How to Run a Speech Prosody Conference

Daniel Hirst, Bernard Bel, Nick Campbell, Keikichi Hirose, Hansjoerg Mixdorff, Ruediger Hoffman, Plinio Barbosa, Chilin Shih, Mark Hasegawa-Johnson

The goal of this document is to help you run a successful Speech Prosody conference. This document was first suggested by Hiroya Fujisaki to Mark Hasegawa-Johnson after the completion of Speech Prosody 2010. It is intended to be a living document, updated after each conference by the organizers, however some of the information is likely still dated.

Sónia Frota, Marina Vigário, Nigel Ward   (updates July 2024)

I. Scientific Aspects of Conference Planning

I.A. The Conference as an Institution

Speech Prosody is, by design, one of the most interdisciplinary of international conferences. We can not say "it is the most interdisciplinary conference in our field" because prosody most probably can not be appropriately or accurately placed within any single "field." Authors who have attended a Speech Prosody conference include representatives from departments of Linguistics, Speech Pathology, Speech and Hearing Science, Psychology, Neuroscience, Music, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Mathematics, Anthropology, and Physics.

I.A.1 Building the Speech Prosody Community

We have always managed to organize the conference in order to avoid parallel oral sessions. We believe that an interdisciplinary community is betrayed if authors from each discipline sort themselves into non-overlapping oral sessions. With all authors attending the same regular oral sessions, several hours/day for four consecutive days, it becomes possible to observe interaction among the disciplines that would be otherwise impossible.

Speech Prosody encourages publication by young authors, authors working on under-resourced languages, and others who may not have the funds to create large state-of-the-art experimental systems, therefore the acceptance rate is usually high. In 2010 the acceptance rate was 87%. More recently, in 2022 it was 74% and in 2024 78% .   There have been typically 200-300 submitted regular manuscripts, resulting in 160-270 accepted regular papers.   One concern that sometimes comes up is whether this acceptance rate is hurting us in some way, for example regarding indexing, but the benefits currently outweigh the downside. However it is important to ensure quality, both by setting an appropriate acceptance rate and by ensuring high-quality reviewing, so that the conference is a driving force in moving the field forward, and the proceedings a reference (with guaranteed indexing).

I.A.2 The Speech Prosody Permanent Advisory Council

In 2010, SProSIG adopted a new constitution.   One of the terms of the new constitution established a Permanent Advisory Council (PAC) for the Speech Prosody conference.   The council includes three permanent members (the founders of the organization: Daniel Hirst, Nick Campbell, and Bernard Bel), the 3-5 SProSIG officers (three according to the constitution, but a tie put four on the board in 2010, and a near-tie put five on the board in 2018), and up to two of the organizers from each Speech Prosody conference (organizers serve on the PAC for ten years).

I.B. Review Policy

Speech Prosody papers are four pages in length with one additional page only for references (page limitation not applicable to keynote speakers).   The purpose of the four-page limit is reviewing: reviewers will evaluate, and the program committee will accept or reject, the entire four-page paper.

In order to ensure quality assessments, and to cope with "split judgments" by reviewers, it is recommended to assign three (or more) reviewers to a paper. This means you will need many qualified reviewers. For this, obtain the reviewer lists, including of performant and non-performant reviewers, from former Speech Prosody organizers well beforehand, and recruit new reviewers. The Permanent Advisory Council may be able to help with this. Also, the Chair of SProSIG will keep an updated list of reviewers from previous conferences. It is important to select qualified reviewers to avoid low quality reviews, and it is recommended to notify reviewers that reviews without any comments are not

acceptable.

