

ALT-C 2006: Guidelines for Session Chairs

1. Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to be a session chair for ALT-C 2006, it is much appreciated. In conjunction with this document you should have received an email from Ron Oliver indicating which session(s) you have been allocated to chair. If in doubt, please contact Ron Oliver at r.oliver@ecu.edu.au

The conference programme is now available online at:
<http://www.alt.ac.uk/altc2006/timetable/timetable.php>

Meeting for session chairs, Monday 4 September at 6pm

It is vital that all session chairs attend the meeting on **Monday 4 September at 6pm in the James Watt Centre. If you cannot attend this session, please make sure to contact the co-chairs regarding any changes to the programme or chairing arrangements.**

The success of the conference depends a lot on active, lively and fair chairing of the sessions.

This year we wish to introduce a significant change to the role of the session chair. We would like you to email the presenter(s) in your session(s) before the conference and ask them to send their presentation to you so that you will have some prior awareness of the nature of the presentation. The aim is to try to spot potential problems with presentations before they arise, and to offer some advice if you feel that it is appropriate to do so. An obvious mistake that some inexperienced presenters will make is simply to prepare too many overhead slides, each with too much text on it, for a 15 or 20 minute presentation. We would like to discourage the 'death by PowerPoint' syndrome and some gentle encouragement for presenters not simply to read the bullet-pointed text from their slides would go a long way to enhancing the quality of the audience's experience! The ideal use of PowerPoint is to illustrate graphically or pictorially the points being made verbally in the presentation.

We will also try harder than in previous conferences to discourage members of the audience from moving within sessions to listen to a particular presentation – the rooms do not lend themselves to such switching around.

2. Generic duties of session chairs

Whilst the role of a session chair will differ slightly depending on the nature of the presentation, there are some generic duties that we would ask all session chairs to undertake in order to help us to capture the richness of discussions within the conference; encourage delegates to engage fully in all conference activities and ensure smooth running of the programme. These are:

- Before the session starts: Try to gather the lead presenters together and explain to them the importance of leaving time for discussion. Also explain to them that you will be keeping them to time out of necessity and ask them to be considerate of other presenters.
- At the beginning of the session: Remind the audience of the theme of the session and of the titles of papers and names of presenters in each session. Draw attention to the apparent complementarity of the papers, explaining that they have been grouped intentionally to produce discussion and say that you hope these discussions might explore and elaborate on cross linking and threading themes
- During the session: Make some brief notes on the key ideas and arguments that have emerged from the discussions within the sessions that you chair, which the relevant Theme Leader can use to help them prepare for their plenary session on the last day, where they draw out key issues that have emerged across the whole theme. We will arrange for a 30 minute slot at the end of the sessions **at 17.30 on Wednesday**, so that session chairs can meet the theme speakers to brief them on what the key issues are that have emerged from the sessions.
- At the end of each session: Highlight what is happening next in the programme (e.g. keynote speakers, posters etc). Report back to the theme speaker on the outcomes of the session.

3. Types of presentation within the programme

There are five different kinds of presentation within the conference programme. The research papers and short papers will be slotted into a 60 minute session. Workshops can be 60 or 90 minute sessions, symposia will all be 90 mins. Demonstrations will be 30 mins.

- Research Paper: 20 minutes, plus 10 minute discussion
- Short Paper: 15 minutes, plus 5 minute discussion
- Symposium: 90 minutes
- Workshop: 60 mins or 90 minutes
- Demonstration: 30 minutes

3.1 Research or short paper sessions and the role of a session chair

These sessions will have either 2 Research Papers (where the full paper is published in conference proceedings) or 3 Short Papers (just the abstract being published) in 60 minutes. Do NOT leave the discussion of all papers to the end of the session; in previous conferences we have seen this work against the first presenter as all the discussion centres on the last presentation. The chair's main task will be to restrict the research paper presenter to 20 minutes, then allow 10 minutes per paper for discussion, or the short paper presenter to 15 minutes plus 5 minutes for discussion. Please ensure that the presenters are clear about how the timing before starting. It is also important that the audience is reminded at the beginning of the session that we discourage movement between rooms within a session.

