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## Guidelines for Moderators, Discussants and Presenters



### Guidelines for Presenters, Moderators and Discussants (competitive paper sessions)

The APMAA conference consists of plenary sessions, panel sessions, parallel sessions and company and cultural visits. APMAA parallel sessions comprise two types of sessions: competitive paper sessions and development paper sessions.

*For competitive paper sessions*, presentations are organized into topic areas. Papers in this session are presented sequentially in 30-minute presentation blocks (**15 min.** presentation, **10 min.** discussion, **5 min.** Q&A). Each presenter's final written paper is available in the conference USB proceedings to participants. All presentation session rooms have PC, screens and data projectors. **Overhead projectors for transparencies are not provided** in the rooms.

#### Competitive Paper Sessions

Each session is either 90 min. (3 presenters, 1 moderator and 3 discussants), or 60 min. (2 presenters, 1 moderator and 2 discussants).

Each **presenter** is allocated **15 min.** for presentation. (About 10-15 slides).

The **moderator** coordinates the session. If a discussant does not show up, the moderator must discuss papers instead. Therefore, he/she should prepare discussion slides for all three papers.

Each **discussant** is allocated **10 min.** for discussion. (About 7-10 slides).

Here we provide guidelines for presenters, moderators and discussants that are beneficial to all, including audiences.

#### 1. PRESENTER GUIDELINES (Time allocation: 15 minutes)

##### *Preparation:*

- During your **15-minute** paper presentation, be sure to state the structure and main points of your argument explicitly and clearly at the outset and again in the summary. Your slides should contain only what is necessary to help the audience follow the key points of the paper.
- Rehearse your presentation out loud several times, if possible in front of a listener who can give you feedback on both form and content.

- Native speakers of English need to avoid speaking too fast or colloquially; non-native speakers should enunciate clearly so that any foreign accent does not impair comprehension.
- Spend most of the time on results, discussion, and conclusions
- Concisely describe your method
- Go very lightly on the literature

*PPT presentation:*

- Be a guide to the audience rather than piling on facts. Do not overwhelm people with a lot of tables that take time to interpret.
- DON'T put material on a slide that only the people in the front rows can read.
- Font sizes smaller than 28pt will likely be unreadable.
- DON'T use full sentences on your slides or write out your entire talk on your slides.

*Time management:*

- Make sure your talk fits into the allotted 15 minutes of your presentation.
- DO stop at the end of the allotted time, even if you have content left.
- No matter how hard you worked on your last few slides, the audience would rather have time for discussion.
- The session moderator in the room will have to cut your talk short, should it run over, to ensure all presenters in the session are allotted their full presentation time.
- The conference needs to keep on schedule.
- Arrive early and make yourself known to your discussant and session moderator.

## 2. MODERATOR GUIDELINES

**Role:** Session moderators introduce the speakers, keep time for the presentations, and facilitate the discussion. Describe the process followed in the session. Tell people how many papers will be presented, how much time each presentation will be and also at what point questions will be possible. Keep your comments to a minimum other than introducing presenters. You should go last if you are presenting your own paper during the session you are moderating, even if you need to change the order from the program. **If a discussant does not show up, the moderator must discuss papers instead.**

*Time management:*

- Make sure there is time for reasonable presentation and discussion and to finish on time.
- Bring along time cards large enough that the presenter can see. Have a 5-minute card and a time-is-up card. Even if it is a bit uncomfortable be firm with presenters who continue past the allowed time.
- Begin on time. Start with a welcome message to the audiences, including a clear statement of the session title. Therefore, you should prepare discussion slides for all three papers.

## 2. DISCUSSANT GUIDELINES (Time allocation: 10 minutes)

**Role:** If you are well-prepared, it will greatly enhance the paper session, so please spend the time needed for careful analysis. Please prepare PPT slides for your comments. Mention both the strengths of a paper and areas for improvement. It is difficult to make points that are both useful for the authors as well as being interesting to the audience. Avoid “insider” discussions that probe small details of a paper.

*Time management:* These are best given to the author in written notes or outside discussion over tea. You have 10 (5) minutes for discussion. Finish on time!

The following material is a good guide. There are other guides that may also be of help if you search for them on the internet.

### ////////// **Tips on Being a Good Discussant** //////////

(Excerpt from the Economic Scholars Program

<https://www.dallasfed.org/~/media/documents/educate/events/esp/tipsdiscussant.pdf>)

Developing the skills of a good discussant pays off in several ways. It is something that you are often asked to do. The same skills that you develop to be a good discussant will also be used in your future responsibility as a journal referee. Learning how to read other papers with the critical eye of a good discussant will help you improve your own writing.

*As a discussant, you have two main responsibilities.*

1. Help those in the audience better understand the paper. You have read the paper very carefully and have taken the time to understand the paper’s contributions, its strengths and weaknesses and its most salient points that need to be conveyed to the audience.
2. Help the author. What’s your reaction to the paper and why? What can the author do to improve the paper?

