

Best Practices for Moderating and Producing Panel Discussions for Broadcast

Are you interested in hosting multiple guests on your show to discuss a particular topic? CFRC volunteers are encouraged to invite panelists to our studios where they may participate in live or pre-recorded discussion on specific topics and themes, a conversation that you as host can facilitate. Panel discussions involve multiple voices, not just your own, so there are a number of important factors to keep in mind when planning for and ultimately facilitating such a conversation.

Why host a panel discussion on your show?

There are many benefits that panel discussions provide. Firstly, multiple perspectives are important for listeners to hear, offering audiences opportunities to consider new ideas that may not have occurred to them. Rather than having one speaker speaking from one perspective, a panel lets many people bring in their own expertise and experiences that fosters greater dialogue and critical-thinking. Further, rather than bringing on a single speaker, a panel can help you capture more listeners by drawing upon the wider network your guests can attract, and will also present a lively discourse you will facilitate. Unlike lectures where the same message or idea may be repeated by one person, panels are more engaging and dynamic insofar as they are also unscripted with panelists speaking to each other, and addressing each other's perspectives, which can elicit new ideas through the power of conversation similar to brainstorming.

Examples of panel discussions: political candidates running for office; university experts on topical news item; creators discussing the current environment for artists in their discipline; community members sharing perspectives on issues of local concern; friends coming in the chat about a fun shared hobby or interest (ie: DnD, cult classic films, etc.) Panel discussions with your friends can of course be more informal and quite lively fun on your show!

Preparing for a panel discussion

Careful advanced preparation for your panel discussion will help you ensure smooth polished flow and facilitation, help your guests stay on topic and within allotted speaking time, and ensure the topic under discussion is fleshed out meaningfully for your audience.

Here are some important guidelines to help you prepare for a dynamic panel discussion.

- Do advanced research. What is the topic and who are the experts/stakeholders?
- Ensure a breadth of perspective where you have the opportunity to curate the actual panel. Understand why you are inviting particular people to the panel.
- Have back up experts/stakeholders in mind if one of yours is unable to attend.
- Develop insightful open-ended questions that run in a logical order and flow naturally from one topic to the next

- When developing questions, keep in mind your show length. If you will podcast the conversation, extra content that cannot fit into your planned radio slot can be included there. Keep in mind other factors that may determine the questions you craft including duration of your radio program slot (if you need a special slot for extra time, contact Jesse Bell to make advance arrangements); number of guests; and time allotted to each guest for responses to questions plus rebuttals/follow up comments naturally emergent in roundtable discussions.
- Learn to pronounce people's names, know their title (ie: Dr. Mr. Ms. Miss, Mx, Swordsman), their background/role (ie: where they work etc), area of expertise and other relevant information to introduce each person appropriately
- Write a brief intro and outro script to ensure you have your required station ID, program name, and a well-thought out themed introduction so your listeners know what the topic of discussion is overall, who is with you to discuss, and why they are there to discuss. Don't forget to introduce yourself as moderator :) Your outro should thank each guest by name, summarize the general scope of the conversation, and point to what's happening in your program's next episode and how to follow you on social media and the station on social media @cfrcmusic. If you have a podcast, you will also want to direct your listeners to it, especially if there is extended pre-recorded content you needed to remove to ensure the radio program fits in your timeslot.
- Be prepared to pivot to a Zoom-based discussion in the event of inclement weather or illness that leads anyone to be well enough to chat, but not well enough to be around other people.
- If doing Zoom, practice usage of meeting recording functions and/or multi-track recording in studio so your voice along with those of your guests will be recorded simultaneously if pre-recording. Do a test run in advance with Chancellor if doing a live broadcast using Zoom so you can ensure everyone is able to participate. Make sure guests are logged in to Zoom at least 10 minutes before you go to air so you have time to troubleshoot if needed (ie if Zoom needs to update, their mic isn't working or computer needs to restart).
- Always double check with guests before meeting, especially with name pronunciation. Ask them to send you phonetic spelling if you are still uncertain of pronunciation or have difficulty when rehearsing that pronunciation (you can also search for other interviews or videos featuring your guests to listen for pronunciation). Do engage in other fact checks regarding their bio (ie: background, pronouns, area of expertise, title, position etc) to ensure accuracy in your introductions and promotions. Be sure to get their social media handles if they have them.
- Create a social media post tagging @cfrcmusic and your guests so your discussion can be cross promoted.
- Get Studio A and CR1 set up training with [Chancellor Maracle](#) in advance and practice set up and recording by [booking studio space](#) through CFRC's website. Review CFRC's How to Set up Studio A & CR1 [documentation](#) and [video](#) through our website. Practice again and reach out to Chancellor if you have questions or are in need of assistance ahead of your live or pre-recorded session (at least 48 hours in advance).

