

Chip Eichelberger Room Setup

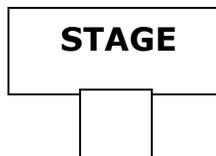
The logistics of the room are very important to the overall success of the meeting: chairs, light, music, temperature, stage set-up all play a role. Here is a check list of things to consider that will make a difference for all your sessions.

- The number of chairs and proximity to the stage is crucial to maximize energy. Keep a close track on the **actual number of participants** you have. The hotel/convention center will typically set up too many. You can always add chairs. Start the first row five feet away from the stage, not twenty feet. *Pay extra attention at a closing session.* Usually the numbers always go down 10 – 25% - take out some chairs. Why? The ones in the front rows will be empty.

When the audience is spread out with many open seats the energy drops and it is more difficult for any speaker. One trick is to use masking tape to restrict access to the back rows before you must use them. Have some staff protect access to the area.

At the closing session you will always have shrinkage of the audience. Set fewer chairs than you think you need or at least tape off the back rows.

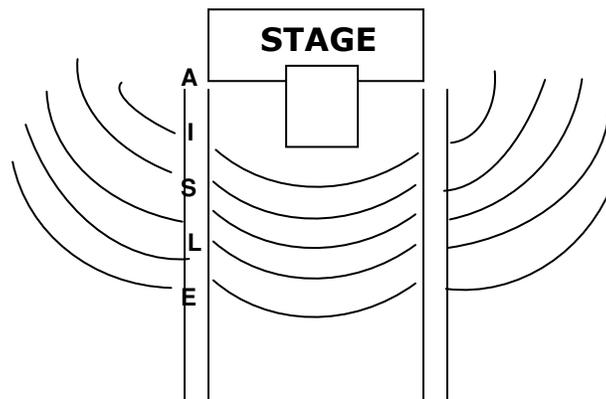
- With groups over 70 and going 5 rows deep you need a 12" riser/stage so the speaker can be seen. Over 150 go 18" and over 500 go 24", over 1000 go 36". When you have over 150 you will have better results with the stage in shape of a "T" instead of the traditional straight across rectangle.



- To magnify audience reaction and comfort the way the chairs are set up is the most important. Ideally instruct the hotel to **set the chairs 4" apart.** *People hate to be jammed together.* Also have the not put the chairs right behind each other, have them stagger them so it is easier to see between the heads in front of them.

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- Setting up the chairs in a modified theatre style “Chevron” pattern is paramount. *Unless you tell the hotel/convention center, they will set the chairs close together, right behind each other and straight across.* If you tell the hotel/convention center to do a Chevron pattern, they will only angle the chairs about 15 degrees – you want **45 degrees**. No matter where the chair is, the person is facing the center of the stage, perpendicular to it. Ideally curve the outside rows in and the outside of each center row. Here is the best layout I know of. It may help to get this diagram to the hotel.



- Try to **avoid a middle aisle** if you can. It is much easier to talk to people than to speak to an empty space or a wide center aisle. *It creates two separate audiences that the speakers must address.* If you need a screen for Power Point or video presentations, try to use a rear projection system to avoid putting the projector in a middle aisle. If you can't do that, try to put the screen in one corner or both corners and not in the middle.
- Bright lights equal energy. Make sure all the lights are working and check to see if what track lights can be set up or other lights added to **light up the stage** if you are not using a professional crew. It is very common for the stage to be put in the center of the room below where an air wall was taken out. This puts the stage in the darkest part of the room. Having your speakers in the dark where they do not stand out is a problem. Having a "stage wash" of lights is a great idea.
- If you are using screens, instead of turning down the lights, unscrew the bulbs just above the screens. Keep the room as bright as you can. Try to place the screen in a corner and not in the middle of the room to avoid a center aisle.

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- If the room is too warm, especially after lunch, the energy will drop. Better a little cool (68°/69°) than too warm. Ask the hotel/conference center staff to turn the AC will in 90 minutes in advance of your morning start. If it is warm before the audience gets in the room, it will really heat up when you get a big crowd in the room.
- If you are planning on using student tables during your event, **almost everything still applies**. Still arrange without a center aisle and turn the rows of tables on the side to a 45° angle. Unless you are specific, the hotel will do 15°. To keep people from sitting in the back rows first, put up RESERVED signs on the tables or take away the chairs and add the if needed.

If you have a closing speaker after lunch, it may be possible to remove the tables during the break and set it up theatre style as described above. This will make a big difference in the energy of the crowd.

- Follow the same advice for all your breakout rooms.
- Make sure you prepare the music in advance you want to play at your event. Tie it into your theme if possible. Always have some **up beat music** playing when people walk in the room and during breaks.
- If possible have the audience enter from the doors in the front of the room and not the back. If they enter from the back, that will fill first.

Bonus Tip: usually it is better to wait until 5 minutes before you begin to let people in the room for your general sessions. If you let them wander in 20 minutes before the start the energy dissipates. Let them burst in, with an upbeat song when you are ready. Have them enter the room from the doors near the FRONT of the room not the back of the room.