Suggestions for Organizers of Conferences

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1. Either Encourage or Discourage Switching between Sessions

For parellel sessions, it is good to either choose to

(1) facilitate switching during sessions

or choose to

(2) disencourage switching during sessions—switching is at own risk.

I recommend (2).

If (1), then for every lecture plan half a minute extra time at the end to switch sessions. And, if (1), then instruct chairmen, if speaker ends to soon or does not show up, to not immediately continue with the next speaker. Instead, wait, and let the next speaker start only at the scheduled time.

If (2), then no time lost for switching. Then instruct chairmen to immediately let next speaker start when ahead of schedule.

Better announce (1) or (2) beforehand, rather than have every chairman and every audience discuss what to do whenever the occasion arises again.

2. Time Planning of Lectures

Instruct speakers and chairmen that at the end of the lecture some specified time is left for questions. Announce that chairmen will enforce it (e.g. by standing up when question time starts).

If lazy organizers say "we leave it to the speakers" then speakers will use up all time, as people prefer talking themselves rather than having others talk. But, lectures without audience-reactions are boring. If organizers say it too weakly, "we recommend/suggest …" then speakers will still use up all time. The main task of organizers/chairmen is to firmly protect the audience against the speaker.

3. Not Getting behind Schedule

This is achieved by the chairmen forcing speakers to start (their time starts running) as scheduled, also if many listeners are late. The speaker then is the victim, but this cannot be avoided. Waiting for late audience leads down a slippery slope.

Start opening session on time, despite many arriving late. If organizers themselves are late already here, then they lose credibility when asking others to keep to the schedule.

One minute before the end of breaks, give a signal with a bell or loud voice/clapping hands.

4. Various before Conference

Do not ask for extended abstracts. The better selection of good lectures, and composing an abstract book (that will not be read) are not worth the time investment of extended abstracts. Ask only for submission of papers or abstracts available anyhow, thus not taking extra time. If 200 participants spend an hour each writing an extended abstract, 5 weeks of labor is lost, imposing too big a loss on the field.
Efficient Paper Selection. Don't let juries score submissions for selection because this takes too much jury time. Let one (unidentified) experienced organizer or volunteer do virtually all of the selection, asking advice only for some difficult cases.
Name batches. Best at breast level, and not at belly level. Use safety-pin/hooks and not ribbons. Name big, affiliation small.

Announce that default no printed versions of the program will be handed out. People who want printed versions, will download and print beforehand. Only have a few paper copies available at the start of the conference for the few who ask for it.

5. Various During Conference

Questions during lectures. Default is that short questions, mainly for clarification, can be during the lecture. General questions come at the end. But do not forbid questions during lecture (more lively). The chairman interrupts inefficient questions. Be considerate of young presenters. People asking should not embark on long discussions, or on technical issues incomprehensible to the rest.

Lectures not too long. Plenary lecture no more than one hour, preferably 45 minutes.
Parallel sessions. With x sessions in series (depth of conference) of y parallel papers each (breadth of conference), x determines the audience per lecture. Don't take x too small. Here it helps to have lectures short.
After each question immediately its answer. Holds both for questions from audience and from discussants.
Clichés to be avoided:

- Questions from the audience are not preceded by compliments ("nice talk Joe").
- Questions from the audience are not rewarded ("good question").
- Speakers, including plenary speakers, do not thank organizers or audience.
- Chairmen do not say that sessions are exciting.

Discussants: help speaker to clarify message, and audience to position contribution (here criticisms can come). **Do not speak about own work or start another lecture.** Make at least one positive and one negative comment. Avoid clichés such as "well-written" and "I learned a lot." Be considerate of young presenters.
No first names: use family names. First names suggest inbreed with no concern for outsiders.
When socializing, don't speak long about own work. Usually, if you ask someone what they work on, they embark on a 15-minutes continuous and detailed speech, forgetting all about who you are. Don't make the same mistake.
Prepare your lecture well because ... Then you get feedback and marketing-info. Not if badly prepared. Then waste of everybody's time, **including your own**.
Installing files: copy onto presentation computer way before session. Have file both in memory stick and on internet.
Chairmen do not read titles of lectures aloud.