- Ensure your guests have CFRC's address (62 Fifth Field Company Lane, Carruthers Hall) or a zoom link. Send this information by email a minimum of 48 hours in advance and confirm they've received it.

Ok, so you are ready to roll in the studio and are armed with all of your preparations. The day has arrived when your guests will join you for an exciting conversation on your program! Just a few more things to do on the day of your panel discussion.

- Arrive at least an hour ahead of your intended live broadcast or recording session to undertake set up of equipment, software, and also furniture. Locate backup headphones, microphones, and cabling in case a quick replacement during sound check is required.
- Ensure you have your list of questions printed out or neatly written down. Avoid using a cell phone or laptop to read your questions.
- Have several note cards indicating 20 seconds, 10 seconds and 5 seconds so you can gently and silently cue your guests they are running out of time on a question and they must wrap up
- Bring pencils/pens & blank paper for your guests. Sometimes people like to write down notes to refer to as they respond to questions or develop responses to another panelist's ideas. You may also wish to have a pencil and paper so you can jot notes that will help you deliver a clear summary during your outro.
- Ask your in-person guests to arrive 20 minutes in advance and monitor the door to let them in. Escort them to either Studio A or the lounge so they may mingle with each other for icebreaker time. Politely introduce each arriving guest to others already there.
- Use the time to chat as well and perhaps identify those guests who may be a bit quieter and others who are more extroverted in casual conversation.
- At least 10 minutes before live show time and recording time, undertake a sound check with your guests to ensure everyone's headsets and microphones are picking up and functioning properly. Ideally, you will have everything set up correctly an hour ahead as noted above including your intro and outro music.

Aaaand Go!

All preparations are done and it's time to sit down and start your panel discussion! Here are some helpful tips to guide you through the process!

- Let your guests know a minute, 30 seconds, 10 seconds and 5 seconds before you go live on air. Count them in.
- Cue your music and go through your introductory script ensuring you introduce each guest and describe what the topic of conversation is for your listeners. Remind your guests and audiences about time limits for guests
- Ask your quietest guest the first question first. Watch the clock and gently use the note cards to remind them they are running out of time if they have not already wrapped up.

- Ask your next guest their thoughts on the same question or allow them to comment on what they just heard from their peer. Continue the process until each guest has had a chance to respond to the first question before moving on to the next one.
- Questions of course are prepared ahead of time but be prepared to pivot when the conversation naturally takes great new, unanticipated directions. You'll likely want to ask follow up questions or allow panelists to follow up on particularly intriguing ideas. Pay attention to time limits and steer the conversation back naturally to the next item for discussion.
- Rotate who gets to respond to a question first so everyone has this opportunity. Rotate the order of follow ups as well among guests. Continue monitoring time and using your note cards to gently remind guests they are running out of time.
- Be mindful of redirecting conversation to others where one or two may dominate the discussion. Also be mindful of redirecting conversation back to the main topic if the conversation veers entirely off topic.
- Between guests, be sure to also state and now over to "name XYZ" so your listener knows who is speaking each transition.
- Be mindful that you are there to facilitate/moderate a conversation and provide a general theme and trajectory, but it is the panelists whose ideas are of interest to audiences and their voices and ideas are primary. Limit your own comments during the conversation. Summarize your thoughts during your outro.
- Do be sure to let audiences and guests know that the whole show is almost out of time (ie: 5 minute warning, 2 minute warning). You'll want to have at least one minute at the outro to thank your guests and summarize conversation using your prepared outro.
- Of course, if you are pre-recording, there is opportunity to let them go longer but you have to edit for radio, longer version can be podcasted. Be sure to let audiences and guests know that a longer version will be available by podcast if you intend to do so.
- If pre-recording, be mindful in your post production that ideally everyone still gets a relatively equal amount of speaking time during your editing process.

And that's a wrap!

Do you have other recommendations we can share with fellow volunteers? We'd love to hear them! Reach out to station@cfrc.ca!