

**: Guidelines for Discussions – [peter.gruber@usi.ch](mailto:peter.gruber@usi.ch)**

Discussions are an important element of the scientific process. They provide formalized feedback to an author before a paper is sent to publication. A good discussion is a lot of work, but on average you will receive as much as you give: every conference participant usually gives and receives one discussion. A badly prepared discussion is considered free riding and frowned upon in the community.

A discussion is a short presentation and should be prepared as such. This includes producing slides, rehearsing at least once and checking the timing (usually 5 minutes).

The structure of the discussion should follow the three “Cs”: context – contribution – criticism.

**Context (1 slide)**

- The problem that this paper tries to address and why it is important.
- A categorization of the problem and the approach. Example: “This is an option pricing model in the class of multifactor affine latent state space models.”
- The state of the literature so far and how this paper is positioned in the literature. Remember that the audience is usually not aware of the literature.

**Contribution (1-2 slides)**

- Approach: What is new? E.g.: method, data set, hypothesis, combination of two approaches,...
- Results: What do we learn from the paper?
- If there are several contributions, which is the most important one?
- Explain briefly the main method/idea. Do not exaggerate this part: just the main idea!
- If you did not understand something reading the paper, probably most other people will not have understood it either. Raise these points so that the author can think of a better exposition.

**Criticism (1-3 slides)**

- First, always include some positive feedback. It is very interesting for the author to see what people liked. He may put more emphasis on these elements in a revised version.
- Your critique should start with the most severe items, like the ...
  - Main modelling assumptions
  - Econometrics
  - Data sources
  - Interpretation of results including possible over-claiming
- Where possible, substantiate your criticism with your own calculations.
- Present possible alternatives including references. It is OK to refer to your own experience here.
- Raise minor quibbles such as typos, unexplained symbols, unclear exposition or illegible graphs last.
- The final slide should contain open questions, suggestions for further work and possibly a “wish list” of what you would like to see added to the paper. Try to refrain from producing a long list of obvious extensions. Focus on feasible additions that provide important additional insights.

A good discussion requires you to study the entire paper and have at least some understanding of the related literature. Give yourself a week to prepare your discussion. Finally, it is OK to ask for a different paper to discuss if you have absolutely no idea about the topic and fear you could not produce a useful discussion in a reasonable amount of time.