*There are various strategies to follow in forming your discussion. Here are some tips.*

**Stay on time.** There is a time limit on your portion of the presentation. This time limit is firm. Prepare your remarks in advance, practice them and be concise.

**Briefly summarize the paper’s main message and its contribution.** The presenter must spend a good deal of time developing the ideas in the paper, carefully presenting the steps in the argument and reporting the main findings. Sometimes, the audience gets lost in the detail. On one slide, summarize the paper’s main contribution, which will capture the essence of the paper for the audience. If the presenter gives a good summary, you can abbreviate this step of the discussion, but remember that a summary is almost always welcomed. If the presenter was confusing, then your summary is often the best way for the audience to follow the paper’s contribution, and you may need to spend a bit more time on summarizing the paper.

**Describe how the paper fits into the literature.** Usually, this is clear from your summary of the paper's main message and its contribution and does not require any further elaboration. However, sometimes there are important references that the paper does not mention or entire literatures are ignored. In other circumstances, you may wish to point out that the paper's message is applicable beyond the narrow focus described in the paper.

**Evaluate if the paper makes its case.** Almost every paper in its introduction claims its contribution. Are the claims convincing? Are there problems with specific parts of the argument? For example, "It succeeds in making points 1–5 but not 6–8." If problems exist, identify them. Is it a mistake in economics, mathematics, data analysis or interpretation?

**Describe any unique aspects of the paper.** Is there a particularly useful and interesting approach in the paper? If the paper introduces you to a new technique or interesting data set and you think that it will be useful in other applications, and then share it with the audience.

**Simplify the paper's technical contribution if unduly difficult to understand.** Sometimes a paper's results are hard to understand. There may be a lot of technical detail that obscures the intuition behind a result. Something may seem counterintuitive at first, but not, if you look at it in a different way. You may be able to make the main points in a way that highlights clearly what's going on in the paper. This is very hard to pull off but can be a great help to the audience. It's good training for you to think about just what you need and do not need to convey the paper's findings.

**Make suggestions on how to improve the paper.** Do you think the paper could be strengthened by changing it in some direction? Are there obvious directions for future research? Try to be specific. It's not helpful to make very general or vague recommendations, so be clear and concise.

**Focus on the big picture.** Do not get bogged down in details. A typical discussion lasts ten minutes, which allows you time for four to five slides. Decide what needs to be said and focus on making your points to the audience and author on those slides. Try to distil your discussion to one or two important points and use most of your time in discussing them. After the seminar is usually the best time to go over the small but useful comments and corrections, including spelling errors, incorrect citations, etc. Don't waste your discussion time going over minutiae unless the paper includes no substantive points and is poorly written.

**Be constructive.** Authors need feedback on their work. Was something missed? Is something obviously wrong? Is the work interesting? And, most importantly, how can the paper be improved? Again, many small suggestions are best handled in a private conversation between you and the author after the seminar, but if one or two are particularly clever, then you can share them with the audience. Above all, try to avoid making unhelpful criticism. Substantiate your criticism.

**Do not apologize for being a poor choice to discuss the paper.** Over time, we all get asked to discuss papers that are not in our immediate area of expertise. Just do the best you can without apologizing. If the paper was delivered to you very late, or if the paper presented has undergone major changes from the draft the author sent you, then the presenter should apologize to you and the audience and should let everyone know that you were not given the tools to properly do your job. If the presenter does not offer you this courtesy, then you may explain. For example, “I haven’t seen this draft of the paper, so some of my comments may no longer be relevant.”

**Get down to business.** In preparation of your discussant role, you may find helpful the following suggestions:

Make a list initially of all of the paper’s sections, tables, figures, etc., and the approximate number of pages devoted to each.

Read the paper once just to form an initial impression of what each section does and how they fit together.

Make a list of things that you particularly notice or questions you have.

Read the paper again making a new list in response to your first list. (Some questions may go away upon the second reading.)

Work through each equation and table, making sure that you can either reproduce the math or verify the calculations and, most importantly, you understand the result.

Jot down ideas for a potential extension or anything else that seems unusual or interesting.

Read a few of the background papers from the references to get a better idea of how the paper fits into the literature.

Review all your notes and develop a discussion outline.

Set the paper aside if time permits.

Prepare your remarks after reading the paper once again. Make sure you have concisely summarized the paper and your remarks are relevant and helpful. If you are not sure, read the paper and citations again until you are confident.

Prepare your slides with only the most important details/equations/results/etc.

Be happy with a preparation well done.

**What you should do during the presentation.**

Pay careful attention to the paper’s presenter and try to adjust your comments to create a natural flow from presentation to discussion. This will require modification on your part. Do what you feel comfortable with. For example, if the presenter makes a point particularly well, you will probably not want to spend much time on it. On the other hand, if an important idea was not well presented and you feel confident in addressing it, by all means do so.