Responsibilities of a Panel Chair

The position of chair is an integral part of any conference. The chair is responsible for functioning of the panel. The chair's primary responsibility is ensuring that the session functions smoothly and that both the presenters and the audience have a positive experience. The chair has two types of responsibilities-- before the session begins and during the session.

The chair should arrive ten minutes before the session begins or as soon as is feasible after the previous session empties. After arriving, the first responsibility of the chair is to identify and greet the presenters and the respondent and to inquire after their presentation needs. The chair should check to see, in the case of co-authored papers, who will be presenting and if the other author/authors are present. They chair should also check their pronunciation of the presenters name. The chair should then identify the order and style of presentation for the presenters. While presenters are not required to go in order as listed in the program, it is the usual practice. Sometimes presenters will request another order and the chair should decide, in consultation with the other presenters, if that is appropriate. The chair will also, in consultation with the presenters, help the presenters reach a decision about the mode of presentation. The usual mode is to present from the podium to the audience seated a traditional audience format. However, in some circumstances other modes of presentation are preferred. For instance, if there are very few audience members a less formal presentation may be preferred. The chair should poll the presenters and institute changes based upon the circumstances.

The chair will also establish time constraints for the presenters and respondents. The chair should ensure that each presenter receives an equal amount of time to present, that the respondent has enough time to respond (roughly equal to the time given a presenter), and that there is time remaining for questions and discussion form the audience. Remember that the question discussion time is often the most interesting and useful time for both the presenters and the audience. The chair should discuss time cues with the presenters, some presenters like to receive frequent time cues, and others find it distracting. The chair should provide the speaker with the time cues they find most useful, however, they should also discuss what cue they will use if the speaker significantly exceeds their allotted time. It is the chairs responsibility to ensure that all participants

The chair rarely sits at the dais during the presentation; rather they sit in the front row in a spot easily visible to the speakers in order to give time cues. During the session the chair introduces both the presenters and the title of the research report they will be presenting. Usually, the chair stands in place to introduce the speakers and their research unless an alternate presentation format is being used. The chair is also responsible ensuring that the speakers conform to their allotted time. The chair should indicate to the speakers when they have exceeded their allotted time and, if they significantly exceed their allotment, may need to intervene. Finally, it is the chairs responsibility to end the session by thanking the participants, the respondent, and the audience for their contributions.