

Moderator Tip Sheet

These tips have been compiled from multiple sources, including the most important source of all – the public!

❖ Tips from Spirit & Place

- **Let your audience know what the event goals are.** Establish expectations early.
- **If the topic is contentious, establish hopes & expectations for group involvement.** Reinforce for the speakers and audience members the importance of [adventurous civility](#). Consider using a Community Agreement.
- **Prepare cutoff phrases ahead of time.** Example: If a panelist is not giving enough time for others to speak, you can say, “You have a great point there, but I think we need to hear from _____ now.” Or, when they take a breath, interject with, “Thank you for that perspective. I’m curious to hear what _____ might think.”
- **Good follow-up questions are open-ended and can be used to ...**
 - *Add clarification:* What did you mean by that? Could you elaborate? Can you give an example?
 - *Bring in new perspectives:* X brings up an interesting point. What do the rest of you think?
 - *Bridge connections between ideas:* John said X and Mary said Y. Do their ideas have anything in common?
 - *Dig deeper:* Let’s explore that from another angle. Can you unpack that point a little more? I’m fascinated by that concept you just brought up; do you want to dig into it a bit more?
- **Close with a call to action.** Challenge your audience to stay engaged and to learn more.

❖ Tips from the Public

Looking through several years of attendee surveys, we know the audience . . .

- **Expects the moderator to provide clarity and guidance.**

The moderator’s questions, though thoughtful, were too complicated and long.

This event was poorly moderated. The moderator didn’t seem to have a plan to lead the discussion anywhere and threw questions at the panel that they were unprepared for.

I was looking for more structural guidance from the moderator and clarity of the questions.

There wasn’t a clear focus or take away for me.

- **Wants the moderator to draw in multiple perspectives & think of the audience’s needs.**

One of the panelists was less verbal than the others and should have been invited to speak more by the moderator.”

Questions should be repeated by the moderator.

The moderator should remind the panelist to use the microphone.

- **Desires to be heard and to share experiences. They don't like being talked at the entire time.**
Great discussion, just wish there was a little more time for panel Q&A.

He did not read to us . . . much appreciated. Excellent and very educational.

Would be nice for attendees to talk informally afterwards. Perhaps breaking into groups to share thoughts, ideas, etc.

❖ **The Moderator or, “Ten Thoughts I Thunked” by Kevin Armstrong**
(Longtime Public Conversation Moderator)

1. **The moderator's principal role is to allow each panelist to be their best self.**
2. **If possible, talk individually with the panelists before the event and talk together with the group for at least an hour before the presentation.** I usually provide the first question to everyone before the event so they can hear one another's answers and get a feel for one another's tone and perspective.
3. **Avoid formal introductions.** A printed program may already provide a biographical sketch. And even in the absence of printed material, take no more than 90 seconds to introduce each person. The audience has come to hear from the participants, not about them.
4. **Stand up for the audience and involve them.** If there is a Q&A, remind the audience to ask questions rather than make speeches. Somewhere between 25–30% of the conversation should involve the audience. Anymore and they run out of good questions. Any less and they feel sidelined. If the audience cannot hear the question, repeat it. If people do not understand the question, rephrase it.
5. **Be neutral and objective.** It is important to be provocative but if you have a dog in the fight, you should be on the panel rather than moderating it.
6. **Be informed and prepared.** You should have a general understanding of the subject in order to create a logical flow to the conversation. Have a set of possible questions, quotes, and conversation starters. Good answers generally arise from good questions. Then, be prepared to abandon them all if the conversation takes an interesting turn.
7. **Ask the question everyone has on his or her mind but is not asking.** If a panelist has been in the news, or is notable for a particular belief or practice, get it out on the table early so you can move on.
8. **Once you've asked a question, look at the audience and look at the other panelists.** The panelist shouldn't be talking to you but to the audience and to any other panelists.

9. **Be attentive to three things at once:** The conversation that is going on. Where the panelists seem to be taking the conversation. How the audience is responding.

10. **Say Thank you.** To the panelists. To the audience. To your sponsors.