# A Timer for Meetings, Conferences and Media Production

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Planning a meeting or conference or other events with several contributions requires a good schedule. The schedule can be easily developed in e.g. Numbers or any other Spread Sheet program. Running the conference means to keep track of the planned program as a session chair and and to give presenters a timer to stay within its scheduled talk times. If the event is a broadcast with predefined fixed slots Timer4Conference supports this by a new auto mode. Once started the auto mode needs no further user interactions. It shows a count down in seconds until the start of the first contribution on a bar graph and then the counter for all contributions.
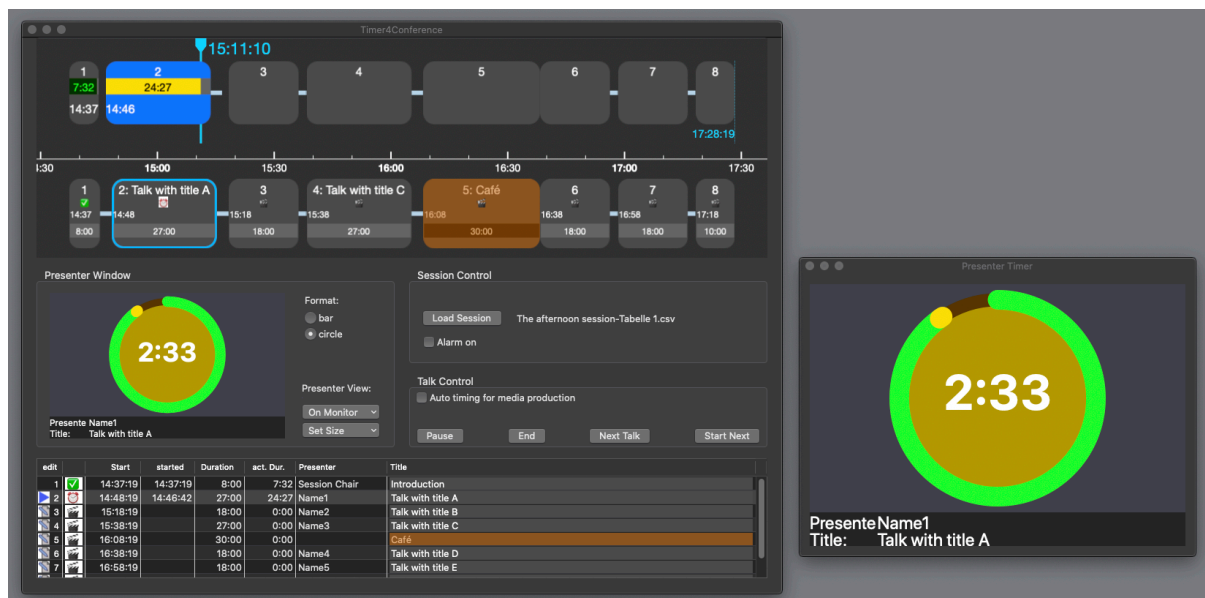
The "Conference Timer" (T4C) helps both, the session chair and the presenter to stay within the plan. The picture shows the panel for the chair and the screen for the presenter. The panel indicates the schedule as a table (bottom) and as a graphical representation (top). The actual talk is shown in the middle. A separate window for the presenter can be shown on a second monitor. It just shows the relevant information for the presenter: The total time he has, and the remaining time she can talk as a bar or circle display.
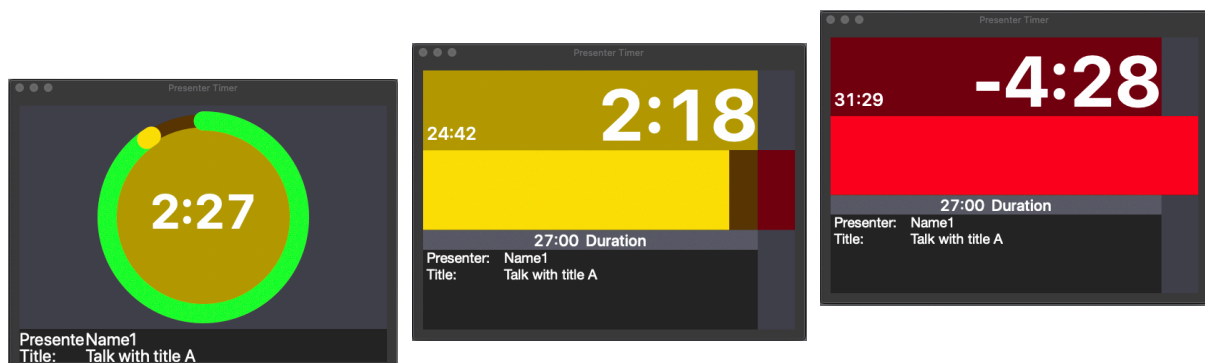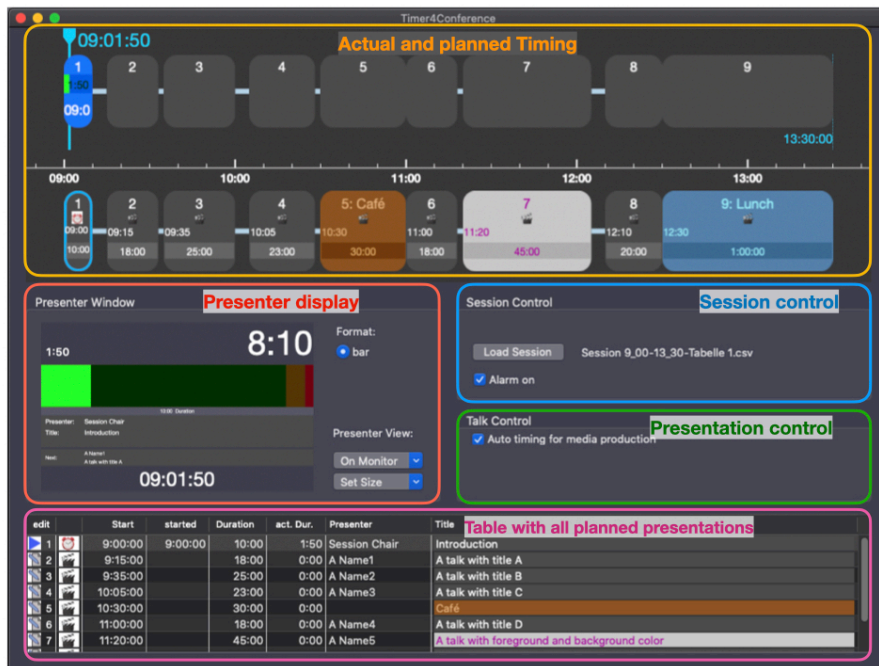

