

BSPS chairing policy, January 2016

The seminar room can be a hostile environment, and is often perceived to be highly judgemental. In such an environment, those who lack confidence are unlikely to want to speak up. They may fear that a poor question will affect staff/senior colleagues' opinion of their philosophical ability and therefore their chances of securing a good reference, temporary position, etc. Or they may simply fear public humiliation. Moreover, given that hostile and aggressive behaviour is stereotypically male, such an atmosphere may engender stereotype threat or a general feeling of not fitting in amongst some women (and indeed some men), especially in a subject area such as Philosophy of Science where women are generally not well represented.

The BSPS has therefore adopted the following policy, which applies to all BSPS Ordinary Meetings and to the annual conference. We also ask those conference organisers who receive BSPS funding for their events to abide by this policy.

1. General

The Chair is responsible for, and has the authority to ensure as far as is possible, that the seminar/conference session is conducted in a collegial and respectful manner. For example, they have the authority to cut off questioners whose questions or comments are aggressive in tone or overly long, and should ensure that no member of the audience contributes without being granted permission to do so. In particular, they should aim to ensure that nobody is interrupted or talked over. (This can be a particular problem for non-native English speakers, who may need a little more time to formulate their question or response.)

2. Short break between the talk and the questions.

There should be a short (3-5 minutes) break between the talk and the question period. This gives all participants the chance to think through and/or discuss their question with colleagues. (NB This policy does not apply to sessions that are less than about 45 minutes long, e.g. the parallel sessions at the annual conference.)

3. Discretion concerning the order in which questions are taken

The Chair is entitled to exercise discretion concerning the order in which they call on people to ask questions, e.g. by:

- prioritising people who don't normally speak and/or postgraduates;
- not allowing someone who has already asked a question to ask a second question later on, if others who want to ask a question have not yet done so.

Chairs should note that less confident participants often sit towards the back of the room, so when constructing a list of questions they should consider starting at the back rather than the front.

4. Adopting (and enforcing) the hand/finger distinction

When the hand/finger distinction is in operation, a hand represents a new question and a finger represents a follow-up question or request for clarification that is highly relevant to the

question/answer just given. This distinction is open to abuse, and in such cases the Chair is entirely entitled to intervene (e.g. by stopping the 'finger' question if it is clearly irrelevant and recategorising it as a 'hand' question, to go on the bottom of the list of questions).

5. Follow-up questions

Participants should be aware that a follow-up question (i.e. a second question immediately after the speaker's response to their original question) is not a right; permission (which may or may not be granted) should be sought from the Chair, and failure to do this may result in the questioner being cut off mid-flow.