, and answers from the speakers too.

The chairperson should also stop questions on due time, to keep the time schedule for the next speakers or the next sessions. If many participants want to ask questions and if sufficient time is not available, the chairperson should decide when the last question will be asked and should announce this to the audience : “Sorry, this will be the last question”, before to give his/her turn to the participant authorised to ask the last question. If many questions are pending, it is kind to suggest that participants may meet the speaker after the session. At the end of the questions, he should thank the speaker and start to introduce the next one.

During the last question, the next speaker of the session should open his/her PowerPoint file or prepare his/her overheads.

## **At the end of the session**

### **Closure of the session**

After the last answer to the last question, the chairperson should close the session. A traditional way to do this consists to thank all speakers for their presentations and all participants for their questions and comments.

Afterwards, and depending on the context, the chairperson should :

- announce the duration and time of the end of the coffee break or of the lunch
- announce the time at which the next session will start
- make some announcements as asked by conference organisers, other chairpersons, etc.