Presenter view as circle or bar with warning (last 10% of duration) or overrun

10% before the end of the talk the presenter gets a warning: the color changes to yellow. When the planned time is overrun the color turns to red and the application gives an acoustic sound. This sound can be turned off by clicking on the 🔊 icon.
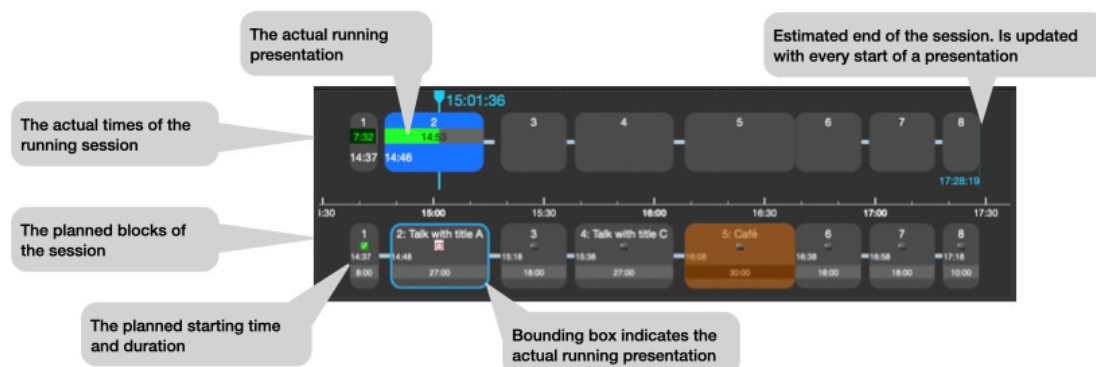
The Main Elements of the Manager Panel

The actual and planned timing:

