

## **First-time Chair Guide for Scientific Meetings (2nd edition)**

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First-time Chair Guide for Scientific Meetings, 2nd edition, Preparation Team



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## Introduction

Scientific societies in Japan have been working for promoting young scientists and women to the chair from a diversity perspective. However, many of them hesitate to accept a chair because of no such experience in the past. This is why we have prepared this guide. It is very useful to chairs who handle online video sessions and English sessions and to participating discussants as well.

Since our 1st edition guide published in 2021, it has been in wide use by not only the Japanese Circulation Society (JCS) but also by other research societies. This 2nd edition is a practical guide prepared in mind of use by people who are going to chair scientific sessions. The end of this guide, therefore, includes a variety of expressions that are instrumental to a first-time chair who moderate a session. Moreover, the Q and A section and a column introduce typical questions raised by scientists who are short in their experience but answered by experienced experts.

Serving as a chair at a canonical meeting will be a stepping-stone to make your future meaningful. Read through the guide and prepare for a meeting by, for example, making a session simulation before the actual meeting. We hope you feel the chair to be challenging and that participants also feel the session to be fruitful.

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## **Preface (Understanding the Chair's Role)**

The chair's major role lies in warming up the entire session centering on a presenter's speech. The role can be accomplished when the chair helps the floor digest the presentation and promote their understanding. The chair does not need to have professional knowledge on the subject of a session. In other words, the chair is expected only to assist the audience so that they can picture a correct image intended by the presenter, namely, why and how the presenter has chosen the subject, interpreted the data, and solved the subject problem. If the chair can provide the audience with an opportunity immediately after the presentation, their questions and comments will naturally become relevant to the subject, leading into an animated discussion. Since chairs are responsible for proceedings in their sessions, chairs need to be punctual on time and moderate their sessions to complete as scheduled.

## **0. Don't worry, take it!**

The management of an academic meeting must carry out many roles, not only assigning session chairs. Assigning discussants and symposiasts is just one of them even though you may excuse yourself for having no such experience. Be brave to accept the challenging role. Anybody begins a new role for the first time. If you are busy to carry out your daily jobs and roles at home, you may hesitate to accept an additional job or role. However, to shoulder a new light burden will broaden your development and potential through actual experience. Be brave to make such a first step. To this end, prepare yourself in your daily life by keeping in mind that you may undertake a chair someday in the future and by visiting and participating in research and scientific meetings as often as possible.

## **1. Well-prepared by the meeting**

### **1.1. Until the session day**

- Read through the excerpt to understand (which may be sent to you from the society one or two weeks before the session day). If you have time, check on the presenters' research fields, their past papers, related topics, etc.
- Consider and keep in mind about topics common to the session.
- Check the presenters' names (how to pronounce), their affiliations and their presentation titles, for your smooth calling at the session. You may have to ask some presenters on the meeting site on how to call them before session.
- Prepare your name cards to introduce yourself to the cochair.

### **1.2. On the session day**

- Check the session place (hall) and time in advance. Visiting the place prior to the session will make you feel more familiar to the place and the surrounding environment. For example, when a session is held in a large hall, it may take time for questioners on the floor to get to a microphone during the Q and A time, which interrupts the ongoing session. To avoid such interruption, the chair needs to ask for cooperation from the audience at the beginning of the session.
- The chair (or deputy chair) needs to be seated in a fixed time (the chair will be informed about messages and other necessary notices by the Congress Secretariat).
- If you are a cochair, meet the other cochair before session and arrange the roles with each other (see examples of announcement listed in the appendix of this guide). Observing the foregoing session allows you to learn an example of the chair who carries out session. This makes you more familiar to how to proceed session and feel easy (if all the audience are already seated and waiting for the chair, the incoming chair may feel nervous when their eyes are fixed on the chair). In particular, if you succeed to the foregoing session theme and same audience in

the same place, the audience will see you alone as a 'newcomer.' Such situation should be avoided.

