

**PhD Conference in Economics and Business  
Australian National University, Canberra, November 2024**

[Australian PhD Conference in Economics and Business | Research School of Economics \(anu.edu.au\)](https://www.anu.edu.au/research-school-of-economics)

## **Organisation of Session: Advice for Chairs, Discussants and Student Presenters**

This document sets out the arrangements for the sessions of the conference, as well as advice to session chairs, discussants and students. If that includes you, this is for you; you need to read at least the relevant section, maybe even the whole thing.

These arrangements seek to make the sessions as productive as possible and lead to a positive experience for all, especially the students. Thank you in advance to those who devote their valuable time to serving as chairs, discussants and presenters of papers. The overall success of the conference lies with you and the conference organisers greatly appreciate your contributions.

### **I. Session Chairs**

Your job as chair is important for the smooth functioning of the conference – you set the decorum for the session, maintain its momentum and keep the whole show on track. The discussants and students will also receive this document so they will know how the session will run and what to do.

Here are some reminders/advice/guidance for chairs:

1. **Announcements:** Please start on time and announce the title of the session. Then introduce the first student presenter and the title of the paper. Simply give the speaker's name, affiliation and paper title; there is no need for any bio data. The same applies when it comes to introducing the discussant.
2. Each session runs for 90 minutes.
3. The first 45 minute will be devoted to:
  - The presentation by the first student (allocated 25 minutes).
  - The discussant (10 minutes).
  - General discussion (10 minutes).
4. This arrangement is then repeated for the second student, discussant and general discussion.

5. Be strict with the timing. The yellow-and-red card system will be used. At the front of each venue you will find these cards – hold up the yellow card when there is 2 minutes remaining, the red when time is up and insist the speaker stop immediately.
6. Start the general discussion by asking the student if she/he would like to respond to the discussant's comments; this will usually be taken up.
7. In case there is a dearth of questions/comments, please come prepared with one of your own. This might stimulate further discussion and give the student (and/or the discussant) something more to think about.
8. End the session on time.
9. After the session, leave the yellow and red cards at the front of the room for the next session.

## II. Discussants

For many students the conference is the first time they present research away from home, and some will be understandably nervous. Of great value to them is the personal attention and the comments from an independent discussant who can bring a fresh perspective.

Many students will be towards the end of their second or third year of studies, and so should be able to produce a fairly advanced paper. This document has been sent to students and sets out the sort of thing you can expect from them.

Here is some advice/guidance for discussants; these are obviously not hard and fast “rules”, just some ideas that might assist you:

1. You will have 10 minutes to present. Probably best to use slides in your presentation (send them to the organisers in advance, if possible).
2. Think of the discussant's job as providing a high-quality referee report. You might start with a succinct summary of what the paper does, and then proceed to its strength and weaknesses. As far as possible, keep the tone positive and emphasise how the research might be improved.
3. At the same time, don't hesitate to point out errors that need fixing – it's better for you to alert the student at this stage rather than a thesis examiner.
4. You might also mention:
  - Results that are truly new/clever.
  - Any unique data used. How much ingenuity and/or effort was needed to collect them.

- Clean/innovative testing procedures.
  - Clarity or otherwise of the exposition, include the layout of tables and graphs.
5. Try to also meet with the student individually to discuss the paper.

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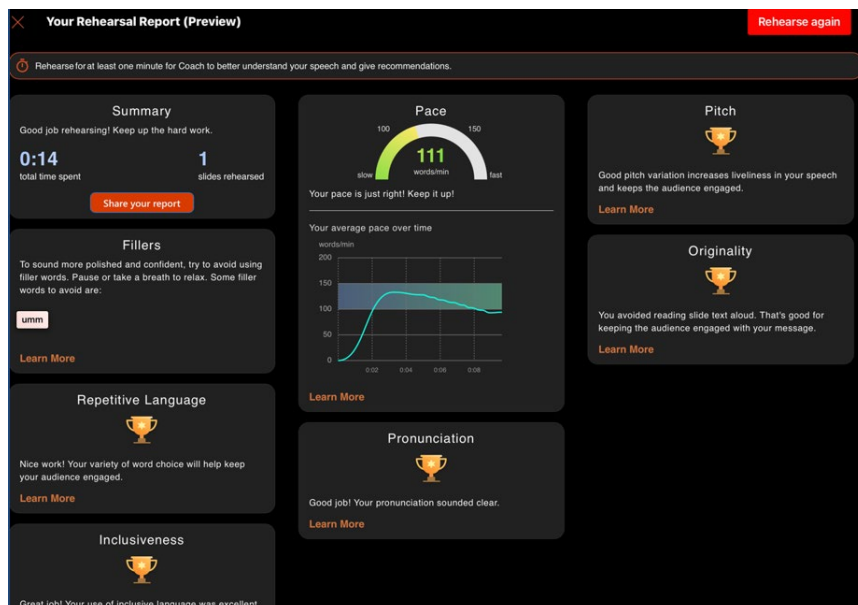
There is a prize for the “Best Discussant” decided by a popular vote.

### III. Student Presenters

Presenting at the conference is a major opportunity for you to make an impact. It may result in making valuable new contacts, promising suggestions for improving your research, invitations to present elsewhere, or even a job offer. All have happened at previous PhD Conferences. It is therefore worth your while to devote substantial time to preparing carefully beforehand to ensure your work is presented in its best light. Here is some advice for you.

#### I. Presenting

1. With 25 minutes to present, there is no time to waste. Different topics can require a format of their own, but in general it is best to go straight to your main message and avoid excessive introductory material. What do you want others to remember from your presentation?
2. Well before the conference, practice assiduously. One approach is to start with “Rehearse with Coach” in PowerPoint. This generates a useful report on your trial run through that looks like this (to see the detail, enlarge the page):



3. Then, you could try out your presentation on some friends and ask for suggestions for improvements.

4. Be sufficiently confident in the material that you don't need to read from notes and/or the sides. Practice makes perfect!

## **II. Slides**

The following common-sense suggestions might be useful:

1. Include on the first slide (i) the title of the paper, (ii) your name and institution, and (iii) the name of your main supervisor. For the presentation, no need to include acknowledgements (these go in the paper, of course).
2. Don't include too much on a slide.
3. Avoid distractions with elaborate layouts.
4. Use plain and simple text with large font size.
5. Tables and figures require special attention. Those from the paper can contain too much detail to use directly as slides. These need simplification to convert from "wholesale" to "retail" form.
6. Send the final slides to the relevant person at the conference well in advance. As a backup, take to the conference a copy on a USB flash drive.

## **III. At the Conference**

1. Introduce yourself to the chair of your session and the discussant.
2. Check the venue before your session and make sure you can run your sides.
3. Ensure you finish your presentation on time. Going overtime is disrespectful.
4. At the start of the general discussion part of the session, be prepared to respond to the discussant's comments. Always start by graciously thanking the discussant for the comments. If you don't agree with the comments, say so and give your reasons. If you agree with the comments, have something else prepared in advance to say -- avoid being silent.
5. After the session, ask for a copy of the discussant's sides. Also, seek clarification of any comments you don't completely understand.
6. Make the most of the networking opportunity by meeting people at coffee, lunch, the sessions, etc. Find out what they are working on and tell them about your research and experience. As a way of supporting the conference and the other students, don't skip sessions.

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There is a prize for the "Best Student Presentation" decided by a popular vote. Winning that would be a valuable addition to your CV.

Good luck!