

## Energizing the Panel Discussion

The panel format is one of the most frequently used seminar or conference methods of presentation. Unfortunately, it is also one of the least satisfying methods from the participants' perspective. It tends to spray out information instead of funneling it toward specific learning objectives.

The format is well known: a moderator introduces speakers, and each takes his or her turn with a 10-to-20-minute lecture. If time remains (and it often doesn't), the process opens to random audience questions.

### *Problems:*

1. speakers go beyond the time limits
2. some audience members ask tangential questions
3. some panelists answer many questions, others answer none
4. panelist lectures do not mesh with those of other panelists
5. attention levels are hard to maintain

The following are methods for revitalizing the panel format. They are based on the following assumptions:

1. The panel should be viewed as a "teaching team," with at least one prior meeting for preparation and coordination.
2. The moderator or team leader must take the responsibility for managing a coordinated, efficient process.
3. Panelists can assume quite different roles—presenter, critic, questioner, discussion leader, etc.
4. Panel lets *written* materials provide the comprehensive coverage, using *oral* communication to provide focus on critical information and issues.

### *Methods:*

1. *The Position Statement*
  - one panelist presents the basic information (data, issues, philosophy, trends, problems, etc.)
  - other panelists provide focus, critique, analysis based on the position statement
  - moderator fields questions and channels them to appropriate panelists
2. *Written Audience Questions*
  - audience members receive cards in their materials; encouraged to write specific questions as they hear presentations

- staff collects question cards, gives them to program moderator
- moderator sorts, finds especially relevant questions
- moderator reads question, channels it to particular panelist

### 3. *The Debate*

- moderator provides overview of topic and issues
- panelist #1 presents arguments and data in favor of a position or procedure
- panelist #2 presents counter arguments and data or other opposing position
- moderator seeks specific questions or challenges from the audience on each position in turn
- each "debater" presents a brief rebuttal and resupport at the end of the program

### 4. *Case Studies*

- one panelist presents problem area, data, factors, etc.
- each attendee has written cases in the materials; prepares an answer to one or more cases
- moderator elicits three or four "answers" to each case
- one or more panelists provide prepared responses to each case

### 5. *Self-tests*

- all attendees answer a written self-test; retain for later "score-your-own-paper" feedback session
- panelists present materials as usual
- moderator reviews "correct" or "best" answers to end the program

### 6. *The Demonstration*

- panel team does a live role-played demonstration, OR
- panel shows a tape or film
- panel then uses demonstration material as a basis for presentations, problem solving, or discussion

### 7. *The Spontaneous Dialogue or Interview*

- moderator introduces panel and asks direct questions (that panelists have helped prepare)
- moderator may seek audience follow-up questions
- moderator may challenge a panelist response or redirect to another panelist
- each panelist presents a three-to-five-minute "closure" or summary statement