Procedures for Organizing Meetings at the MLA Convention

This guide describes the kinds of meetings at the MLA convention and the procedures for organizing them. All correspondence concerning these procedures should be sent to the MLA convention office. The e-mail address for the convention office is convention@mla.org.

1. Who Can Organize Meetings

Meetings at the convention are arranged by MLA divisions and discussion groups, individual members, the American Literature Section, allied and affiliate organizations, and committees of the association.

2. Guidelines for All Meetings

Deadlines. Special Session proposals and Division, Discussion Group, and Allied and Affiliate program copy forms should be sent to the convention office and must be postmarked or submitted electronically no later than *1 April*. Participants in all sessions must be listed on the membership rolls by *7 April* or have been granted a waiver of membership.

Membership. While anyone who has registered for the convention may attend meetings, only current MLA members may organize, chair, or participate formally in sessions (i.e., give papers, serve as discussants, or have their names listed in the Program).

Membership in the association is for the calendar year. Individuals who join the MLA to organize or participate in convention programs must be listed on the membership rolls by *7 April* of the year in which the convention is to be held. Current MLA members may check the membership status of a session participant by going to www.mla.org/member_search. A member number and password are required in order to access this members only section of the MLA Web site.

At the discretion of the executive director, waivers may be granted for nonscholars (e.g., creative writers, lawyers, etc.), scholars who work outside of the United States and Canada, and scholars in the United States and Canada who work in disciplines other than language and literature. The request must be made on the Request for Waiver of Membership form and should accompany the program copy form if possible. The waiver request form may be obtained by e-mailing the MLA convention office (convention@mla.org). The form must be submitted no later than *1 April*. Speakers may be granted a waiver once every five years. The speaker's discipline (history, economics, psychology, etc.) or profession (curator, archivist, attorney, etc.) must be specified. Please note that waived nonmembers cannot organize or chair a session.

Payment for speakers. Each year the MLA Executive Council authorizes very limited funds to provide partial assistance to persons who are not MLA members and who would not normally be expected to attend a professional meeting in the field of language and literature. Those who are eligible to receive such funds include distinguished persons in fields other than those directly represented by the MLA, creative writers who do not have academic positions, scholars who reside outside the United States and Canada, and MLA honorary members and fellows. Requests for such funds must be made

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on the fund request form (which may be obtained from the convention office or on the MLA Web site at www.mla.org), must reach the executive director no later than *15 April* of the year in which the convention is to be held, and must explain how the participant would enrich the program.

Participation in meetings. So that as many members as possible may have the opportunity to be active in convention programs, a member may participate as speaker or respondent only twice (e.g., by organizing and chairing a meeting, reading a paper, or serving as a speaker, panelist, or respondent in one or two sessions) at a single convention. Up to eight participants, including presiders and respondents, and their affiliations may be listed for any roundtable session. The Delegate Assembly has approved the policy that there must be a fifteen-minute discussion period at the end of each session; therefore, the Program Committee strongly recommends that there be no more than three principal papers in a session. A member may propose only one special session a year. No more than two panelists from the same institution may participate in a session.

Length of meetings. All convention meetings other than forums last one hour and fifteen minutes; forums are one hour and forty-five minutes. Fifteen minutes must be left at the end of each session for discussion.

Calls for papers. Calls for papers, which may be published in the *MLA Newsletter* and on the MLA Web site (www.mla.org), serve to bring together potential session organizers (be they divisions, discussion groups, allied organizations, or individual members) and participants. Calls for papers are simply statements of intent to propose a session; they do not in any way bind the organizer or the Program Committee. No announcements will be made for organizers who have already submitted their proposals.

Of the four issues of the *Newsletter* produced each year, three are useful for making calls for papers: Fall—for the convention to be held in the following calendar year (e.g., the Fall 2005 issue for the convention to be held in December 2006); Winter—for the convention to be held in the following calendar year; Spring—for the convention to be held that year. (The Summer issue cannot be used for sessions proposed for that year because the deadline for proposals is in early April.) A calendar of deadlines is available from the convention office and on the MLA Web site. Because of the limited space available, calls for papers in the *Newsletter* and on the Web site must be limited to thirty-five words, including the title of the session but not counting the name and address of the person placing the announcement. The MLA reserves the right to edit calls for papers submitted to the *Newsletter* and the Web site.

