‘How to Chair’
scientific sessions

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Seminar sessions

Take up opportunities to develop /practise your skills

Conferences, NEPG

......and beyond!
Institute/group seminar programme

• Students chairing sessions since 2013

• Training (or learn the hard way!)

• Opportunity to practice your skills

• Preparation, staying calm and collected!
The role of the ‘Chair’ person(s)

Set the stage for the event

Person(s) ‘running’ the session
(any problems - look to you)

1. Enthusiast for the session
2. Know the names and background of speakers
3. The ‘Relaxer’
4. The ‘Time Keeper’
5. The ‘Moderator’ and ‘Peacemaker’!
6. Familiar with topics/ ask questions
## Preparation: before the seminar or conference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institute Seminars</th>
<th>Conference</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Email and make contact with the two students speakers</td>
<td>1. Meet up with co-chair-decide order</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Check pronunciation of names</td>
<td>2. you may know speakers already/ if not - web pages or at meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Check background: stage</td>
<td>3. Check pronunciation of names</td>
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<td>4. Agree on who goes first</td>
<td>4. Check title/background with speakers</td>
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<td>5. Check talks uploaded/laser/audio</td>
<td>5. Know beforehand- be prepared for changes!</td>
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<td>6. Have a chat before hand about their project-see if they have any questions.</td>
<td>6. Slides uploaded (depends on event) - usually done for you- but things can go wrong!</td>
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<td>7. Have a couple of questions up your sleeve! (ask the speaker in advance) or look at the abstract</td>
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Conferences

• Arrive early- familiarise your self with AV

• Lighting/aircon/windows

• Welcome and help relax the speakers

• Check there are no changes to talks! *(last minute changes)*

• Set up timer! Tell speakers. **Time keeping is essential!** *(can’t rely on speakers!)*
Seminars and conferences:

On the day

- **Start on Time** (challenging when there are parallel sessions)
- Introduce yourself – check the audio is working!
- Fire exits/mobile phones
- Introductions: speakers expertise/achievements etc
- **Time Keeping**: 2mins to go- timer beeps/orange light/ stand up
Question time post talk

Open up the paper for questions and comments - **allow a little time for people to think of a question**

If there is still silence - have a question ready!
• ask the student/speaker in advance...or
• write down whilst speaking...or
• review abstract

Be mindful of how the student/speaker is handling questions

Intervene if needs be (give others an opportunity)

Acknowledge speaker and move on...

At the end: sum up and thank everyone
Good chair- bad chair

Lazy (or not prepared) chairperson-
• hasn’t looked up speakers
• hasn’t checked title
• doesn’t ask questions

Professional chairperson-
• has looked up speakers and found something ‘nice’ to say about them
• comments post talk- interesting talk etc
• opens the paper for questioning but has one or two up their sleeve

Rushed (or dictatorial ?)chairperson -
  doesn’t introduce speakers topic
  doesn’t wait for the audience to ask questions (how long should you leave it?)

Calm, pleasant and professional –
  relaxed pace throughout
Things that can go wrong - Things and people!

• Small conference - speakers are MAC and PC! In same session
• Projector breaks
• Videos won’t work
• The microphone isn’t working
• The audio system /speakers are not working
• Windows open- drills outside
• Rude people in the audience-chat during talks!
• The co-chair doesn’t turn up
• Can’t think of a question !!
• A speaker hasn’t turned up
• Speaker just wont stop talking!
• Speaker faints!
• The Heckler is in the audience!
The chair: common Mistakes:

- Mumble
- Too quiet
- Too rushed
- Have back to audience
- Mispronounce name and title
- Don’t allow time for questions
- Don’t appear interested
- Acronyms (find out what they stand for)

Agree **who** is to introduce speaker and **title** ....varies on the event!
Our recent experiences:

**RNA-UK 2015**

The speaker who went on and on and on.....
- Student?
- Post-doc?
- Principal Investigator?

**RNA and Disease: Italy 2015**
- My presentation – uploaded or not?
- Not!
- The role of the chair
- Timing
Reasons for chairing:

Enjoyment

Good for the CV

Good for promotion – invited to chair (esteem indicators/international recognition)

Good for networking - out in a situation to meet people you wouldn’t normally approach

Good to be ‘involved and proactive’- see how a conference is organised (NEPG)

Opportunity to practise – in the future – YOU will be invited to chair - organisers select who they want - not always just based on subject area
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