# Appendix: Detailed Guidance for Chairs, Speakers, and Audiences

These guidelines are adapted from those used by HOTCUS.

## Guidance for Chairs

* Make sure you are **organised**. Introduce yourself to your speakers in advance, ideally by email, and then again in the break before the session. Confirm their biography and paper title, but also find out how they prefer to be addressed, check how to pronounce their names, and check their pronouns. You may also wish to ask speakers for a question that they would like to answer as part of the discussion.
* Pay close attention to **timings**. Always arrive early and begin promptly and make sure you time each speaker’s individual slot, so that each has his or her fair share of the session. However awkward it is, you must keep people to their agreed time. Agree in advance with your speakers about what sign you will use to alert them that they need to begin drawing their talk to a close (especially important online), and don’t be afraid to interrupt if they have gone over time. Do not give one speaker more prominence than the others, whoever they might be.
* Let the **speakers** take the spotlight and don’t hog the time. If you find links with your own work, or think of references that might help to inform speakers’ research, talk to them or email them later. Encourage inexperienced researchers and speakers, and boost their confidence by thanking them for their presentation and showing an interest in their work.
* Manage the **Q&A** carefully.
  + You can take a short **break** (3-5 minutes) between the talk and the questions, to allow people time to think through what they wish to ask.
  + Scan the audience to ensure early career researchers and more **reticent** colleagues have an opportunity to address the panel. Women are often under-represented amongst question-askers at conference, so be attentive to that, especially at the start of the Q&A. You don’t need to operate on a first-come-first serve basis, and you can take multiple questions from different people at once in order to be more **inclusive**. Keep track of who has indicated that they wish to ask a question. If you are online, allow people to ask questions using the chat function, and do not require them to turn their cameras on in order to participate.
  + Instruct the audience to ask **one** question at a time, so that they don’t dominate with a long comment and several questions; you can always come back to them at the end if there is time. Be firm about allowing follow-up questions. Step in and interrupt if a question or comment is hostile or inappropriate.
* Be prepared for **silences**. In case of silence during the Q&A, prepare your own question for each speaker (or use the question that the speaker has indicated in advance), but don’t hog the time. Make sure that all speakers get at least one question, and also try to prepare questions that connect the papers together.

## Guidance for Speakers

* Be absolutely sure that your presentation is **timed** correctly. Aim for a minute or two under the allotted time, you can always say more in the Q&A (but don’t use the Q&A to simply continue your paper).
* If you are using **slides**, speakers ensure that they are written in a font and colour that are easier to read for those with dyslexia or other reading/learning difficulties. Another consideration is to ensure a sufficiently large font size and font colour contrast with the background, to help people with visual impairments. Images should be provided with a description. If possible, share slides as well as recordings (noting any copyright implications).
* Present your work openly, **inviting** questions and comments. If there are sections you would specifically like feedback on, or that you would like to expand on further if there is time, indicate these during your presentation. An authoritative, close-ended presentation does not invite questions.
* If you receive a question or comment that you perceive to be inappropriate or challenging, take time before you answer it, and don’t always assume that it is meant to be hostile. You are always welcome to say that you’ll take the point under advisement, and leave it there.

## Guidance for Audiences

Always make sure that your questions are constructive and supportive, even if you disagree with the argument of the paper or don’t think the research is ready for sharing. Here are some examples of constructive questions:

* **The supportive question**: Audiences can be silent for lots of reasons, so we appreciate the kindly souls who break the ice. We like questions that show you have actually listened to the presentation or read the precirculated paper, and those that address a specific point. Don’t be afraid to ask for clarification – this gets the speaker to engage and explain, and can be particularly useful for researchers at the start of a project.
* **The selfless question**: The questioner who focuses on a speaker’s research is immeasurably more helpful than one who dwells on their own. Even better are questions that compare the work of several panellists. These turn the conversation into a three-way discussion between the questioner, the speakers on the panel and the audience.
* **The practical recommendation**: Everybody loves this question: we need to know what we have missed in the primary and secondary sources. But phrase it positively, please. Don’t demand to know why the speaker has omitted classic work a, b, or c. It’s far better to ask: “Have you consulted such and such? It reinforces your argument.”
* **The think-outside-the-box prompt**: We like to look at our work from new perspectives, so these questions are always welcome. It shouldn’t feel like an attack, however. Nor should it be about the questioner’s own work. Ask us to think about a specific comparative case, or comment that our findings may be reflected in other fields or time periods – not only does this challenge preconceptions in a useful way, it may help us to think about expanding our work in new directions.
* **The tell-me-what-else-you-know question**: We all cut lots out of our papers. Very often, speakers comment on this while delivering a paper, partly because we are so desperate to point out that we haven’t missed something obvious. So we love an opportunity to flesh out details and demonstrate the depth of our research.
* **The I-couldn’t-disagree-more question**: What should you say when your disagreement is genuine and large – so much so that downplaying it would be an injustice to your intelligence and the speaker’s? Staying civil is hugely important in this situation, so keep it brief. Try, as Jane Austen put it, to “unite civility and truth in a few short sentences”. Register your dissent and the reasoning behind it without taking up too much time (or unleashing strong emotions). If your point is widely shared in the room, you won’t need to labour it; if it is not, a lengthy intervention will not win you many converts. You can always discuss your issues after the session. We don’t necessarily want everyone to agree with us and praise us (although that can be nice). We want the audience to take us seriously, whatever career stage we are at. That means not dismissing speakers because they are in the early days of their research and have not yet read seminal works. Similarly, those of us at the other end of the spectrum need to be challenged on new approaches and techniques. Early-career scholars can offer much here, even if nervous about questioning senior academics.