The role of the session chair is therefore to:

- Look at the presentations and papers before the conference, offering advice about the presentation if appropriate.
- Ensure that presenters are clear about how you are going to chair the session.
- Explain to the audience how the session will run, and remind them that leaving during the session, to attend another session, is discouraged.
- Introduce each presenter and ensure they keep to time. Explain beforehand how you will give a warning of the impending end of the presentation, and that you will be strict about asking presenters to finish.
- For the discussion: facilitate an interaction between the presenters and the audience and, where appropriate, draw out cross-linking themes and ideas between the papers.
- Where appropriate give feedback to individual presenters in the spirit of encouraging improvement in presentation.
- Report back to the theme leader on the outcomes of the session.

3.2 Symposia and the role of a session chair

A symposium involves a panel of presenters (maximum four) who facilitate debate around a key theme. This should NOT be a "series of presentations followed by some time for questions"; debate and interaction with the audience is essential. The panel must work together on a theme and pose issues for debate. Panel members may choose to defend or argue against a position, theory, model or concept; highlight areas of uncertainties; or offer different interpretations of well-known studies and their results, etc. This is likely to work well, where one or two panel members take one position or viewpoint and the other panel members argues against that position. A key outcome of a symposium should be that an area of knowledge has been redefined or that new understandings have emerged. Each symposium will have a panel leader who will steer the panel and the way the symposium will be organised.

The role of the session chair is therefore to:

- Briefly introduce the audience to the title/topic of the symposium and the panel presenters
- Work with the panel leader to facilitate interaction between the audience and the panel (how chairs do this may be negotiated with each panel leader)
- Ensure the panel does not overrun the 90 minute slot
- To report back to the theme leader on the outcomes of the session

3.3 Workshops and the role of a session chair

Workshops involve active participation and discussion with the focus on participants being able to develop skills, conceptual understanding or practical ideas for future implementation in their own practice. A workshop is NOT a presentation followed by a discussion; it is vital that participants have meaningful activities to undertake. A workshop might also take the form of a 'master class' where, for example, an aspect of research or evaluation is dealt with in more depth and might be aimed at 'new' researchers or practitioners. Each workshop will have a workshop leader who will steer the way the workshop is organised.

The role of the session chair is therefore to:

- Briefly introduce the audience to the title/topic of the workshop and the workshop presenters
- Work with the workshop leader to facilitate interaction between the audience and the workshop presenters (how chairs do this may be negotiated with each workshop leader)
- Ensure the workshop does not overrun the 90 minute slot
- To report back to the theme leader on the outcomes of the session

3.4 Demonstrations and the role of the session chair

Demonstrations give an opportunity for participants to engage with practical examples of the use of learning technologies in learning, teaching and assessment. Presenters may demonstrate a range of practical applications (e.g. a VLE, CAA application, communication tool; mobile learning device; analysis tool etc) and where appropriate enable delegates to have some "hands-on" time with the application or tool.

The role of the session chair is therefore to:

- Introduce each demonstrator and ensure they keep to time
- Facilitate interaction (e.g. questions, discussion or hands-on) between the demonstrator and the audience
- To report back to the theme speaker on the outcomes of the session

Pre-conference briefing session

We hope that these briefing notes help to clarify the role of session chair at ALT-C. Please make sure to attend the pre-conference briefing session for session chairs and theme speakers on the Monday evening before the conference starts, at 18.00. In this 30 minute session we will go over the guidelines and answer any questions that chairs may have. However, it is important that you try to make email and/ or face to face contact with the presenters in your session(s) before this.

Terry Mayes and Ron Oliver
Conference Chairs
July 2006