



Working with Your Speakers

by Barbara Brixey Wylie

Before:

1. Get it in writing! Even when you have discussed the details with the speaker, send a letter or email listing everything you've agreed upon.
 - Topic and title
 - Date and time
 - Location, including the street address and details such as one-way streets
 - Audio/visual needs: Will you provide the computer and projector or will the speaker? If internet access is available, will it be needed?
 - Handout:
 - Typically, societies and national conferences limit handouts to four pages or less. This is good because it encourages speakers to communicate clearly yet concisely. Occasionally, a presentation may need a longer handout—perhaps a chart or map to be kept for handy reference. Stating your policy in the initial invitation cues the speaker to explain the need for any extra pages and prevents you from being blindsided with a ten-page handout.
 - Reproduction: Will you reproduce it or will the society reimburse the speaker for making the copies? State the reimbursement rate *per page*. (Front is one page; back is another page.)
 - Amount of honorarium
 - Length of presentation
 - Most speakers have planned their presentation to last 40 - 45 minutes plus up to ten minutes for questions because that's what most audiences want.
 - If you require a different length, the speaker will need to rework the presentation to fit. Does your honorarium compensate for this added preparation?
2. Ask for a biography of 100 words or less and, perhaps, a photo to be used in publicity. If you don't specify the number of words, you may get three pages of information, leaving you to guess which items are most important to the speaker. Relay that information to the Publicity Chair and keep a copy for yourself.
3. Check arrangements with the speaker one or two weeks before the scheduled presentation and give any special instructions.
 - Agree upon the speaker's arrival time.
 - Specify which door to enter if there is more than one.
 - Provide the room name or number.
 - Identify the person who will greet him or her.
 - Review A/V requirements and identify who will help with the set up when the speaker arrives.
 - Speakers who are reproducing handouts need to know how many copies to provide.
 - The speaker may have been elected to a new position, received an honor or published a new book so ask whether the biography submitted for publicity needs to be updated.

4. Remind the treasurer to write a check for the speaker's honorarium and, if appropriate, reimbursement for copying the handouts.

At the meeting:

1. Arrive before the speaker does.
 - Make sure the a/v equipment is ready.
 - Greet the speaker.
 - Provide assistance (you or a designated person)
 - Help the speaker set up the computer, projector and microphone. Have an extra extension cord handy in case the cords won't reach the outlet.
 - Test one of the speaker's slides to determine whether some of the room's lighting needs to be dimmed.
 - Test the microphone.
 - Ask the speaker whether to distribute handouts as people arrive or at the beginning of the presentation.
 - Provide a glass of water at or near the lectern.
2. Introduce the speaker.
 - No matter how well the audience knows the speaker, don't stop with "needs no introduction." Every speaker deserves an introduction and every audience needs to be reminded why you've invited this speaker to present this topic.
 - But, don't steal time from the speaker by making a long introduction. Four or five sentences can highlight the skills and accomplishments of most speakers.
 - If the program is first on the agenda, in front of the group, give the speaker permission to leave before the business meeting if he wishes.
 - Before you sit down, remind people to turn off their cell phones and set a good example by turning yours off too.
3. You are the host so be prepared to deal with the unexpected.
 - It is better for you to ask the speaker to talk louder or to reposition the microphone than to leave the audience unable to hear.
 - Don't let anyone in the audience derail the speaker with excessive interruptions. Try interrupting with something like "Could we please hold our questions until the end of the presentation so we won't run out of time?"
 - If the speaker goes overtime, try these incremental tactics:
 - Step 1: Rise and stand in the side aisle where the speaker can see you.
 - Step 2: If there is no response, walk forward until you are about even with the front row while discreetly touching your watch
 - Step 3: If there's still no indication that the speaker is closing, intervene with a quick apology for interrupting ("The library is going to lock the doors and turn us into pumpkins in ten minutes.") and a warm thank you.
4. Help the speaker pack up after the presentation. Because unmarked cables and cords are easily confused, this helper should know what belongs to the society/host facility and what belongs to the speaker.

After the meeting:

1. Follow up with a thank you note (or email) to the speaker.
2. Don't hesitate to recommend a good speaker to friends in other societies.
3. Encourage good speakers to submit their information to the TSGS Speakers Bureau.