I.B.1. Review Criteria

There are five primary review criteria for Speech Prosody: Significance, Correctness, Originality, Readability, and Relevance (SCORR). "Significance" or "Theoretical/empirical contribution" is an estimate of the likely impact the paper will have upon the field of speech prosody. "Correctness" is the lack of errors in scientific background or experimental design. "Originality" is the degree to which the paper proposes and tests new ideas. "Readability" or "Clarity and argumentation" measures the professionalism of the manuscript presentation, and the degree to which a reader can easily understand its content. "Relevance" is the degree to which the paper addresses problems relevant to the study of speech prosody. We have had trouble, in the past, with reviewers who used a very narrow definition of the word "prosody" (e.g., "prosody" = "intonation and rhythm"), and hence gave very low "relevance" scores to very good papers. This can be overcome by selecting qualified reviewers and a sufficient number of reviewers per paper. While the program committee has the right to ignore any reviewer evaluation, by doing so, you waste the energy and time of your reviewer, and in practice this is almost never done. It is also important that the evaluation grid given to reviewers is clear enough, with a definition of each criterion, if needed. This would ensure that your reviewers are properly informed, in advance, for example by providing them with a few sentences defining "relevance," such as the degree to which the paper addresses problems relevant to the study of speech prosody, understood in a broad sense to include interdisciplinary topics. It is also advisable that the scores for the overall evaluation include a scale detailed enough to capture robust differences among papers (e.g., a 7-point scale, for example: strong accept, accept, weak accept, borderline, weak reject, reject, strong reject; or at least a 5-point scale). The evaluation grid given to reviewers should also include the rating of the reviewer's confidence, and recommendation on presentation format.

Plagiarism (copying of another's work without proper explicit and detailed citation) is cause for immediate rejection of any manuscript submitted to Speech Prosody. Self-plagiarism is also cause for immediate rejection. Examples of self-plagiarism include the submission to Speech Prosody of a manuscript that has been previously published elsewhere, or that has been submitted for review to any other journal, conference, or workshop. An article is considered "previously published" if its content is identical to that of another article submitted by the same authors, even if the wording is not identical. Every article submitted to Speech Prosody must contain significant original content, and the significance of the paper is evaluated based on its original content only. An article submitted to Speech Prosody may contain results or analyses that have been published elsewhere by the same authors, but only on two conditions: (1) the previous publication must be correctly cited, and (2) in addition to the previously published results, the article must contain significant original content worthy of publication in an ISCA conference.

I.B.2. Notes on Reviewing

Papers are accepted almost entirely based on review score. Reviewers are asked to score each paper on a numerical scale and to evaluate the confidence with which they rate each paper. Several types of average are therefore possible: raw average, confidence-weighted-average, Z-normalized average (each reviewer's scores are normalized to zero mean and unit variance prior to averaging across reviewers), and Z-normalized confidence-weighted average. Of these, the raw average is most useful, but the other averages can help to determine borderline cases. As a general rule, papers rated below a suitable hard cut-off (in the past, 2.6 in a 1 to 5 scale), should not be accepted. Conference organizers may accept papers whose average review score is slightly below the general threshold, but which merit inclusion because they address under-resourced languages, because they are salient to the theme of the

conference, or for some other reason, but without demoting other papers that were given higher review scores.

Generally, the top-reviewed papers are accepted for oral presentation. While it can be tempting to choose papers for the oral sessions to favor thematic coherence, given that the oral presentations are usually attended by most of the delegates, selecting the best papers for oral presentation ensures that the best work is given more visibility, boosting the field and inspiring our research community.

Every submission (including to a special session) should be subject to the same general review procedures. Organizers of special sessions are informed of the papers submitted to their sessions that were accepted, with their respective scores. If the number of papers accepted exceeds the number of slots, they can choose the papers to be presented in their session, and the other papers that were accepted are included elsewhere in the conference program, within a thematic or regular session. The special session organizers should also be given a list of top-rated papers that seem relevant to their area, so that they can choose any of the regular papers that they wish to include in the special session in case there were not enough submissions to their special session accepted.

I.B.3. Review Schedule

The review schedule depends on the length of time that it takes for visitors to obtain a visa to enter your country.   Find out how long this takes.   Set the announcement of paper accept/reject decisions to be far enough in advance of the conference so that everybody can get their visas, but not too much earlier.   Call this time "T."   For example, Speech Prosody 2010 was held May 11-14; it was determined that some visa requests might take fourteen weeks, therefore accept/reject decisions were announced on T = January 15. Considering that the conference is usually held in May, accept/reject decisions should be sent no later than January 15, as a rule.

Special session proposals should be submitted no later than T minus 12 weeks.   Special session proposals should be reviewed by the organizing committee, who should select about three or four special sessions, and probably no more, to ensure enough space is left for regular papers to ensure a diversity of topics an approaches.   The list of special sessions should be announced by T minus 10 weeks, so that each author can choose whether to submit his or her paper to a special session or a regular session.

