

Forum, Panel, & Symposium

Submitted by Sandi Johnson

“Perhaps no method is more central to the adult education tradition in the United States than the forum and its derivations, the panel and the symposium.” (Sisco, p. 255)

Description:

Method	Purpose	Tone	Level of Audience Participation
Forum	Meeting of 25 or more persons gathered for open discussion among members of the entire group and one or more resource persons	Semi-formal	Great
Panel	Meeting of 3 to 6 persons seated around a table in the presence of an audience with aim of having a purposeful conversation on a given topic or theme	Informal	Limited
Symposium	Series of formal presentations given by 2 to 5 persons of notable authority on different aspects of the same theme or closely related themes	Formal	Moderate

from Sisco (1998), page 259.

Uses:

Forum:

- To further clarify or explore information presented by a lecture or panel
- To promote audience participation and stimulate broad-based discussion
- To identify community needs and interests

Panel:

- To stimulate interest in a topic and present multiple points of view
- To identify and clarify problems and issues

- To chart a course of action

Symposium:

- To present several sides of one question or several perspectives on one theme
- To bring together diverse viewpoints on a controversial topic
- to aid in understanding how related parts of a topic contribute to the whole

Materials:

No special materials are required; however, some attention to room arrangement is necessary for successful execution of these strategies.

Forum:

- Moderator and resource persons seated at a table with microphones on a stage or platform in front of the audience.
- Audience seated facing the platform or at round tables.

Panel:

- Panel members seated at tables (with microphones if needed) facing each other on platform or stage with moderator positioned to guide discussion.
- Audience seated facing the platform.

Symposium:

- Speakers and chairperson are seated on stage or platform facing the audience, with a single stand or podium for one speaker at a time.
- Audience seated facing the platform.

Instructions:

The primary instructions for the panel, the forum, or the symposium are: *Select the most suitable topic, the finest possible participants and the best available setting!*

Forum:

- The *moderator* introduces the program and guide discussion.
- The *resource person(s)* supplies information, answer questions, and offer ideas.
- The *audience* should be persons who have knowledge and interest in the topic.

Panel:

- The *moderator* is familiar with the topic and arranges the panel, selects panelists, and guides discussion.
- *Panel members* are articulate, knowledgeable and diverse.
- *Audience members* are interested in the topic, although their backgrounds may vary.

Symposium:

- The *chairperson* organizes and presides at the symposium.

- The *speakers* are responsible for clear, informative presentations.
- The *audience* is comprised of interested individuals.

Tips:

Forum:

- A skilled moderator keeps the discussion from being monopolized by more outspoken participants.
- A smoothly operating sound system greatly enhances the success of larger forums.

Panel:

- A skilled moderator is essential to keep panel members on task and allow all panelists equal opportunity to speak.
- Panels work best when panelists are effective speakers as well as knowledgeable about their subject area.

Symposium:

- Coordinate with speakers to minimize any confusion on topic or focus of symposium and to avoid repetition in material presented

References:

Sisco, Burton R. (1998). "Forum, Panel, and Symposium." In M. W. Galbraith (ed.), *Adult Learning Methods*, 2nd Edition, Florida, Krieger Publishing.

Watt-Evans, Lawrence (1999). "Pros and Cons: Panel Discussions." At www.sff.net/people/lwe/miscellaneous/articles