

# HOW TO [BE A BETTER] CHAIR [OF] AN ACADEMIC PANEL

You didn't choose the timing, the format or the speakers.

You aren't the organizer. But you're the Chair.

What now?

## WHAT IF ACADEMICS COULD HAVE INTELLECTUAL EXCHANGE THAT WAS MORE INCLUSIVE?

We want to start a conversation.

Our experiences of academic panels vary, but some so clearly reveal how such events mirror and train us for **toxic academic hierarchies**.

Chairing is a critical way of regulating academic space and **access** to it. But still, we've been dissatisfied with our own ability, when Chairing, to prevent the same-old expressions of **power and privilege** from emerging.

Maybe a more explicit approach to equity in panel chairing could support a better training and a **better atmosphere for thinking and learning?**

This is a limited project. It exists in the context of a whole host of other academic practices, barriers, spaces and systems. And we're focused on academic speakers. We've been reminded that inviting non-academics to academic events may create other obligations for listening rather than limiting. Here's our starter toolkit.

**WE KNOW THERE IS MORE TO DO.**

## LET EVERYONE KNOW

**Before you start**, tell the panellists your plan. Ask panellists how they would like to be introduced & confirm the pronunciation of names.

**At the opening of the panel**, set out how you will be using the power you have. Let the room know that you are taking on the responsibility of distributing time to talk, and expect to be held accountable. The language of responsibility and accountability might be useful in speaking to either panellists or the audience.

We don't think that a Chair can or should try to control what is said.

# KEEP PANELLISTS TO TIME

**Inform panellists** that in order to preserve a fair amount of time for others, you will give them two warnings as their time draws to a close (e.g. at 5 minutes and 1 minute) and a final request to stop once their time is up. If conference organizers have not provided paper signs to signal time remaining, bring your own.

**Start talking** if the panellist won't stop. It's awkward, but you can remind the panellists/audience of how you see your responsibility: to share out the time.

## NAMES

Indicating at the beginning of the Q&A that you would like everyone with a question to introduce themselves by name before their question invites everyone to become a part of the group.

Naming some people while others are recognized by the colour of their sweater or hair heightens the insider/outsider feel of many academic conferences.

## QUESTIONS ARE ALL FOR ONE SPEAKER

Try being explicit: tell the room you'll give the next question to anyone who has a question for another member of the panel. Or, insert yourself into the questioner list to ask a question of a different panellist.

## INVITE QUESTIONS FROM ALL

Keep a speakers list, and watch the room for indications that people want to be added to the list.

Ensure that you're looking at actively at everyone, and for subtle signs that someone might, with some gesture of encouragement from you, add themselves to the list.

If there are lots of questions, consider taking 3-5 questions before going back to the panel, allowing more voices & concerns to be heard.



## THE ENDLESS QUESTION

Especially if you have already indicated your responsibility for sharing time, breaking in to reiterate that concern, and move to the next questioner becomes easier.

AGREE?  
DISAGREE?  
FEEDBACK?  
WRITE TO US.

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