Authors should submit their manuscripts at T minus 6-8 weeks.   Manuscripts should be sent to reviewers no later than T minus 5-7 weeks.   Reviews should be due no later than T minus 2-3 weeks. From T minus 3 until T minus 1 week, you will vigorously pursue tardy reviewers, and acquire backup reviews as necessary, so that by T minus 1 week, you have all the reviews you need to make final accept/reject decisions.

Final accept/reject decisions are made at a review meeting, attended by all members of the organizing committee, some time between T-1week and T. Manuscripts should be divided among members of the organizing committee, so that, before the committee meeting, at least one member of the committee has read the reviews of every submitted manuscript.   It is important that every review is read by at least one member of the organizing committee: If a reviewer proves that a paper is plagiarized, or is otherwise dishonest, then the paper should be rejected, even if its average review score is high.

By the time of your review meeting, you should know how many oral sessions you will have at the conference, and therefore, how many papers can be accepted for oral presentation.   This number should be roughly 50-60 papers, in roughly 12-16 oral sessions.

I.C. Scientific Committee

Members of the Scientific Committee review papers. They are also encouraged to give you

advice on the conduct of the conference, but they rarely do so.

If you have, say, 300-350 manuscripts, and if each should be reviewed by three reviewers, then you will need 900-1050 reviews. Realistically most reviewers will want to review six papers at most. The scientific committee of SP2022 had 269 members.

At least one year prior to the conference, determine the topic areas that will be listed on the call for papers. Contact all of the members of the previous Scientific Committees, asking if they are willing to serve again and for which topics. Find out how many people you have in each topic area. If the number of reviewers in any topic area is insufficient, recruit new members of the Scientific Committee from the faculty of appropriate research institutions.

The Technical Program Committee (TPC) will be formed of selected members of the Scientific Committee. It is recommended to launch the TPC as early as possible, since it is responsible for the paper submission procedure and paper selection process, and then for making the conference program including keynote speaker assignments, special session planning, and other special events of the program. When selecting keynote speakers, regional, gender, and age balance should be taken into account, together with their topics and approaches.

I.D. Call for Papers

The call for papers should include (1) the ISCA logo, (2) the name of the conference, (3) a short definition of the conference, (4) a list of topics on which papers are encouraged, (5) important dates, including at least the manuscript deadline and the conference date, and (6) the conference website URL.

I.E. Manuscripts

Manuscripts should be formatted according to the guidelines of the Interspeech conference. Style files are usually available on the Interspeech website; you can provide a copy of the style files on the Speech Prosody conference web site. The style guidelines for Speech Prosody can be somewhat less restrictive than those for Interspeech. Font must be no less than 10 point. Professional citation standards must be upheld; some authors will not know what this means, so you may want to provide examples.

Manuscripts should be submitted in PDF format, with embedded fonts. In 2010 we experimented with allowing Word-formatted manuscript submissions, and the experiment was a dramatic failure; several manuscripts could not be reviewed because fonts available on the author's computer were unavailable on the reviewer's computer. Likewise, in 2010, we did not check PDF for embedded fonts until after the conference, therefore we were unable to publish any book containing all of the submitted papers. You should create a batch job that automatically checks every submitted PDF document, in order to make sure that it has all of its required fonts embedded in the document file. If not, you will be unable to publish the document, and some reviewers will be unable to read the document.

I.F. Manuscript management software

Recently EasyChair has been used for manuscript submission and reviewing. It is worth getting the professional version for the time it saves when producing the files needed for creating the proceedings for the ISCA Archive.