3. Division Meetings

The MLA divisions encompass the primary scholarly and professional concerns of the association. Each division may arrange one to three meetings of one hour and fifteen minutes each. Fifteen minutes must be left at the end of each session for discussion. As an alternative to its regular programs, a division may propose a forum (see sec. 6), perhaps in conjunction with another division, a discussion group, an allied organization, or an affiliate organization. A division that arranges a forum may also organize one other meeting during the convention at which the forum is held.

Executive committee program responsibilities. Division executive committees are responsible for planning division programs. It is the duty of the chair of the executive committee to handle the details of organizing the session(s) and to prepare copy for the Program issue. If the chair delegates these responsibilities to another member of the executive committee, that member must notify the MLA convention office of the change. Division executive committees are encouraged to experiment with a variety of formats in organizing their sessions. A division session can, for example, present a roundtable, a panel discussion, two speakers, or a single speaker who delivers a major address.

Executive committees meet during the convention to select topics for future convention programs and to transact other business. Immediately after the convention, the secretary of the executive committee (who will have become the chair on 1 January and thus will organize the program for that year) must send the MLA convention office a call for papers for at least one of its three sessions. The call should include the deadline for submissions, the name of the person to whom papers should be sent (if other than the secretary [incoming chair]), and other pertinent information (see *Calls for papers* above for more details).

Executive committees may arrange informal social gatherings during the convention for members of their divisions—luncheons, dinners, or cash bars for cocktails or nightcaps. The convention office cannot consider scheduling requests for social events that are not scheduled during the cash bar time period (5:15–6:30 p.m., 28 or 29 December) and are not in a headquarters hotel.

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Selecting topics for division programs. Because division programs are among the largest convention meetings in terms of scope and attendance, executive committees are urged to plan at least tentative topics for their programs a year or more in advance. In selecting topics for division sessions, executive committees should keep in mind that divisions represent major areas of membership interest and that their programs, over a period of years, should attempt to convey the range of interests of the division membership. The MLA convention office maintains files of the last five years of convention programming for each division. To aid in the selection of topics, this information is made available to the chairs of the executive committees on a regular basis.

Selecting speakers. Executive committees may place calls for papers in the *MLA Newsletter* and on the MLA Web site (see sec. 2). The Delegate Assembly approved the Executive Council's recommendation that each division be required to issue a call for papers for at least one of its sessions each year.

Preparing Program copy. The chair is responsible for submitting final copy for the Program to the MLA convention office by the 1 April deadline. Chairs are reminded that they must adhere to the guidelines on membership and on payment for speakers (see sec. 2).

4. Discussion Group Meetings

Discussion groups are smaller and more specialized than the divisions. Discussion groups may arrange one meeting of one hour and fifteen minutes for the convention. Fifteen minutes must be left at the end of the session for discussion. In addition to organizing their regular programs each year, discussion groups may propose a forum (see sec. 6), perhaps in conjunction with another discussion group, a division, or an allied organization. To assist in the planning of a discussion group's program, the MLA office maintains files of the last five years of convention programming for each discussion group. This information is provided to the chairs of the executive committees on a regular basis.

Executive committee program responsibilities. A five-member executive committee, of which one new member is elected annually at the group's convention meeting, is responsible for planning the discussion group's program. It is the duty of the chair of the executive committee to handle the details of organizing the session, to prepare copy for the Program, and to preside at the session. If the chair delegates these responsibilities to another member of the executive committee, that member must notify the MLA convention office of the change.

Executive committees meet during the convention to select topics for future convention programs and to transact other business. Immediately after the convention, the secretaries of the executive committees (who will have become the chair on 1 January and thus will organize the program for that year) may send the MLA convention office a call for papers if they wish.

Selecting speakers. Should the executive committee decide to have an open call for papers, please see section 2 of this guide for the appropriate information.