Shows in a graphic the planned and actual presentation blocks. The currently running talk has a blue outline or background. The finished talks are marked with color if they were in-time (green) or overrun (red) in the running session row.
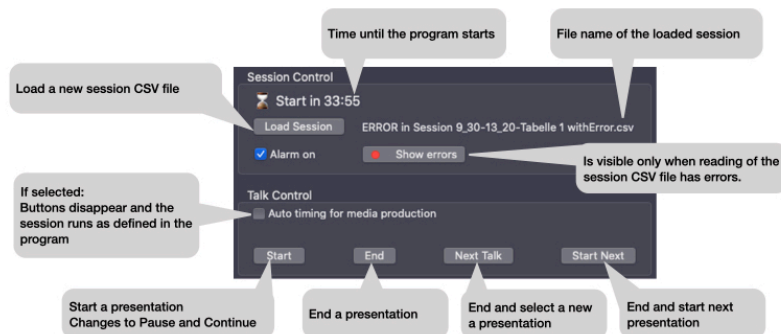
The session control:

Contains a button to load a session file (CSV format). If read errors are detected in a file a further button appears to view the error messages.

The presentation or talk control:

This part of the panel is used to start and stop the presentation timer and to select the next talk. If e.g. a technical problem is encountered in a session and the time should not be subtracted from the speakers time one can "Pause" and later "Continue" the time counting of the talk. After the start of a talk the button turns into "Pause". The paused mode is indicated. When the "Auto timing for media production" is selected all buttons are hidden since no further control is required. This mode is used when the defined program does not allow deviations e.g. for a broadcast production.
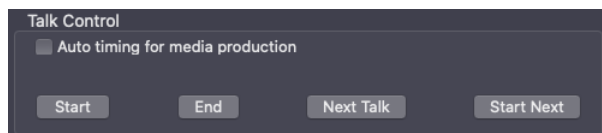
Manual control of a session   *Automatic run mode of a session*
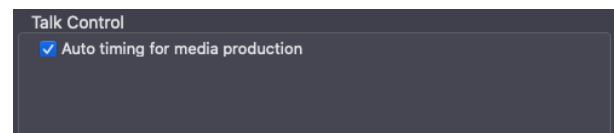
The presenter control:

Shows a copy of the presenter display. It allows to select the format of the presenter display, as bar or circle, the size and the (external) monitor to display it (see last chapter). In auto timing mode a further line with the content of the next talk or contribution is shown.

The table with all planned presentations:

Indicates the status of a presentation:
- To be presented
- Is running
- Done
- Will be skipped
- Paused

Planned start time

Actual start time

edit		Start	started	Duration	act. Dur.	Presenter	Title
1	✅	9:00:00	9:00:00	10:00	4:00	Session Chair	Introduction
2	⏱	9:15:00	9:04:08	18:00	0:18	A Name1	A talk with title A
3		9:35:00		25:00	0:00	A Name2	A talk with title B
4		10:05:00		23:00	0:00	A Name3	A talk with title C
5		10:30:00		30:00	0:00		Café
6		11:00:00		18:00	0:00	X Name4	A talk with title D
7		11:20:00		45:00	0:00	A Name5	A talk with foreground and background color
8		12:10:00			0:00	Session Chair	Summary of the day

Color indicates Lunch or Coffee (auto detection by keywords)

Color defined in .csv file or by the edit function

Click to edit row

Planned duration

Actual duration

Menu: Right (control) mouse click in a row:

- End running and select next talk
- Enable restart of talk
- Skip this talk
- Edit this talk
- Insert a new talk before this row
- Append a new talk after this row
- Delete talk

The table shows all talks read from the session CSV file or from "Insert" / "Append" commands. In addition to the planned times it will be updated with actual values of start times and durations. These values can be exported (File menu -> Save As…).

How to Drive a Session

The steps to start and run a session are (non automatic mode):

1. Load a session file, click on "Load Session":
   The format of a session file must be CSV as generated by e.g. Numbers. The details of the format is described further down.

2. The blocks of the session are shown in the table and as graphical representation.

3. Press "Start" to activate the counter of the first talk.

4. Press "Pause" when the talk is interrupted and the time should not be subtracted from the speakers time. The button changes to "Continue".

5. Press "End" when the talk is finished.

6. Press "Next Talk" to load the timing info of the next presentation or select the next talk by clicking on a row in the table. Clicking on "Next Talk" will end the current running talk and show the next talk in the presenter view.
   The "Start Next" is a quick combination of "End", "Next Talk" and "Start".