I.G. Program

The conference program should span four days, typically in at the end of April, May, or beginning of June. There has been quite a lot of variation in the way in which the oral sessions have

been designed.   Usually each oral paper is given a 20 minute slot with 15 minutes for the presentation and 5 minutes for Q&A.   This can be squeezed, but if so, retaining adequate discussion time remains important. The number of invited speakers was high at the inaugural conference (2002 : 18), but has since stabilized at around 4.   Special sessions were introduced at the third conference in 2006. The 2008 conference introduced oral sessions which were neither invited nor special sessions.   The 2010 conference included three special sessions (two hours each), eight regular oral sessions (varying in length from one to two hours), five keynote sessions (one hour each), and eight poster sessions (two per day, held simultaneously in the same room, but divided by topic). More recently, the 2022 conference included 16 oral sessions (3 of which were special sessions), and 1 poster session per day (one of which included a special poster session). In 2022, in poster sessions, presenters with odd-numbered posters were required to be at their poster in the first 45 minutes of the session, and presenters with even-numbered posters in the last 45 minutes of the session.   Some conferences have followed the policy of allowing posters to be displayed for the entire day of their presentation.   Coffee breaks are twenty to thirty minutes.   Lunch breaks vary from 60 to 90 minutes.

Workshops and tutorials, if any, should precede or follow the main conference.

The program should be in a single track.   To ensure this, we need to assign most papers as poster presentations.   Unfortunately, some sources of travel funds may be reluctant to send authors to present posters, so it may be worth including a statement on the conference web-page; such as "Both oral and poster papers are selected on the basis of their scientific quality and published equally in the Conference Proceedings"

I.H. Publications

You should aim to generate about five publications as a result of this conference: (1) an abstract book, (2) the conference proceedings, (3) an electronic package of the papers formatted for archiving at the ISCA website, (4) a pdf for the conference website of the full Proceedings, and (5) a booklet documenting the organizers, sponsors, and reviewers of the conference, as a contribution to conference accountability and as a resource for those evaluating its quality. While there is flexibility regarding how the various information is distributed across these publications, and whether they are distributed in hardcopy, on a USB drive, or on the website, (3) is absolutely mandatory.

Archiving at the ISCA site requires creation of indices in a specific format. Please contact the ISCA Publication and Archive Committee or consult the website, currently https://www.isca-archive.org/#about , for the current guidelines.   In passing we note that the ISSN for the Speech Prosody Proceedings series is 2333-2042.

Producing a book of the proceedings has the merit that it can be submitted for indexing. For details, please see *Indexing proceedings of ISCA-supported workshops*, by Mark Hasegawa-Johnson, available from the ISCA website. In the past, Speech Prosody has been indexed by Ei, under the title "Proceedings of the International Conference on Speech Prosody." Indexing in Ei means indexing in Scopus. To submit a title suggestion for your proceedings use the Ei Title Suggestion Form. https://suggestor.ei.engineeringvillage.com/ (Suggest a proceeding). Once a decision is made by them to cover the conference, it would be made available on both Engineering Village and Scopus. Please refer "Conference papers selection criteria" in the below link, Scopus Content Policy: https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/content/content-policy-and-selection New submissions are reviewed once per year in a review cycle that begins every September 1st and ends the following Spring, so it is advisable to submit the title suggestion(s) before September 1st.

I.I. Paper Awards and Student support

It is very motivating for students to provide one or more Best Student Paper Awards, typically

awarded at the closing. The TPC should make the selection plan well beforehand, and advertise the existence of awards on the conference homepage. To qualify for the paper awards, a student has to be the first author and the presenting author. It is good to include awards both for best oral and best poster presentations. Selection of awards can be done in various ways. At some of the early conferences this was done based on the average numeric review scores, either raw, confidence-weighted or Z-normalized. More recent conferences have had a dedicated jury, including PAC members and other invited delegates, evaluate the actual presentations, for example in terms of technical quality, significance, and magnitude of the student's contribution.

The organizers should also try to support the participation of students and early career researchers in the conference through reduced conference fees, and grants/travel awards. Besides ISCA, the IPA and the CIPL (Comité International Permanent des Linguistes) usually provide student travel grants/awards. A student reception and an ISCA student-mentor event have also been part of recent conferences.

I.J. Contacting the ISCA Board

Be sure to contact the relevant ISCA board members early, first in order to get the conference recognized as "ISCA-sponsored." ISCA can also provide instructions regarding the process of preparing Conference Proceedings for the ISCA Online Archive (the Publication and Archive Committee). Finally ISCA can provide information regarding student scholarships for travel or best paper awards (although the latter are usually not monetary), handled by the ISCA Grants and Awards Committee or the Conference Committee.

