Guidelines for session chairs – SEFI 2025

SEFI is grateful that you are willing to take the role of session chair. These guidelines are intended to help you preparing for and carrying out successful sessions. We would like to thank you for your effort!

OBJECTIVES

- Set a respectful, professional, welcoming tone.
- Help keep the audience engaged in the topics being presented.
- Make sure the session runs smoothly and on time.
- Facilitate respectful Q&A and discussions.
- Be prepared to ask questions of a presenter if the audience has no questions.
- Show appreciation for presenters.
- Manage issues and challenges that arise during the session.

1. PREPARE the session

- Read SEFI's Code of Conduct.
- Gather basic information needed to introduce the speakers properly.
- Learn how technology will be handled and familiarize yourself with it.
- Arrive at least 10 minutes in advance so you are ready to start on time.
- Welcome the presenters in your session, confirm the correct pronunciation of their names and make arrangements about time-keeping and questions.

2. INTRODUCE the session

- Introduce the session theme.
- Remind SEFI's Code of Conduct.
- State time limits.
- Describe the Q&A organization and emphasize that the goal is to ask concise questions on the topics presented.

3. INTRODUCE the speaker

- Provide name, affiliation and presentation title.
- Support the speaker, if necessary, with sharing the presentation.

4. MANAGE time of the speaker

Rule: the presentation time is max. 8 minutes, followed by 5 min for Q&A.
This likely is the most difficult aspect of chairing a session, but an important one to ensure that even the last speaker can use the promised time, or the audience does not miss the start of the next activity.

As the end approaches (in order of excess):

- Stand up.
- Move closer to the speaker.
- Interrupt the speaker, e.g., "I'm sorry, but we don't want to take time away from other speakers. Thank you for your presentation. Our next presentation is…"

5. MANAGE the discussion

You play an important role in promoting an inclusive environment where more junior and less vocal attendees can get a word in.

- Announce that the floor is open for questions.
- Elicit questions from multiple types of meeting participants.
- If there are no questions, you can ask a question yourself.
- If there are too many or too difficult questions, you may step in and remind the audience that these issues can be discussed after the session.
- Request that follow-up questions from the same questioner wait until others ask theirs.

6. CLOSE the session

- End on time.
- Thank speakers and audience for their time and engagement.
- Encourage ongoing discussion to move if the room is in use afterwards.
- Complete the session feedback form.