7. Continue with "3.".

To run a session in "Auto timing" mode:

1. Load a session file with "Load Session" button.

2. Select "Auto timing for media production": buttons are invisible and the presenter window shows a count down of minutes and seconds until the planned program starts and runs through all contributions without user interaction.

Keyboard Usage

On Mac Books with a Touch Bar timer4conference displays "Start/pause/continue", "End", "Next Talk" and "Start Next" buttons that can be used to control the timer. The following keys on keyboards may be used also (not in "Auto timing" mode) :

s	start a talk
p, **c**	pause and continue time counting
e	end a talk
n	switch to next talk
space	end talk and start the next talk

How to Prepare a Session File

A session can be prepared with the help of Numbers. A few rules have to be followed to allow "Conference Timer" to interpret the data.

1. The first line (the header) must contain the column names.

2. The column with the name "Start" is used to calculate the start time of a block (a row in the table).

3. The "Duration" column is used to calculate the nominal time of a block. When the presenter exceeds this time the panel indicates red.

4. "Presenter" is shown under author in the panels. This column might also be named "Author" or "Speaker".

5. The column "Titel" is used to fill the corresponding fields in the application.

Example session in Numbers, red boxes indicate required fields

6. The "End" column is optional. All other columns are ignored.

7. The "Q&A" column in the example is used to add time for discussions (questions and answers) or time needed for technical switching to the next contribution. A formula (as shown in the picture) can be used to calculate the next start time by numbers. The application is not using this "Q&A" column. Timer4Conference calculates the discussion time = "next start" - "start" - "duration". In "Auto timing" mode the discussion or Q&A time should be 0.

8. Newlines are allowed in the "Title" fields (hit control & return together on the keyboard).

9. The "Title" column may contain a foreground and background color of a talk to highlight special contributions. The format starts with a "{" followed by a "#" and a 6 character hex code with the foreground color followed by a "," and the background color "#123456" and ends with "}". The hex number is composed by 2 digits for each red, green and blue in the range 0 to ff (standard Web color code). #000000 is black, #ffffff is white, #0000ff is blue.

10. Avoid merging of cells since it changes the column order. All rows must have the same number of columns.

11. If reading of the session file detects errors a click of the appearing button "Show errors" brings up a panel with the error messages.

A Numbers file may have several sheets to e.g. group of sessions. A CSV export command creates a file per sheets. The name of a sheet is shown on the main panel next to the "Load Session" button.
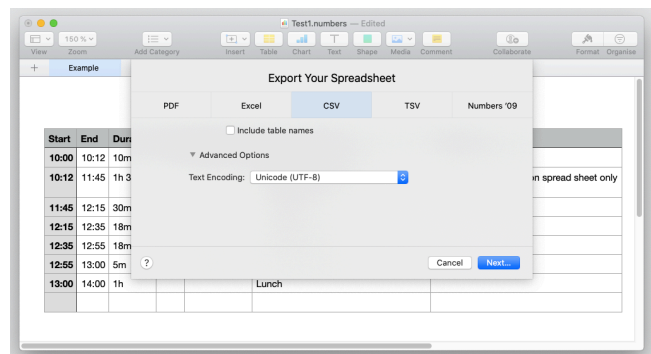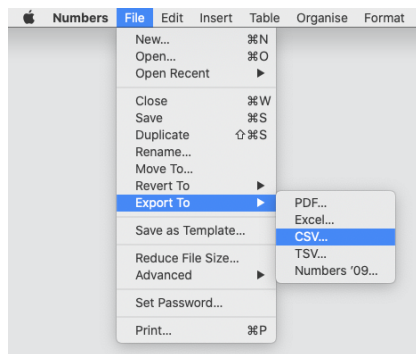


To create a CSV file goto "File" menu of Numbers and "Export To" as "CSV…". In the appearing panel select "UTF-8" as text encoding (default). With "Next…" a file in the local directory with .csv ending should be chosen. This file can be imported by "Timer for Conference".