Preparing Program copy. The chair is responsible for submitting final copy for the Program to the MLA convention office by the 1 April deadline. Chairs are reminded that they must adhere to the guidelines on membership and on payment for speakers (see sec. 2).

5. Special Sessions

Special sessions differ from other convention meetings in two ways: (1) they are initiated and organized by individual members to exchange ideas on topics of limited scope; (2) they must be approved by the Program Committee each year. A member may propose only one special session a year. Special sessions must leave fifteen minutes at the end of the session for discussion.

The Program Committee reviews all valid proposals for special sessions and selects the special sessions to be held at the convention. To be valid, a special session proposal must be postmarked no later than 1 April or submitted through the MLA Web site no later than 1 April. The proposer must be a current MLA member. All session participants must be MLA members or have been granted waivers of membership by 7 April. The committee attempts to approve sessions on a wide range of subjects and approaches, taking care not to approve too many sessions on the same topic.

Selecting topics for special sessions. Careful selection of a topic is the first step in preparing a good proposal. Topics should be specific enough to be dealt with adequately in the one hour and fifteen minutes allotted. Topics such as "Teaching Composition," "Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*," or "Archetypal Criticism" are too broad. More suitable topics would be "New Methods of Teaching Composition in the Community College," "Nature Imagery in Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*," or "Archetypal Interpretations of *The Scarlet Letter*." Because the sessions are specialized, their topics

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may vary considerably from year to year according to the changing interests of the membership. The organizer of the session is responsible for arranging the session so that at least fifteen minutes are available for discussion and is responsible for monitoring the length of presentations. Papers on the topic may be circulated in advance by the session leader, summarized at the start of the meeting, or delivered by the participants.

Organizing a special session. Session leaders should give careful consideration to their choice of panelists and include in their proposal only the names of panelists who have formally agreed to participate in the session, if it is approved. The organizer must obtain these tentative commitments from panelists *before* submitting the proposal. All participants must be members of the MLA by 7 April. A member may be listed in more than one session proposal. A member who has submitted papers or agreed to be a respondent for more than two sessions must inform each session organizer, and the organizers should then indicate on their proposals who will replace the member if a replacement is necessary. There should normally be three panelists. A session leader cannot be listed as a panelist unless he or she is delivering a paper. No more than two participants (including the session leader) may be from the same institution, unless the institution is a key aspect of the session (e.g., "New Approaches to Beginning Language Teaching at the Monterey Institute"). The proposal should include information about the participants, explaining why they are particularly well suited to serve on the panel.

The session leader decides which method of selecting panelists best suits the topic. Some sessions bring together individuals who are known to one another and who are aware of their shared interest in a highly specialized topic; other sessions bring together individuals who are identified with a certain theory, idea, or program and whose collective participation would be of particular interest. Under these circumstances, the session leader would probably approach the three or four persons who, in his or her view, would contribute most significantly to the session and ask them to serve as panelists. Sometimes, however, a session leader may propose a session precisely for the purpose of seeking out individuals who are actively involved with the topic. The organizer would then issue a call for papers to announce his or her intention to propose a session and invite prospective panelists to express their interest. Members who wish to solicit panelists in this manner should write to the MLA convention office and request that a call for papers be placed in the *MLA Newsletter* and on the MLA Web site (see sec. 2). Members who place calls for papers in the *Newsletter* and on the Web site should acknowledge receipt of proposals and notify members whose proposals could not be included in the session.

Preparing a proposal for a special session. The forms to be used in preparing proposals for special sessions may be obtained from the MLA convention office, through the MLA's Web site (www.mla.org), or, during the convention, from the headquarters offices. Proposals should be typed on the appropriate form to facilitate reading and evaluation by the Program Committee. Please use standard typeface no smaller than 12 point. Proposals submitted at the MLA Web site should have paragraph breaks. Without paragraph breaks, proposals are difficult to read. Members who wish to organize sessions should pay attention to the deadline (usually 1 April) announced each year for the submission of proposals. Proposals received after the deadline cannot be considered. Proposers occasionally want to connect certain proposals. Because of scheduling constraints, this is not possible; therefore, each proposal will be evaluated separately on its merits by the Program Committee.