I.K. Chances to Edit a Book or a journal special issue

The call for special sessions should note the possibility of an edited volume based on the special session papers, specifically in fair open access journals and publishers (see the LingOA for a list of fair open access journals https://www.lingoa.eu , and Language Science Press as a fair open access publisher, https://langsci-press.org). Other possibilities are traditional publishers like the Springer series: Prosody, Phonology and Phonetics (https://www.springer.com/series/11951), or the De Gruyter Mouton Phonology and Phonetics series (https://www.degruyter.com/serial/pp-b/html?lang=en).

I.L. Website

The website should be designed, if possible, to last. One way is of course to host it at an institution that ensures that it will remain available in the future. An alternative is to build it to enable it to be easily copied so as to be archived permanently at sprosig.org, for which purpose simple html is preferable to advanced technologies. If this is not possible, at least the key information should be available in an easily archivable format, such as html or pdf, including the call for papers, schedule, keynote speakers names and abstracts, and committee memberships.

II. Hospitality Aspects of Conference Planning

II.A. Venue

By this time, you have already picked out a conference venue. Make sure that the venue is available for the entire period of your scheduled conference activities. Since most of the papers will be presented as posters, the quality of the poster sessions is critical.   Try to hold these in a room that enables plenty of space between posters and is acoustically favorable.

II.B. Budget

SProSIG does not (currently) have any mechanism to insure the Speech Prosody conference in case of financial loss.   In all conferences to date, the financial risk of organizing the Speech Prosody conference has been borne fully by its organizers.   In practice, the conference has never either gained or lost any large percentage of the money invested, but since the total budget is necessarily large, individual organizers may be justifiably concerned to avoid even a small percentage loss.   In order to avoid loss, it is helpful (1) to budget early and carefully, (2) to seek sponsors.   In 2010, for example, the University of Illinois agreed several months in advance to underwrite about $10,000 of financial loss, and this loss was then computed into the budget for the purpose of lowering registration fees; no additional loss was incurred.

The budget should include funds for coffee breaks, for a welcome reception on the first evening of the conference, or the day before, and, if possible, other meals. In the past, these have variously included lunches, or a reception or banquet on the third night of the conference, or a student reception on the second night. In general, these should be thought of collective events that are part of the conference, and designed to promote networking and intergenerational learning and knowledge transfer.   The budget should also include about $250 to pay for renewal of the sprosig.org website hosting for two years.

You should also plan to give a registration packet to each person attending the conference, including a map of the area around the conference venue, a nametag, and possibly a conference bag.

II.C. Registration Fees

There should be at least eight classes of registration, according to the following system: (student vs. non-student) X (ISCA member vs. ISCA non-member) X (early registration vs. late registration).

A student registration fee should be about half the price of a corresponding non-student registration fee.   Student registration fees should only be permitted to students who can upload a document proving that they are currently registered (at the time of registration) as a student at some educational institution.   Student registration should include the banquet, if there is one.   Typically, about half of the registrants will be students, and about half will be full registrations. However this depends on the number of student volunteers, for example, For SP2022 there were 32% student registrants, but also a large number of student volunteers, national and international, that did not have to pay a registration fee.

The way to set registration fees, therefore, is as follows.   Decide how many people you expect to attend (about 300).   Determine the total cost of the conference.   Divide these numbers, in order to find the total cost per person of the conference.   An ISCA member non-student, registering before the early registration deadline, pays 4/3 of this cost.   An ISCA student member, registering before the early registration deadline pays 2/3 of this cost.

ISCA non-members pay a higher registration fee. In the past the excess fee was sufficient to provide them with a one-year membership in ISCA but this is no longer required.   Still, the difference

should be enough to incentivize participants to consider joining.

There is typically an early registration deadline, about two months before the conference, simply because it is helpful for the conference organizers to receive their registration fees a couple of months before the conference. Late registrations are typically 10-20% more expensive.

II.D. Advertising the Conference

Advertise the conference by posting two e-mails each to mailing lists such as the Linguist list, the Auditory list, the ISCApad, the IEEE Speech and Language Technical Committee mailing list, the Fonetiks list (FONETIKS-request AT jiscmail.ac.uk), the AMLAP list, and, of course, the Speech Prosody list. About six weeks before the manuscript deadline, you should send the call for papers to each of these lists (some mailing lists, like the IEEE SLTC list, have a lead time of about one month between submission and publication; plan ahead). Again, about one month before the early registration deadline, you should send an announcement of the conference to each of these mailing lists.

