

Philosophy: Policy on Research Seminars, July 2014

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).

The following policy has therefore been adopted. This applies to all research seminars conducted as part of the DA's research, including the weekly Research Seminar and all conferences and workshops, whether organised by or aimed at staff or postgraduate students.

1. Short break between the talk and the questions.

There will 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.

This applies only to sessions that are at least 45 minutes long; in shorter sessions, a break would not allow sufficient time for discussion.

2. 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.

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

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).

4. 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.