A proposal for a special session must be complete to receive proper consideration. It should include: (1) the title of the session, (2) a thorough description of and intellectual rationalization for the topic, (3) the names of the session leader and the panelists who will participate and their professional titles and institutions, and (4) complete Program copy that includes paper titles, names of participants, and only one affiliation per person.

(1) The title should reflect the topic and purpose of the meeting. Since titles of sessions are used not only in the indexes to meetings in the Program but also in special-interest mailings to segments of the MLA membership, it is important that they convey what the session is about. "Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction" is an apt title for a session dealing with fiction in several languages, but a session focusing on the works of two French novelists might more accurately be titled "Naturalism in Novels by Emile Zola and Guy de Maupassant." Similarly, the title "Virginia Woolf" does not indicate the focus of the session. If the session will treat a theme in one of the author's works, a more appropriate title might be "The Betrayal of Family Relationships in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*."

(2) The description of the topic should include (a) an explanation of the topic and the way in which it will be treated and (b) the rationale for organizing a session on that particular topic and the way

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the proposed topic relates to existing scholarship. A brief description of each paper or presentation should be included, but do not send abstracts. Since the Program Committee tries to achieve a balance between sessions on subjects of wide interest and subjects in which only a few persons are interested, this information is important.

(3) The names and institutions of the session leader(s) and panelists who will participate in the session should be included. Only one institution may be listed for each panelist. A member may participate in only two sessions (e.g., by organizing and chairing a meeting, reading a paper, or serving as a speaker or panelist) at the MLA Annual Convention. No more than two panelists from the same institution may participate in a session. A member may propose and serve as session leader for only one special session a year. A member who has submitted papers or agreed to be a respondent for more than two sessions must inform each session organizer, and the organizers should then indicate on their proposals who will replace the member if a replacement is necessary. Proposers should understand that proposals are at a disadvantage if the special session forms are not used, if all the information requested is not provided, or if the proposal includes the names of persons who are not currently MLA members by 7 April or for whom the membership requirement has not been waived. To avoid delays in having their proposals processed, members proposing sessions should verify the membership status and current affiliation of panelists before submitting proposals. You can check membership status by referring to the membership database. If the individual's name does not appear, you can check further by calling the MLA membership office.

Usually only one person serves as session leader. Proposals listing two session leaders should indicate which person should receive correspondence from the MLA convention office concerning the session.

Review by the Program Committee. Each May, the Program Committee meets to review all valid proposals and to select the special sessions to be held at the upcoming convention. The committee approves proposals on the basis of their quality in relation to the others submitted. The committee attempts to include sessions on a wide variety of topics and approaches and to distribute its selections among English and foreign languages and literatures; writing; scholarly, professional, and pedagogical subjects; and so on. The committee strives to balance its selections between topics of continuing interest and topics to which little or no attention has been paid. The committee welcomes proposals that allow for a variety of formats, including roundtable discussions, provided all other guidelines for special sessions are observed. Organizers are notified in writing of the committee's decisions.

Approved sessions. Once a session has been approved, its organizer should confirm with panelists their intention to participate and should reiterate what is expected of them. Session organizers should be aware that substantial changes in the list of panelists cited in the proposal could result in cancellation of the approved session, since sessions have been approved on the basis of the proposals submitted. Only changes in affiliation of previously proposed speakers or speakers who are replacing participants who have withdrawn from the session may be noted on the Program-copy proof that the proposer receives in July.

6. Forums

Arranged by individual members, divisions, discussion groups, allied organizations, or the American Literature Section, forums are large public meetings on topics of broad general interest. In addition to the main session of one hour and forty-five minutes, a maximum of two related workshops may be organized to treat specialized aspects of the general topic. No more than six forums, including the presidential forum, are arranged for a convention.

