

Moderation Guide

Overview

Moderators are panelists who are designated to provide structure for and to lead panel discussions. Moderators are encouraged to participate fully in the conversation if a panel has 4 or fewer panelists. If a panel has 5 or more people, the moderator should primarily act as a guide for the discussion, but can make some contributions. Unless otherwise noted, panels at Chicon 8 are intended to be 60 minutes long within a 90 minute time slot. Please ensure that your panels finish by the 60 minute mark so that the room has some time to air out between sessions. (Airing out the rooms is part of our COVID-19 precautions). If audience members want to talk to panelists after the panel, please direct them to take conversations to areas outside of the panel room.

Timeline of Moderator Duties

- Pre-Con - Discuss the panel with the panelists via email
- At-Con, In the Green Room, Pre Panel - Meet with the panelists
- At Con, In the Panel Room, Pre Panel - Pick your seat, facilitate the panelist mic checks
- At Con, In the Panel Room, At the Start of the Panel - Announce the title and topic, state your comment/question policy, facilitate the panelist introductions
- At Con, In the Panel Room, During the Panel - keep the panel on track, make sure panelists get equal opportunities to participate, repeat/rephrase audience questions into the mic, contact Op / Tech / Program Ops if required.
- At Con, In the Panel Room, At the End of the Panel - Wrap up the panel, end the panel on time.
- At Con, In the Panel Room, After the Panel - encourage people to continue any conversations outside of the panel room

Pre-Con

Before the convention starts, moderators should have contacted the other participants by email to address any concerns and to share any resources (useful links, recommended watching/reading, etc) that are relevant to the panel. This email can outline questions the moderator might like to open with and ask if the panelists have topics they'd like to discuss or have questions that they'd like to ask. Most panels are intended as discussions, led by the moderator - if your panel will have a different format, discuss it with your panelists in advance and make a plan. Let them know that they should keep their introductions on the panel brief. You should also let the participants know of any ground rules you may have, for example don't just promote your own books, don't talk over other speakers whether on the panel or in the audience, etc.

In the Green Room

Please meet in the Green Room (**Water Tower**) 30-40 minutes before the panel if you are able. Break the ice with the panelists, continue the pre-con discussion (if you were able to have one), or touch base about what you want to discuss if you can. It is good to quickly review panel description, purpose and format with the participants even if you have already done this. Please check with the participants if there are any topics to avoid. Please do not add anyone to panels at the con without checking with Program Ops. You should start making your way over to the panel room 10-20 minutes before the panel start time, depending on its location in the hotel.

Beginning of the Panel

Start the panel with an appropriate greeting and the title of the panel, introduce yourself and give a brief description of the subject. Please be aware, there are access spaces for mobies/wheelchairs, and access seating people who need to sit near the front. However, if these are empty as the panel begins, they may be used by people without access needs, but be aware if anyone with access needs arrives during the panel, these spaces should be available for them. In addition, please ask the audience to keep the isles and doors clear for safety reasons. From here, let the participants provide brief introductions, and move the panel along if they take too long. As discussed in the Green Room, they should keep their introductions brief and you should be ready to jump in with a quick “thank you.” and move immediately to the next person or begin the panel.

As everyone is sitting down, make sure you are in the seat you prefer. You may ask panelists to move if need be. If you are in a seat where you feel you cannot best fulfil the job of moderator the panel will not go as well as it could. If you sit at the end, make sure you aren't too focused on those nearest you. If you are in the middle, make a point to check both sides frequently. If some panelists have not been saying much, turn to them and ask if there's anything they'd like to add. If they say they haven't, don't press them, thank them and move on. If you establish a pattern of going to each panelist in turn early, they tend to continue to follow that pattern, better ensuring everyone has a chance to speak.

Microphone use

Remind panelists to project their voices towards the microphones if they are not doing so - this is an accessibility issue! Our microphones should be set up for passive pickup, and we would like participants to avoid touching them unless necessary. In some larger rooms, a Tech person will be available to solve any microphone issue. Pay attention to the Tech person in case they signal that a panelist is inaudible or is too loud. Often this can be fixed by adjusting distance from the microphone. If a Tech person is not available and the microphones are not working in your panel room, please report this issue to Program Ops, which can be done by texting or calling **(253-317-0011)**. Facing the audience instead of the other participants can be challenging when it is a conversational atmosphere, but gentle reminders to speak to the audience work well. Facing the audience is even more important if the microphones are not working.

During the Q&A most rooms will NOT have a microphone for audience questions, so you will need to repeat questions from the audience to ensure everyone hears them. You can rephrase questions for clarity and brevity, but please try and keep the intent of the question being asked.

During the panel

Stay engaged in the conversation and take notes if needed. Make sure all panelists have equal opportunity to participate in the conversation - this does not mean giving all panelists exactly equal time (for example, some people may choose to be brief rather than verbose) but rather ensuring no panelist is overlooked or one person dominates the conversation. Pay special attention to making sure that you are maximizing the inclusion of diverse voices among both panelists and audience, such as People of Color or those of other genders on mostly male panels (or other combinations).

