



IMPROVING UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Resources for Presenters – Roundtables

Roundtable sessions provide an opportunity for you to discuss a topic of mutual interest with a small group of conference participants. In past years, roundtables have drawn from a few to 15, but most have 5 to 8 participants. If yours is a live session, the table will literally be round, with a sign on it indicating your session. If your session is remote, you will be able to admit participants as their names appear at the top of the computer screen and see their faces in the Zoom “gallery.” Whether in-person or remote, all roundtable sessions are 45 minutes long, which should give you enough time to cover your topic AND invite discussion.

This is an important point. Evaluations from past conferences praise roundtables that promote discussion and slam those that leave no time for anyone but the presenter. The format is NOT an invitation to lecture, so please try to involve the conference participants as much as possible. In practice, this means you should try to cover your material in 15 minutes or so and then leave the remaining 25 minutes to get reactions from participants or—better yet—invite them to offer comments as your presentation unfolds. The best roundtables are conversations among peers.

IUT conferences aim at being relaxed and informal. Your presentation can be equally informal, especially if you are chatting live over coffee. But even in a remote session, you can do much to create an atmosphere conducive to sharing. The conversation will be made easier by the fact that your audience has a lot to contribute. Though some will be new to the profession, many will have taught for at least a few years. That means you can count on most everyone at your table or on your screen having something useful to say.

If yours is a virtual session, you should ask participants to use the “Raise Hand” feature on the “Reactions” menu at the bottom of the screen whenever they want to make a comment. You will then see their picture with a yellow hand at the top left of the screen. They can also use the “Chat” feature to send a written message either to you privately or to the group as a whole while the discussion is going on. If your session is live, it may get a bit noisy in the room, so you will need to speak clearly and slowly enough for participants to hear you. The idea is to have a lot of energy, which is good. But if there are several roundtables with simultaneous conversations the noise level can sometimes be distracting. Since English is not likely to be the first language of some of your participants, clarity is all the more important.

The following are some general tips to assist you in making the best Roundtable presentation possible.

1. Preparing for the session beforehand

- A. Take time to identify and outline the major issue(s) to be discussed. Try to anticipate some of the possible questions and include a direct application so that participants might be able to use the information some time in their courses during the coming year.
- B. Possible handout. Your participants will be exposed to a great deal of information in a short period of time. Handouts are helpful because they allow them to process this information at greater leisure afterwards. You can include the major points you wish to raise and include any references or links to resources you used for information. If this is a live session, try to bring at least 10 copies of the handout with you to distribute. Otherwise please give us a pdf that we can post along with the recording of your session.

2. Facilitating the discussion

A. Begin with a very short introduction to the topic of the session. Highlight a few issues you wish to cover in the discussion. Mention that there will be ample time for comments, and suggest that attendees note down questions or possible contributions while you speak.

B. When it comes time for the others to chime in, make notes that will help you to further facilitate the discussion. Note individuals' names and important comments.

C. Where appropriate, ask for clarification. Not all comments will be crystal clear the first time they are offered. You should feel free to make suggestions and expand on others' ideas and encourage the same other attendees.

3. Concluding with a summary

A. Complete the session by highlighting topics that were covered with any revelations that were made during the discussion. If appropriate, refer attendees to your handout for more information.

B. Ask for additional ideas or a "last word" from the participants. Keep in mind there is an impressive amount of teaching experience at this conference. Ideally you will learn something new about your own topic before the Roundtable ends.

C. Thank the participants for their presence and contributions, and you're done!

NB: If you have any questions regarding the Roundtable format, please contact Jim Wilkinson at iutconference@gmail.com.