The MLA executive director, with the assistance of the Program Committee, is responsible for approving forums for each year's convention. Any member who wishes to propose a forum—as an individual member, as a representative of a division or discussion group executive committee, or as an officer of an allied organization—is encouraged to get in touch with the executive director (execdirector@mla.org) and to attend the open hearings of the Program Committee, held every year on the last day of the convention. The open hearings enable members to discuss their ideas with the Program Committee before submitting a formal proposal.

Formal proposals should describe in detail the topic and nature of the proposed forum, include biographical information on its participants, and explain the number and purpose of related workshops. A forum proposal should include the title of the forum and each workshop, a thorough description of the topic, the names of the forum presider and the presiders at each workshop, and the names of participants (with one affiliation for each person) and their paper titles. The description of the topic,

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no more than 1,500 words in length, should include an explanation of the topic, the rationale for organizing a forum on that particular topic, and the way the proposed topic relates to existing scholarship. A brief description of each paper or presentation should be included, but do not send abstracts. All speakers must have agreed to participate when the proposal is submitted. If the proposed forum would entail payment of honoraria or expenses for speakers or special equipment, an estimate of the cost should also be provided. Eligibility of speakers to receive payment is explained in the general guidelines for all convention meetings (see sec. 2). The total expenditure per forum should not exceed $700.

The deadline for submission of proposals is 15 March. The Program Committee will review all proposals and recommend for approval by the executive director those that, in its view, would deal in a productive way with a subject suitable to this format. Members will be notified of the decision on their proposals after the May Program Committee meeting.

7. Special Events

Special events, such as poetry readings, films, or performances, are events of significant interest to some portion of the membership. The MLA executive director, with the assistance of the Program Committee, reviews and approves special events. Proposals for special events should be made on the special-event form (which may be obtained from the convention office or on the MLA Web site) and must reach the convention office no later than 1 April. A special event must be proposed by a current MLA member. The special event should be described in detail, including how the event will function and who will facilitate the event at the convention. When planning the event, proposers should keep in mind that the MLA uses hotel rooms for sessions. These rooms are set theater-style and may not have a stage or special lighting.

8. Allied and Affiliate Organization Meetings

Allied organizations may arrange two sessions of one hour and fifteen minutes each for the convention. Each organization may decide whether either of its two sessions will be used to present papers, to conduct a business meeting, or to hold a social event. Allied organizations that arrange social events outside the convention hotels may announce these events in the convention Program or the *MLA Convention News and Program Update*. The copy deadline for the Program is 1 April; the deadline for the *MLA Convention News and Program Update* is 30 October. Affiliate organizations may arrange one session at the convention. As an alternative to their regular programs, allied and affiliate organizations may propose a forum (see sec. 6), perhaps in conjunction with another allied or affiliate organization, a division, or a discussion group.

If an allied organization arranges two meetings, one of those meetings will be scheduled during a special block of time that has been established for such allied organization meetings. The time to be set aside will vary according to the location of the convention. When the convention is held on the West Coast, these meetings will be scheduled for the mid-afternoon of 27 December; when the convention is held on the East Coast, these meetings will be scheduled for the mid-afternoon of 30 December; when the convention is held in the Midwest, these meetings will be scheduled for the early evening of 27 December and the early afternoon of 30 December.

Allied or affiliate organizations that plan to arrange meetings will receive Program-copy forms by February. Calls for papers may be announced in the *MLA Newsletter* and on the MLA Web site (see sec. 2). Organizers should confirm with panelists their intention to participate in the session and should reiterate what is expected of them. Organizers are responsible for returning the appropriate Program-copy forms by the deadline (usually 1 April) announced in the calendar prepared for the year.

Like speakers and panelists for all other meetings at the MLA convention, those who are on the programs of allied or affiliate organizations must be MLA members (unless the membership requirement has been waived; see sec. 2). Allied and affiliate organization meetings and social functions that are listed in the body of the Program are open to all persons registered at the convention.

9. American Literature Section Meetings

The section's scholarly and professional concerns cover the full range of American literature. The section normally arranges two meetings for the convention. If the American Literature Section arranges a forum (with or without workshops), it may also organize one other meeting during the convention at which the forum is held.

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