If you seek an advanced level of chair in the above situation, you, as the chair, may ask for comments from the presenters and chair at the preceding session or opinion leaders and experts who warmed up the foregoing session. Such handling will also warm up the session you succeeded.

## **2. Be sure to control time as scheduled**

The chair's most important job is to control time as scheduled, namely, to allot an equal length of time to all the presenters and to complete the session on time.

- Bring a watch to the session place (put your wristwatch on the desk to avoid the audience from noticing your occasional attentions to the wristwatch).
- After considering the time to introduce oneself, the chair may start session a little earlier if the site is prepared completely for starting session.
- Make a memo of each presenter's start time and allotted time before changing over to the next presenter (sum of the presentation time and the Q and A time).
- Introduce yourself to the floor, at least your name and affiliation (see examples of announcement in the appendix).
- At the beginning of the session, tell the presenter and the audience the duration of the speech time and Q and A time (see examples of announcement).
- When a presenter does not end the speech in time, the chair should urge the presenter to wrap up the speech even in the middle of speech. In this case, the chair should accept only easy-to-answer questions according to the remaining time or urge the questioners to have a talk with the presenter in person after the Q and A session ends.
- If a next presentation has been withdrawn and the time allotted to the presentation is not filled, the chair may allot it to the Q and A time of the current presentation.
- In particular, since time control at an online video session is likely to be left to the chair, the chair should always have a watch at hand. This is because a clock may not reflect on the PC screen when it is fully occupied by the online video session.

## **3. Arrange an easy-to-talk atmosphere for presenters**

- Presenters might be nervous while waiting for their turn of speech. So, the chair should arrange an atmosphere that they feel content and comfortable during the session, which will also contribute to improving session quality.
- The chair should prepare some questions in advance for the case where the audience raises no questions during the Q and A time. The chair can make such memos before the session or

take such notes while listening to the presenter' speech. If the chair is unable to conceive such questions, the chair may ask the following questions in general:

**★Examples of questions in general★**

"I'm interested in this part (this part is not easy for me to understand). Will you elaborate that part."

"What has made you to conceive that idea?"

"May I ask you clinical applications you are planning?"

"May I ask you an outlook of your research?"

"Do you have any other things you want to tell the audience?"

--During an online session, the chair should mute the microphone unless the chair is about to speak into the microphone. When the chair noticed that the previous presenter has forgotten to mute or when the chair hears the noise continuing, the chair should remind the presenter of the event.

--Prior to an online video session, the Congress Secretariat may appoint a discussant(s) to encourage the audience into an animated discussion. If the chair desires such discussion, the chair may have a short arrangement with them prior to session. In such arrangement, ask the discussant(s) their fields of profession and to use the Raise Hand function if the discussants have a question during the Q and A time, or tell them that the chair may point out to them to remark on the subject even if they do not use the Raise Hand function.

**4. Think with the hearts of the audience**

--When the audience is just seated quietly during the session, the chair may not realize their presence. Conversely, the audience disturbing ongoing proceedings will cause stress to the chair.

--At the beginning of a session, the chair should try to make eye-contact with each person in the audience and convey a welcome message to them. At the end of the session, the chair should likewise convey a thank-you message to the audience for joining the session.

--When you are going to play a role of discussant, if possible, prepare constructive questions to ask the presenter and give a positive comment during the Q and A time. Well-considered questions and comments can warm up the session. In other words, the discussant is expected to play a stimulative role so that both the presenter and the audience realize that the session is meaningful.

## **5. Prepare for an unexpected event**

An expected event will certainly happen. When two cochairers face a happening, turn off the microphone(s) before consulting with each other on how to deal with the happening. For your reference, read through the following cases of happenings and learn how to settle them.

--When a cochair doesn't appear or comes late

Answer: Two cochairers are appointed to a session so that either can moderate the session in the case that the other is unable to attend. Thus, a new cochair will not be normally filled in. The remaining cochair has to start the session.

