

Be a Better Panelist

Want to learn more about what happens behind the scenes in Programming? Our own Steven Silver has written a [great article in Apex magazine](#) that goes into depth about the creation of a convention program as well as showing how much communication matters between Program staff and participants. There is also a wonderful article here about [Promoting Your Work](#) for first time authors to help you navigate this world of fan-run conventions.

If the Programming Team at a science fiction convention does its job properly, the end result should be a clean schedule that always presents interesting items for attendees and program participants alike. However, Programming is one of the most complex divisions of a convention and, to make the Programming Team's task even more difficult, it is an area that invites outside scrutiny at a time when the division is in a major state of flux.

Tips for Being a Better Panelist!

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Some things to do:

- Be prepared. If possible, find out the topics beforehand and make notes prior to the convention.
- Do have a general discussion with your co-panelists before the panel (by email before the convention or meet in the Green Room before your panel if this is possible), but nothing too specific. At the very least, agree on what you're going to talk about!
- Especially if you are discussing something controversial, do back up your arguments and assertions with facts.
- Do start and end on time (and take discussions/autographing that often pop up the end of the program item out of the room.)
- Turn off your phone (or, at least, put it on vibrate) before the panel starts.
- If you speak softly, do remember to either speak as loud as you can or request a microphone. If only the first two rows can hear you, it doesn't matter how brilliant your observations are.
- Do know how to use the technical equipment you asked for (well ahead of time...)
- Do use humor and/or try to be entertaining, where appropriate. (This is particularly important if it's supposed to be a funny program item!)
- Do expect surprises. They happen.
- Be polite.
- Have fun

Some things *not* to do:

- Do not announce that you don't know why you're on a panel. If you get put on a panel that you don't think is appropriate for you, let Programming know ahead of time so you can be removed from the panel.
- Do not sit on a panel and only promote/refer to your own work. You can mention what you've written, but your focus should be on the topic, not on selling your books/stories/work. If you are only at the convention to sell, that's what the Dealer's Room is for.
- If you have books with you, do not stand them up like a wall between you and the audience, which is distancing. Hold the titles up when you introduce yourself, but then either put them away or lay them flat on the table (see #2)
- Do not monopolize the conversation. Chances are that if you do so, you will both bore and annoy your co-panelists and the audience (unless you are Harlan Ellison, in which case they've probably given you a solo slot).
- Do not drone.
- Do not be a wallflower. If you aren't adding to the conversation, there is little reason (if any) for you to be on the panel. If you don't feel you are conversant enough with the topic or comfortable in a panel environment, let programming know ahead of time so they can assign someone to the panel who might be able to contribute more to the discussion.
- Do not be afraid to disagree. Panels in which everyone agrees are boring. A little debate goes a long way to make a better and memorable panel. That said, don't disagree just for the sake of disagreeing.
- Also, do not insult people—other panelists, the audience, the committee....
- Do not drag the program item off-topic. If someone else has veered off in another direction, try to help steer the conversation back to the assigned topic if it's your turn to talk.
- Do not call on people in the audience for questions if you're not the moderato. Corollary: Unless you are the moderator OR the moderator isn't doing the job, don't moderate.
- Do not add other people to the program item, or allow people to add themselves.