

LEXICON

The 38th New Zealand National

Science Fiction & Fantasy Convention

LexiCon: A Guide for Participants

There will be a range of events available at LexiCon, including solo presentations and workshops. This guide is focused on panels, but we hope it is useful for those involved in other ways. Please do feel free to talk to the convention committee (concom) if we can help you in any way.

Panels usually last for one hour, and have 3-5 panelists, including a chair. The main criteria for being a panelist is having an interest in the topic and being prepared to talk about it, rather than any formal or professional experience. Panels generally involve discussion among the panelists (rather than several short presentations) and include some time for audience questions.

Panelists sit at the front of the room and talk while seated. In some cases this will be on a stage - which will be wheelchair accessible with a ramp. Please let us know if you need any equipment or particular arrangements made in advance.

Being a Panelist

We encourage you to attend PANEL101 on Friday afternoon where we'll be giving you information and tips about being a panelist. Whether you can make it or not, here's some additional advice.

First, thanks for offering to participate! Being a panelist might seem intimidating, but panels are generally fun and informal. It's an opportunity to geek out about the stuff you love with other people who love it, too.

Some panelists make heaps of notes in advance, others prefer to talk more off the cuff. If this is your first time on a panel, we recommend bringing at least a few notes including titles of books/movies/games/etc you'd like to talk about to conquer any brain blanks.

If there are microphones in your room, please use them - irrespective of whether you think people can hear without them. It's hard for someone to speak up in a crowded room if they're having trouble.

The panel will usually begin with introductions. A short introduction could be something like these:

- * My name's Anne Smith. I was actually introduced to Doctor Who just a few years ago - but since then I've watched everything I can get my hands on. The seventh Doctor is my favourite and I will fight anyone who says bad things about Ace.
- * Hi, I'm Josh Brown. I've been reading paranormal romance for a number of years, and the first book in my trilogy [Title] will be released in August.

It's tempting to spend the time when you aren't speaking preparing what you're going to say next, but listening to the other panelists might spark a new thought or idea. Those panels that turn into an interesting discussion are often the ones that are most fun to watch.

You may want to make notes as the panel goes on so you remember to make a point when your turn to speak comes up.

If your panel is marked as "family friendly", please keep your content suitable for all ages. This doesn't mean you need to focus on children, or avoid complex ideas, but content the typical parent wouldn't want their child hearing is best avoided.

And in general, remember there will be people in the audience with different experiences. If you're planning on describing something that could be particularly troubling (eg graphic violence) that isn't obvious from the panel description, consider if you can do so without going into details - and if it's essential you do, let us know so we can add a warning to the description.

Being a Chair

Just like being a panelist, chairs will vary in how much preparation they do beforehand. Some formalise and circulate a set of questions; others just arrive with a rough idea of what to talk about. As a minimum, you should have an idea of who the other panelists are. It's a good idea to connect with all of them by email prior to the con, to make sure everyone has the same idea about the topic. Some panels chat quite extensively about the topic in advance, but that is not required.

While this can differ based on convention, at LexiCon the chair is usually also a panelist, so you should be prepared to talk to the points you raise. The chair is responsible for guiding the discussion, and setting expectations. Most chairs begin with a short introduction of the topic, then ask each panelist to introduce themselves. It's a good idea to set expectations for the audience here as well, such as whether or not audience questions/comments are acceptable during the bulk of the panel or if they should be held until the end.

As panelists likely have different experience and interests, it's useful to focus mostly on open ended questions, for example:

- * What are your favourite examples of x in movies?
- * Why do you think it's important that y is represented in fiction?
- * When did you first see z and what impact did it have on you?

If one panelist has a particular interest you can invite them to speak to it (eg ("Sam, I know you've done some particular research on beliefs about vampirism in eighteenth century New England, can you tell us a little about what you've discovered")) but most of the time a general question which you ask each of the panelists to speak to is a good model.

Often audience members want to speak quite early - and some of them want to talk a lot. While you can make a judgement call on how to handle this, we advise telling panelists to hold their questions until the last 10-15 minutes, and to remind them when you open for questions that you are looking for questions to the panelists, not general discussion.

You're also responsible for making sure everyone on the panel has time to speak. A good resource for those moments when someone is taking more time than they should, is author Nancy Fulda's article [Moderating Panels: How to be Rude in the Nicest Possible Way](#).