

# Golden Rules for Presentations and Workshops

## *Characteristics of a bad workshop*

1. The presenter(s) are unqualified:
  - have no or little teaching experience
  - not knowledgeable about the subject matter
  - poor communicators
  - talk down to participants
  - can't teach their way out of a paper bag
  - too much talk
2. Presenters have a poor attitude, (and /or poor hygiene!):  
defensive, too apologetic, afraid, not excited about the topic.  
Presenters say: " We were going to do this really neat thing, but I forgot the equipment."
3. The workshop is unorganized, generally:
  - don't have all of or enough equipment
  - equipment is not working, presenters did not prepare ahead of time
  - goals are poorly stated or never stated
4. Pace of workshop is not varied, or too varied.
  - a. The workshop is too rushed - too many goals or activities. " It irks me when the workshop is half over and we are only on number 3 of a list of 20 activities!"
  - b. Workshop has only one activity - and this lasts too long. "People have different learning styles. It makes sense to vary the approach." " The mind can endure no more than the seat"
  - c. Salad bar style – with lots of handouts on many topics, but no in-depth treatment of any of the concepts
5. Rigid adherence to the agenda can also be bad. If people are interested in something, or need more help, go with the flow.
6. PowerPoint Presentations, 50 transparencies, laser abuse, too conceptual, not practical, no concrete examples of classroom applications.
7. Using hard to get materials and equipment – or materials that are out of season--make it less likely that the participants will try the activity in their classrooms.
8. Forced attendance

## 9. Touchy-feely Icebreakers

## *Golden rules for a good workshop*

1. Organize! prepare a checklist 2 weeks ahead of time:
  - Goals
  - Activities
  - Equipment
  - Handouts
  - Prepare an agenda or schedule - which can be flexible
  - Send a letter to participants telling them what to bring
  
2. Workshop should:
  - build in time for teachers to share with other teachers: Wine and Whine!
  - be challenging - but activities should be designed for success. Open ended problems or questions allow for this
  - include a variety of formats to meet the needs of people who have different learning styles: **exploration > instruction > practice > discussion**
  - revisit or review topics - include this in your schedule
  
3. Presenters should:
  - be enthusiastic, be patient, have a sense of humor
  - have a back up plan.
  - go with the flow - if something goes wrong - deal with it!
  - know the audience! (If local, conduct a pre-workshop survey of participants)
  - let participants contribute their knowledge: e.g.. In a science workshop for elementary teachers, teachers contribute ideas about cross curriculum connections such as books, crafts, snacks that go with the science topic.
  - start and end on time!
  - say what you have to say and then get on with the activities!
  - provide an agenda, state goals up front
  - provide handouts. Two copies of a handout is a good idea. Allow one for notes and scribbles, and a fresh copy for the classroom. **Handouts should contain up-to-date lists of equipment, web sites, book lists, etc.**
  - offer communication after the workshop, offer opportunities to interested participants.
  
4. Having 2 presenters is good idea:
  - presenters have more confidence
  - presenters can provide more assistance
  
5. Workshop should build self-esteem and confidence
  - challenge the participants
  - participants should work in groups. “ It’s easier to be frustrated together than frustrated alone.”
  - open-ended activities again work here - with teams reporting at the end. If teams used logic and reasoning to arrive at their conclusions, then they are successful.

**6. The workshop should be a mini model for research in the classroom. Don't talk about it - do it with participants. Teachers don't know that research is active, experimental and on-going!**

7. Require participants to develop an implementation, or action plan.

- let participants help each other - have a brainstorming session on how they are going to implement in the classroom.

8. Have a follow up session. Get everybody back together to report on what they tried in the classroom some time after the workshop. Or, also a good idea, you follow up with the participants by phone or e-mail, just to see "how it's goin".

9. Icebreakers can be a good way for participants to get to know each other and gain comfort - but should - in the interest of time - relate to the workshop. Some examples:

- make and take - each participant gets a box with half of the items needed to make something. Have to find someone with the "other half".
- People are paired up. They have to learn about that person including one unique thing - and introduce that person to the rest of the group.

10. Helping people see the need for your ideas:

- get them to your workshop! Send personalized invitations to each teacher - to their **home** address! Provide an advance copy of workshop highlights.
- role play a poor science teacher and give participants an assignment to define science terms in a text chapter. After 30 seconds of incredulity on their parts, explain how research is different.
- quotes from the most respected and well known scientists like Einstein for example can be powerful motivation: "No number of experiments can prove me right, but it takes only one to prove me wrong".
- each person writes down one memory from his or her days as a K-12 science student.

**11. The bottom line:**

- timing - hold the workshop during regular school hours if possible - but never right after school!
- treat participants like professionals
- Creature Comforts: **Food!**
- **incentives are important:** freebies, release time, door prizes, stipends, credit, discounts, even a certificate and definitely good clean readable handouts! Going away with a finished product is nice.

- stress relief? Especially for technology related workshops! “I blew it” coupons, “something unexpected is going to happen” buttons.
- Laughter

12. A few notes on the hostile or reluctant participant: These folks can be hecklers and ruin a workshop if they get the upper hand. 1. Allow participants to state why they came – even if it a negative reason. This gets it out of the way. A good trick that stops the hostile participant from being disruptive is to get a positive comment from the people on either side of him/her. This isolates the heckler, and keeps him/her quiet.

Sometimes the mildly hostile participant is so because they know too much about the subject to find the session useful. Get them to be your assistants!