

PANELIST DO'S

Serve the Audience. They paid good money (at the very least invested their time) to be there. So always keep the audience in mind as you prepare. Figure out what they might want to know from you and then deliver it. Anticipate their questions and have answers and resources ready.

Check In with the Moderator. Speak to the moderator well beforehand to align your expectations with the moderator's. Find out who the other panelists are, why you were chosen, and what role you play. Ask for the format of the program along with a working agenda, speaking order and ground rules. Finally, ask how best to support each other. At the very least, the moderator will ask for a short bio that is interesting and relevant as well as some pithy, provocative questions about the topic.

Be Prepared. Research the other panelist's positions and determine what makes you/your position unique from the others. Be ready to introduce yourself succinctly (2-3 sentences is great), have an interesting opening statement, and 3-5 key messages that matter. Be ready to support your points with concrete examples and crisp, concise stories that humanize your message and drive it home. Think of a quick sound bite that everyone will write down because it is so cool – and so right!

Be Timely. Show up on time – even a little bit early. Then, if you are given 5 minutes to present, a minute to share, a sentence to recap, stick to your time limits. It's all about respecting the audience and following the prescribed process.

Follow the Moderator's Lead. Hopefully, you'll have a good moderator who provides clear instructions. Speak when invited to and give subtle signals to the moderator when you would like to contribute to the discussion.

Be Honest. Your audience wants insider information. They may even be struggling with topical issues that you have successfully conquered. As you share your ideas, be honest about your struggles, what worked as well as what didn't. Be open and honest, and a little humble too.

Use the Microphone. If there is only one microphone for all the panelists, make sure you have ready access to it. Lift it close to your mouth and speak confidently into it while looking at the audience.

Tag On. Make it a conversation rather than a ping pong match between the moderator and individual panelists by making explicit links or references to what other panelists have said. Add to or disagree with their contributions by saying *"Let me add something to that idea..."* or *"We take a different approach at our company..."* Be additive and not repetitive to the discussion – and don't feel compelled to answer every question – especially when another panelist has given a perfectly fine answer.

Disagree Diplomatically. At some point, you will disagree with the other panelists (otherwise, why have a panel discussion?). One of the panelists will say something that is not consistent with your own view or perspective. You've got to weigh in! Respectfully disagree without being disagreeable. Rather than saying "Jane, that's stupid," respond by saying something like *"Jane, I understand how your research could lead to infer this; however, my field work indicates otherwise."*

Enjoy Yourself. If you're having fun, the audience will too. Smile. Laugh. Tease each other in a kindhearted way. It will be okay; your audience wants you to succeed, so show your passion and enthusiasm for the topic. So just relax; it will all be over in an hour or so!

Make Friends. You have the opportunity to create great relationships with your fellow panelists, moderator and audience members. Particularly if you were articulate and made relevant points, it's a great way to connect with other high profile experts. Don't hesitate to follow up with an email and continue the conversation!

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PANELIST DON'TS

Don't Wing It. Audiences expect a scintillating conversation similar to their experience with CNN or Fox News – so you have to do more than just grace them with your presence. Great panelists take the time to think through their key messages, tweetable quotes, and inspiring (and concise) stories – otherwise, you may end up looking like someone from the Jerry Springer Show.

Don't Be Boring. Yes; you are there to inform, but you must also be interesting. Show energy and enthusiasm for the subject. Have a few interesting facts, true stories and illustrative examples. If you're able, try to make things a bit humorous – but leave out the joke about how many panelists it takes to screw in a light bulb.

Don't Bluster. When you are speaking, keep it short. No more than 90 seconds is a good goal. People prefer snappy, well thought out answers to interesting questions.

Don't Get Huff. In a good panel, you will be interrupted, challenged and contradicted. You do not have to answer every question. You will not always get in the last word. The moderator will cut you off if you go over time. Let it go. Be gracious to others and they will be gracious to you.

Don't Be A Jerk. Don't cut off other panelists or the moderator. Don't interrupt another panelist. Don't hog the spotlight. Balance your airtime with others on the panel and give everyone a chance to contribute.

Don't Use Slides. Put the information in a handout. Give the audience a link to further information. If you must, use one or two slides that requires a visual representation of a key idea – a graph, chart or image – and make sure the audience doesn't have to squint to read it.

Don't Self-Promote. Some panelists just can't help themselves pitching their product, service or company. Don't be that person. NO ONE wants to hear your sales pitch. Instead, make your comments in service to the audience and at the end, let them know where you'll be after the panel to discuss the panel topic further.

Don't Be a Contrarian. Yes, there should be some disagreements, but don't disagree simply because you can. Disagree because the discussion will benefit the audience *and* your reputation.

Don't Think No One is Looking. Even though you are not speaking, some participants will still be looking at you. Stay poised and professional. Sit up straight. Look at the other panelists when they are talking. Don't sigh, eye-roll, zone out, scratch, cross and uncross your legs, fiddle with your smart phone or laptop....

Don't Fake It. If you don't know the answer to the question, simply say so. Don't ramble or make something up (somebody is out there recording your response to post on YouTube immediately after the panel is over). If someone else on the panel might be able to answer the question, punt it over by saying, "I have never experienced this myself, but perhaps Joe has got some ideas on this?"

Don't Pontificate. Don't talk down to or lecture the audience. You are there to have a conversation with the other panelists and audience as colleagues, not to serve your ego.

Don't Distract. Be aware of your physical presence, especially if you are on a raised platform and sitting on comfortable chairs without a table in front of you. Peek a boo! Short skirts, plunging necklines, dangly jewelry and bizarre (or no) socks can distract the audience from the message. It doesn't add to your credibility, either.