--A presenter does not appear (there are many reasons including the case that the foregoing session is extended). A speech has been withdrawn (which is informed by the Congress Secretariat when the chair is seated).

Answer: When a speech has been withdrawn, the chair may move up the scheduled time according to instructions of the Congress Secretariat. Depending on the session, the discussion time allotted to each presentation can be extended. A change in the time schedule should be announced at the beginning of the session. If a presenter is late to appear at the session hall, the chair may decide and announce that the late presenter's speech will be delivered in the end of the session.

--A presenter exceeded the time allotted for the speech.

Answer: The chair must control each presenter's allotted time (speech time + Q and A time) by announcing, for example, the following decisions:

"As the time is over, only one question may be accepted."

"As the time is over, you should ask questions in person to the presenter after the session."

--If the Q and A is heated up, the chair must urge the presenter (questioner) to wrap up the answer (question) by instructing the person:

"Please make short your question (or answer)."

--The audience has not gathered by the beginning of a session.

Answer: A session can be started later as long as waiting time is left although the chair needs advance consent of the Congress Secretariat. In such case, the chair also needs to tell a delaying time (e.g., 20 minutes delay) to the audience. Or the chair may tell the audience to have an animated discussion among themselves.

--No questions are raised from the audience.

Answer: The chair should first ask a question without waiting much time for questions from the audience. While the audience is hearing such a question and answer, some of them may come to raise a new question. However, if the audience still remains silent, the chair may ask the cochair to bring up a question.

--A person in the audience raises a question at the seat (not using the microphone)

Answer: The chair should remind that person by saying:

"We didn't hear you clearly. Please use a microphone to ask the question."

--Discussion began to heat up between the presenter and the audience and took over the session.

Answer: The chair should stop the discussion to regain control over the session by saying:



"The discussion is being animated and interesting. However, the session time is limited. Why don't you talk with the presenter in person after the session ends."

--The presenter didn't understand the meaning of a question raised from the audience (or unable to hear an English question).

Answer: The chair should ask the questioner to repeat the question slowly. Although entirely depending on the chair's decision, there are cases where the chair asks the questioners and the presenter to exchange their questions and answers in native language when the chair observes that the discussion has not warmed up enough because of poor English communications. Prior to the session, a cochair may talk with the other on how to prepare for such case.

--A person in the audience brings up a question that is irrelevant to the title of the presentation.

Answer: The chair may not dare to correct such question. However, if the presenter is apparently confused about the question, the chair should handle the question on an ad-hoc basis so that the presenter can get out of the situation.

--A question is brought up from the audience that neither the presenter nor the chair can answer but the chair needs an answer to proceed with discussion.

Answer: The chair should first ask the other cochair for an answer. If the cochair is unable to answer, the chair can seek an answer in the audience by asking:

"Is there anyone in the audience who can answer the question?"

--The presenter and the audience disagree on their opinions.

Answer: The chair can cut in the discussion to cool it down from a neutral standpoint by saying: "Attention please. In my understanding, Dr. A is of the opinion that .....while Dr. B is of the opinion that..."

Or the chair may stop the discussion by saying:

"Attention please. The discussion is heating up but the time is over. "Or the chair may dare to cut in the discussion to take back the focus to oneself.

--The research presented has still room to be improved.

Answer: The chair may express an opinion by saying:

"If you consider xxx, your study will bring about great impact. Have you ever considered the xxx analysis (method, statistics)?"

## 6. Remember that the chair and the audience are ordinary persons

--Some chair makes a comment on a presentation speech or makes a summary at the end of a session. The skill is great. When the chair felt something really interesting during the presentation or learned something during the session, the chair may express a comment. But the chair shouldn't dare to make a comment if he/she feels uneasy in doing so.

--Since the chair is not a robot, the chair may express its impression. For example, when the chair has an impression that the presenter has made a studious effort, the chair may appreciate the effort by saying:

"I'm impressed that you have done a lot of effort to prepare this remarkable presentation. I'm sure you must have poured all your energies into this presentation."