An example of a Numbers session file is available: http://www.rehlich.com/T4C/Test1.numbers

How to Modify or Edit a Session

A session can be modified or new items can be added or items can be deleted. To edit existing rows a click on the left most edit column in a row opens the edit window. All items can be modified except the start time after the session was started. If the session was not started it is possible to set the start time of the session in the first row and all following start times are recalculated from the durations and discussion settings.
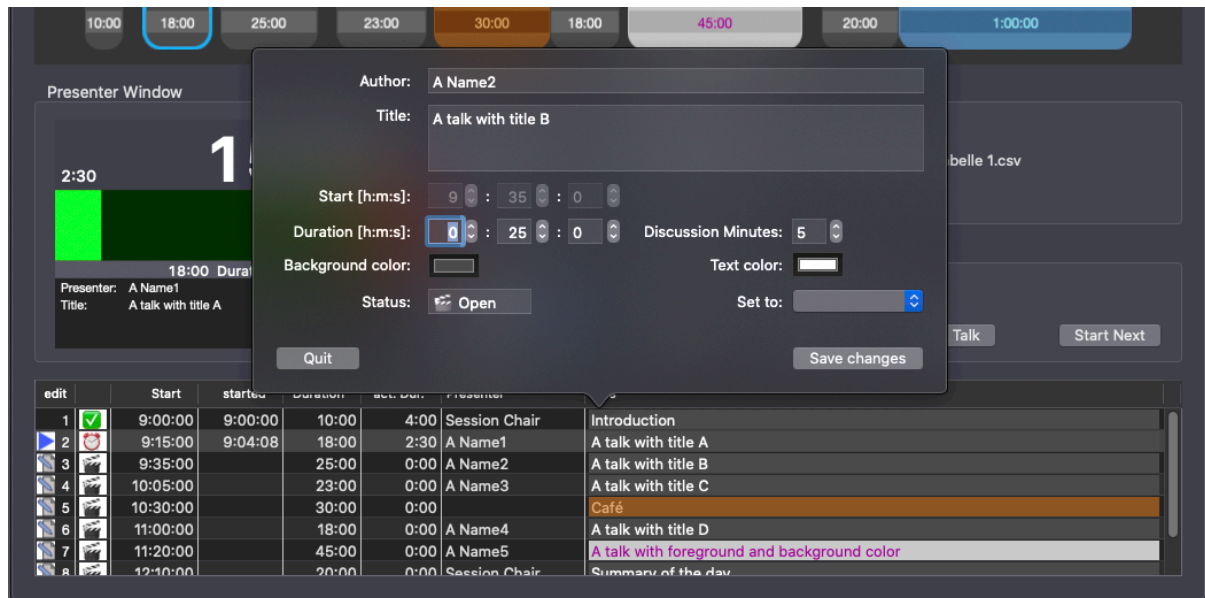
To add a new talk before or after a row use the context menu (right click on that specific row). After a modification the "Save changes" button must be pressed.

Help Menu

The menu "Help" has two entries. "Timer for Conference Help" will display this help text in Preview. "Numbers with Demo" opens Numbers (if installed) with a small demo file. This file can be used as a template to create own session plans.

File Menu

The "File" menu allows to read session files and to save a session. A saved session file includes the actual start time and the used time for each talk. This output is in CSV format and can be imported in e.g. Numbers. The "Print" allows to print a screen shot of the main panel in PNG format.

Timer Display for the Presenter

Besides the person that guides through the session the presenter has to know how much time he or she has during a talk. A separate screen with the basic information a speaker needs can be shown with the "Show on Monitor" pop-down menu. The menu shows all available screens connected to the computer with its position relative to the main screen, the screen sizes, and the screen names.

Presenter window in "auto mode"

If a new monitor is connected to the computer it will be visible in the "Show on Monitor" menu after a restart of the program or by selecting "Rescan Monitors" in the "View" menu.

The "Set Size" pop-down can select a default size of the presenter window or it can scale to full screen size of the monitor.

If the main window runs full screen and the other monitor[s] are black, system preferences should be changed. In System Preferences" go to "Mission Control" and select "Displays have multiple Spaces". Logout is required.

An iPad might be used as external display. Programs like "Yam" (https://www.yamdisplay.com) or Sidecar on newer macOS (https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT210380#systemrequirements) allow to connect your Mac via a WiFi network as a speaker timer. A cable-less connection is quite handy since it allows a flexible positioning of the speaker timer screen. Further wireless helpers are offered in the Apple App Store.