If you have some pre-prepared questions you want to ask panelists, it is usually best to let them know these questions in advance. We often find that most panels work best as a free flowing discussion where participants are able to present their relevant ideas and opinions, rather than having a rigid structure strictly determined by the moderator. However, you should try to prevent

the discussion from drifting away from the topic. Be firm but fair when redirecting people. If someone goes off-topic into a subject that you know is covered at another panel, you can plug that panel then steer the discussion back on course. Another useful tip is to use the phrase “That’s a subject for another panel.” to help get back on track. While someone is off-topic, think of a question you can use to bring the topic back on course. Having this ready immediately after you say “that’s a subject for another panel” or whatever phrase you use to indicate you’ve gone off-topic will ensure there’s no off-topic follow-up and help prevent hurt feelings that a silence after might engender.

If there is a disturbance (like someone continuing to record a session that has been designated not to allow recording, or there is an unrelenting heckler in the audience), you are empowered and encouraged to contact Ops (convention operations) via text or voice call at **312-970-0880**. You may also ask the person to leave.

Managing panelists

Common difficulties with panelists include talking over others, going off topic, monopolizing the conversation, or otherwise impeding the flow of the discussion. As the moderator, it is your duty to politely interrupt them and redirect to another panelist, especially if there’s one who hasn’t had a chance to respond to the question yet. Gentle humor can be a good method for interrupting if you are good at such things. Alternatively, you can always bring up another topic with a different panelist as a way to get the rest of the group back into the discussion. Don't let panelists (including yourself!) pursue individual agendas unless they are directly on topic. This includes extended sales pitches for individual author’s books - although brief mentions of their own work and how it applies to the topic are of course encouraged.

If a panelist or audience member makes a bigoted statement of some kind, interrupt immediately and ask another question or move to another panelist. If they continue or do it again, you can stop letting them participate and can report the incident to the Code of Conduct team via text or voice call at **312-970-0886**.

Including the audience

Allow time for questions, but don't let individual audience members monopolize the panel or drag it away from the topic. Be clear if you are accepting both questions and comments, or just one or the other. If the audience member has a very long-winded statement or question, interrupting by either asking the panelists what they think, repeating the gist of the question or comment for the benefit of the audience, or repeating the gist of it to the audience member and saying “do I have that right?” and then turning to the panelists can help ensure that more audience members get to participate in the question time.

Announce at the beginning of the panel if questions will be at the end or encouraged during the panel. Have a method for audience members to let you know if they have a question other than yelling it out (unless that’s the theme of the panel). If people are raising their hands, either try to remember the order in which they raised them or take notes so you don’t skip people. If you can think of a way for people who cannot raise their hands to indicate they have a question, announce this at the beginning as well.

When you do call on the audience for questions, avoid gendered language (“sir”, “miss”, “girl/boy”). Don't assume that the audience member can see you pointing at them, either. Using clothing as

identifiers can be a good technique (blue shirt, red corset, TARDIS dress), but do NOT use assistive devices ("person in the wheelchair") and do not assume that an unusual outfit is a costume. Avoid judgment-based descriptors like "weird" or "unusual" as what might be foreign to you may be commonplace in the person's culture - this is a Worldcon after all!

While having a general idea of who raised their hand or otherwise signaled, try and make sure that people from all over the audience get to speak. Try and prioritize people of color and non-men to ensure you don't end up with just white men participating. Just as you want a diverse panel, you want diverse audience participation. This isn't to say don't let white men speak, it is to make sure you don't run out of time before others get to speak also.

While you should try to keep the program on track, don't let any of these guidelines cause you to stop a discussion which is interesting to both the panel and audience! Sometimes panels end up in different places than were intended, but still fulfill the "big picture" goal of providing interesting and thought-provoking content.

If your panel will be on a sensitive topic (Writing the other, ask a queer/trans person or the like) it might be a good idea to ask audience members to submit questions in writing so the moderator can choose if they should be shared or phrase them more appropriately. Bringing notecards for this purpose can be helpful.

If audience members begin asking an insensitive, bigoted, or otherwise offensive question, even if they don't realize that's what they are doing, interrupt and either state that it isn't appropriate and move to someone else, or if they've asked enough to have a real question, restate their question more inclusively and ask the panel.

Do not let the panel become an argument or a fight between the audience and the panel or between audience members. You are there to guide the conversation, so shut down any contentious back and forth and move on.

Wrapping up

We expect to have program ops runners notifying you with a sign in the back of the panel room when you have approximately 10 minutes left in your allotted 60 minute panel, but please keep an eye on the time in case they aren't able to make it over to your room. Consider asking a summing-up question near the end of your allotted time, like asking your panelists something forward-looking about what changes they see ahead (if applicable) or what they might be looking forward to regarding the given subject. Then, bring the panel gracefully to a close when your time is up. Remember to thank everyone!

This moderation guide has been heavily influenced by the moderation guides from Capricon, Arisia, and Dublin 2019. We thank them for the use of their content.