--Even if a happening occurred beyond control of the chair, the presenter and the audience will not blame the chair as the chair feared. Don't be so nervous.

--A presenter may be nervous more than need be.

Answer: The chair shouldn't say: "You look nervous" (which will make the presenter feel more nervous). Instead, the chair should see the presenter in the eye and gently talk with or say:

"We are glad of your careful explanation," which will make the presenter feel easy and comfortable.

## 7. Learn through your experience

Thank you for your first-time chair. You must be very excited. Be proud of yourself on the role you played through. Keep the following points in mind. It will contribute to the betterment at your next opportunity.

--You should be grateful to the cochair for its recognition and cooperation. You may ask the cochair for feedback. When you missed an opportunity to hand over your name card to the cochair before the session, you should greet him/her after the session.

--The chair should ask a colleague for feedback after the session. If you have no such person, ask the presenters and people in the audience for their feedback during recess time.

--Let's take notes on good points and bad points in the session.

--Tell and share your chair experience with others. This will be helpful for you to overcome your weak points at your next opportunity. Like from experienced colleagues, you will also receive interesting opinions from young colleagues.

--Share your chair experience with persons who don't have such experience. The sharing will encourage them to accept when an opportunity is offered to them.

## Appendix

For reference, the chair's announcements are exemplified as follows:

## 1. Example announcements

At the beginning of a session: (if all is ready, the chair may start a session a little earlier.)

When a session has one chair only:

"It's time to start the session of xxx (name of the session). Let me introduce myself to you.

My name is yy (name) from zzzz (name of affiliation).

It is an honor to chair this session.

When a session has two chairs: (Either of the cochairs may introduce their names and affiliations to the audience. The following is an example that each cochair introduces oneself separately by giving the microphone to the other. Collaborate with each other on an ad-hoc basis.)

A: It's time to start the session of xxx (name of the session). Let us introduce ourselves to you.

My name is yy (name) from zzzz (name of affiliation). It is an honor to jointly chair this session.  
(give the microphone to the other cochair)

B: My name is xx (name), xx from zzzz (name of affiliation).

(give back the microphone to the other)

A: I'm going to chair (x) presentations (check in advance) in the first half, while Dr. xx is going to chair (y) presentations (check in advance) in the second half of the session. This session has (z) minutes for the presentations and (v) minutes for Q and A (check for the allotted time beforehand). We would like to ask for cooperation from you all."

Announcing presentations:

"Now, let's start our first presentation by Dr. xx (name) from yyyy (name of affiliation). The presentation is titled "zzz."

Q and A:

"Thank you for the interesting presentation. Now, let's move on Q and A (discussion). Anybody on the floor can make comments and questions.

Please give your name and affiliation before comment or question."

When the session ended:

"All of our presentations are over. We are grateful to doctors for their presentation and to other doctors for their participation. Your cooperation has made us complete this session on time (or, we are grateful to all of you for your participation in Q and A)."

\*When the session didn't have ample Q and A time because of a tight schedule, the chair may say:

"I apologize for allotting an inadequate question time due to my management of time."

## **2. Example questions in general**

"I was interested in XXX. Could you explain ... more in detail?"

"I was a little confused about XXX. Could you explain ...again/more in detail?"

"How did you come up with the idea of XXX?"

"What kind of clinical applications do you envision for the future?"

"What do you plan for the next steps based on these results?"

"Do you have any other comments for the audience?"

## **3. Useful expressions**

"We're running behind schedule, so let's get started."

"The Xth presentation has been canceled (or withdrawn)."

"Could you speak a little bit slower, please?"

"I did not understand what you meant by XX. Would you describe it in other words?"

"The XX part was unclear. Could you elaborate on that, please?"

"Would anyone in the audience like to answer this point/question?"

"We wish you good luck with your research and look forward to hearing updates at the next opportunity."

"Thank you for your interesting presentation."