Social networks may also be useful. It is recommended to create an X account for conference tweets.

II.E. Hotels for Guests

If possible, arrange special prices for guests at area hotels, and a budget option such as rooms in university guest houses.

If you are holding the conference in a hotel, be aware that your guests are internet experts. In 2010 the conference was attended by 300 people, but only about 85 per night stayed in the conference hotel; others stayed in nearby hotels.

II.F. Transportation and Maps

Be sure that the web page provides detailed instructions, allowing visitors to make their way from any of the likely airports, train stations, or bus stations to the conference venue. The web page should also tell visitors how much they should expect to pay in terms of taxi or subway fees in order to get from an international terminus to the conference venue.

II.G. Sponsorship and Exhibition

Sponsorship of Speech Prosody conferences has varied considerably from year to year. In some years, organizers have been able to secure sponsorship from professional organizations, businesses, municipal organizations, and non-profit organizations. The home university is often willing to provide some support. Begin discussing any such sponsorship agreement early --- at least a year before the date of the conference --- so that the organizations you approach will have time to add this line item into their budgets for the coming year. Be ready to discuss the specific benefit received by the organization you approach. A university may be ready to sponsor the conference in exchange for publicity. A municipal organization might be willing to support student travel scholarships, if it means that more students will visit the municipality. Publishers may be willing to exchange publicity, e.g., the publication advertises the conference, and the conference advertises the publication. You may be aware that larger conferences (e.g., Interspeech) often rent exhibition space. Exhibitions at a conference the size of Speech Prosody are rare, not because we charge too much for exhibition space, but because companies have been unwilling to cover the travel and salary costs of a staff member to perform the exhibition. It may be that there is an opportunity for virtual, unstaffed, or part-time exhibitions.

II.H. Conference Assistants

You will need students to staff the registration desk, to carry microphones in oral sessions, and otherwise help as needed.   In 2010, these Conference Assistants were recruited internationally; in return for six hours of work some time during the conference, each student was given free registration at the conference.   In essence, this provided a kind of scholarship, helping students to attend the conference who would otherwise have been unable to afford it.

Previously, these Conference Assistants were typically recruited from the universities of the host country, and favoring the hosting institution, as a strategy to get more students from your own university to be interested in prosody.

II.I.   Travel Scholarships

ISCA provides travel scholarships to students who attend ISCA conferences, including Speech Prosody.   Ask the ISCA travel-scholarship chair about this, at least a few months before the early registration deadline, then put the application instructions on the conference website. As noted above, the IPA, the CIPL and other sources may also provide student travel support.

II.J.   Publicizing and Supporting SProSIG

The Speech Prosody Special Interest Group (SProSIG) is responsible for the continuity of the conference series, and more generally, for serving and growing the speech prosody community. The SProSIG PAC and Officers will have supported your conference, and you can support them in turn.

The opening session should include 3-5 minutes for the SIG Chair to speak: to contextualize the conference historically, to highlight the other SIG activities, to invite people to join the SIG, to invite people to consider becoming officers, to invite everyone to the Business Meeting, etc.

The closing session should include time for presentation of bids to host the next conference.

There should be time scheduled for a Business Meeting of the Speech Prosody SIG.   An hour will be sufficient. This can be done, for example, in the time before a reception or dinner, or during lunch, if food service is available. This meeting is open to all and should appear in the schedule.

There should be a time scheduled for a meeting of the SProSIG Permanent Advisory Council, not conflicting with other events.   This might be during lunch break, ideally with a venue and food aranged, or over dinner, either hosted (if budget is left over after all priorities have been met) or unhosted. It is nice if the conference organizers can also attend, and if invitations are also extended to potential future organizers and potential future officers.

II.K. Ethics Considerations

It is recommended to have a representative of the ethics committee or conflict resolution office of the hosting institution be in liaison with the organizing committee to immediately address any cases of harassment or other ethics issues that may arise.

II.J.   Transferring Experiences

Experiences on operating Speech Prosody meetings are useful for planning future meetings, so organizers are requested to make a report summing up the conference which they run, and submit it to PAC.