#### 4. Q and A

Q1) When two cochairs moderate different presentations, may either cochair ask questions about presentations moderated by the other?

A) Yes, you may. However, it is important that the cochair allots time evenly to all the presenters. If questioners are in line to use the microphone right after a presentation, the cochair should refrain from making a comment. Conversely, if part of the presentation was apparently not easy for most of the audience to understand, the cochair should take the initiative in asking the presenter questions. Questions should be permitted in the following order of priority:  
Audience > Cochair not in charge > Cochair in charge

Q2) When a presenter did not understand or didn't catch the meaning of a question in an English session, may the cochair ask the questioner to repeat it again?

A) The chair may suggest the questioner to repeat the question by saying:

"Would you speak your question a little more slowly."

Or urge the questioner to repeat slowly what is meant by saying:

"Do you mean that ...?"

If the presenter is unable to answer, the chair may seek an answer from the floor by asking them:

"Is there anyone who can answer the question?"

Q3) Compared with a session in Japanese, does the chair need any particular preparation for a session in English?

A) If you are not accustomed to talking in English, you had better prepare for it. Even if you have studied in an English-speaking country, your English ability will go down without daily practice of conversation. There are many means to improve your English. For example, you can join an English conversation class or an online English conversation class when you are too busy. Or, you may accustom yourself to listening English news or train your hearing ability by watching English films and TV dramas. There are also books available for preparing for English meetings. These opportunities will accustom yourself to English conversation. In any case, you should make effort as much as you can. However, you don't need to go so far as having native-like English speaking ability.

Q4) I can speak English neither fluently nor beautifully. Should I tell it to the audience at the beginning of the session?

A) You don't have to. However, you should prepare for the English meeting as much as you can. Try to speak polite English clearly and gently. It is important at a scientific meeting that both the chair and the audience understand the presentation subject so that discussion will lead up to a next level.

Q5) When a session starts behind time, should the chair omit the opening address?

A) At the opening address, the chair should announce to the audience that the session is delayed and, therefore, will immediately move on to presentations. In this case, the chair may omit both a stereo-typed address and presentation title calls. However, the chair doesn't need to shorten the total of the session time. Such omission apparently shows disrespect for well-prepared presenters and other participants.

Q6) When should the chair announce a cancelled presentation? May the chair extend the Q and A time in other presentations?

A) The chair should announce to the audience at the beginning of the session that the Xth presentation has been cancelled. Instead, if another presentation has many questioners, the chair may extend the Q and A time. The cochairs should consult with one another on such a case before session.

Q7) If a presentation is going to be made on a recorded video, the presentation has no Q and A time. Should the chair announce it at the beginning of the session?

A) The chair may announce it at the time when the presentation is to be called.

Q8) What considerations are needed when the chair is to moderate an online video session?

A) If the chair is going to moderate an online video session, the chair also needs to handle telecommunication troubles. For example, the chair needs to instruct the foregoing presenter to stop sharing the PC screen, or stop camera and microphone, or to advise on how to solve audio trouble such as howling, if any, without delay. It is important, therefore, that the chair accustoms oneself to online video meetings in daily life, which will help the chair to handle such trouble in an appropriate manner. Avoid the audience from feeling bored in a long waiting time until the audio trouble is settled. The chair may need to postpone the troublesome presentation to a latter turn. If questions are received via chat, make sure to check the chat. If many questions are sent via chat, the chair may need to select on one's decision.

Q9) Are there any points that the chair should bear in mind for symposiums?

A) Some symposium is carefully planned by the Congress Secretariat who also selects the presenters. The chair may need to make a prior arrangement with the other cochair and the Congress Secretariat to settle questions before the symposium day, if any. If the chair knew the content of presentations prior to their speeches, it may help the chair to handle the proceedings in the session. Prior to the session, the chair may also need to inform the presenters of their allotted time of speech and Q and A time.

Q10) Is there anything on clothes that the chair should keep in mind?

A) Many male and female participants attending scientific meetings in Japan wear a suit. It seems, however, depending on a meeting place and the season in Japan, wearing a "Cool Biz" casual wear is recommended, or many participants in meetings outside Japan wear casual clothes. You may check them on the website that is going to host a meeting. If a chair is going to wear a skirt, she needs to mind the length of her skirt. When the meeting room has a stage higher than the floor, she may feel uneasy at her legs while seated. She also needs to check that her shoes are clean.

Q11) When two seats, side by side, are prepared for two cochairs, is there any customary practice to choose which chair to seat?

A) When no place cards are put on the seats, the cochair whose name appears first on the collection of abstracts or the meeting booklet is customarily seated on the left seat (seen from the floor) and the other cochair, on the right seat. However, depending on customary practice, some scientific meeting or Congress Secretariat may arrange a different order from the above. If the chair is not sure, he/she should ask the meeting hall manager or the other cochair.

Q12) When a presentation and Q and A time are ended, what concluding remarks or conjunction words should the chair tell the audience before calling the next presenter?

A) 1. When the chair has no particular thing to tell, the chair shouldn't dare to put in conjunction words but just say: "Thank you for the presentation. The next presentation is titled "xxxx." Or the chair could say: "Thank you, Dr. xxxx, for your presentation." (The chair should remember the name of the presenter.)

A) 2. Even though questioners still remain waiting when the chair decides to move on the next presentation because of limited time, the chair may say to the questioners:

"(looking at the questioners) Question time is over. I'm sorry but have to move on the next presentation, which is titled xxxx."

A) 3. If the chair is interested in knowing the ongoing research result, the chair may say:

"We would like you to continue the research and present us with the result in future. ...Our next presentation is titled "xxxx."

A) 4. The chair may say:

"Thank you for your interesting presentation. ... Our next presentation is titled xxx xxxxxxxx."

See Appendix, 1. For English session, and 3. Variety of expressions.

Q13) When the chair was occupied in managing the time schedule and hardly paid attention to the presenter's answers, what comment can the chair add?

A) When there is much time left, the chair may say:

"I could not follow some part of your answer. Would you elaborate it a little more (on xxxx, in particular)?"

When there is not much time left, the chair may say:

"Question time is up. So, let's move on to our next presentation."

If the chair wants to get the presenter's answer later, say:

"Thank you for your presentation. We have to move on to the next presentation, but will you explain xxx later on the floor."

Q14) If I declined to accept a chair offered due to my circumstances or if I was not able to handle the chair well, does it mean that no more opportunities will be offered to me in the future?

A) It depends on each situation. Even when you declined such offer, that hardly means the next opportunity is not offered to you. However, be sure to respond (yes/no) to an offer without delay. Moreover, even when you were not able to handle the chair well, it does not mean that any further opportunities are unlikely to be offered to you. Even when you failed, make the failure a stepping-stone to success. Your efforts are watched by people around you. So don't hesitate to accept such offer; it may lead you to a next opportunity.

## **5. Column: How many years are needed for the chair?**

--The Japanese Circulation Society published "First-time Chair Guide for Scientific Meetings" (1st edition) in 2021. The society made a survey later. According to the survey on Awareness and Feasibility of Women chairing Cardiology Sessions in Scientific Meetings: A Nationwide Survey by the Japanese Circulation Society. Front Cardiovasc Med 2022; 9:871546), 40% of the respondents were of the opinion that a chair needs to have 11- to 20-year medical experience, while 30% of the respondents were of the opinion that a chair needs no medical experience.

--According to the survey made by the society on "Factors Influencing Acceptance of the chairperson Position at Annual Scientific Meetings of the Japanese Circulation Society -A



Questionnaire Survey in Chugoku District-. Circ Rep 2023; 5: 260-264," doctors having a chair position in their past indicated a higher percentage of accepting a chair when offered again.

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Diversity Promotion Committee in The Japanese Circulation Society (JCS)

The Josei Junkanki Consortium (JJC)

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