

INFORMATION FOR WORKSHOP PRESENTERS

The Academy for Lifelong Learning is an educational establishment without teachers or instructors. Instead, it is based on a peer-learning model in which workshop participants are each required to research a topic and share their findings with fellow workshop members. A successful presentation is one which not only informs but also engenders a lively exchange of comments and ideas in the ensuing discussion period.

Am I required to do a presentation?

Yes, this is a standard expectation. In some instances, various aspects of the topic may be shared with a co-presenter. For example, in a literature workshop one member may be responsible for the selected text while another may present the author. Some workshops, such as The New Yorker Readers, The Economist Readers, and Events of the Week, operate on a “read and discuss” model in which participants introduce topics for general discussion as opposed to making a formal presentation.

If you are new to the Academy, you would likely find attending the “Presenting the Presenters” Forum helpful. This event is held close to the beginning of the fall semester and showcases three exceptional presentations from the previous academic year.

When do I get to select my topic?

In late May or in June, the facilitator for your workshop will circulate a list of presentation topics, asking you to indicate your preference. Before making a commitment, you might want to think carefully about your choice. You will be putting a lot of effort into your presentation so you should feel confident that you will enjoy the task. Are you comfortable in tackling something completely new? Or would you prefer a topic with which you already have some familiarity? You are encouraged to ask your facilitator for advice.

What about selecting the date?

Depending on the workshop, facilitators may assign topics to specific dates or alternatively allow dates to be selected by presenters on a first-come, first-served basis. In the event that you ask for a date or a topic that has already been taken, your facilitator will ask you to come up with an alternative.

Those who are new to the Academy may wish to first observe the presentations of other, more experienced, members and may be well-advised to select a presentation date that is later on in the academic year.

Once all, or the majority, of participants have been heard from, your facilitator will circulate a presentation schedule for the Fall and Winter semesters. Requests to change this schedule can be disruptive and are discouraged, although the possibility of significant unforeseen events or changes in circumstance can never be discounted.

How do I go about doing the research?

Gathering the information for your presentation can be time consuming, but also very rewarding. Try not to let the task overwhelm you. Keep in mind that your presentation should generally only be 20 - 25 minutes in length, so you will need to be selective. Establish a focus early on in the process so you don't get distracted by going off on tangents, fascinating though they may be.

The Web, with its wealth of information on virtually any topic, is the obvious place to start your research but you will undoubtedly wish to move on to other more comprehensive resources to be found in libraries and other institutions. [Click here to view the Research Resources for Presenters.](#) Contact your facilitator if you have trouble locating information for your topic.

How do I turn my research into a successful presentation?

If you have done your research well you may feel that you are a "world expert" on that particular topic at that particular time. However, a long recitation of facts, no matter how learned, will do little to engage your audience.

A successful presentation is one which leads to a stimulating discussion. It not only informs but also presents alternative or conflicting viewpoints, poses questions, and provokes debate. In some workshops, presenters ask their facilitator to post questions, video links, or additional reading suggestions ahead of time so the group can come fully prepared to participate.

While by no means mandatory, the use of a slideshow can do a great deal to engage your audience and illustrate the points you are making. Both of the Academy's meeting rooms at Knox College have a PC, a projector, a speaker system and internet access for this purpose. Members may not bring in their own computers for use in the classrooms but should save their presentation onto a USB drive instead. PowerPoint is the preferred format for the creation of slideshows. Apple users may create a slideshow in Keynote, but it must be exported (saved) in PowerPoint format. The use of Google Slides is another option. If you have never done a slideshow before, the Toronto Public Library offers free instruction on PowerPoint at various locations.

For members with MS PowerPoint:

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/search.jsp?N=4292809379&Nso=0&Ntt=powerpoint>

For members with Apple Keynote:

The following guide is available through the Toronto Public Library: *Pages, Keynote and Numbers for OS X and iOS*

<https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/detail.jsp?Entt=RDM3182924&R=3182924>

For basic information on the creation of Google Slides:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPyCrrEc8SA>

For further information on how to present your slideshow at Knox College, [click here to see Technical Resources for Presenters](#).

If you do opt to use a slideshow, remember it is merely a useful adjunct to your presentation. It is best not to treat the text on your slides as a script to be read word-for-word. Well-chosen visual images can illustrate and dramatize the points you are making; avoid using slides that are text only. When you do use text, remember to keep the type size large enough to be read from the back of the room (24 point minimum).

Every presenter, no matter how experienced, is well advised to have a trial run-through of their slideshow on Academy equipment. Sometimes, formatting can be an issue, especially when the file has been exported to PowerPoint from another software application. Checking each of the slides in your presentation file is recommended. Every Thursday, from 9:10 to 9:50 a.m., Tech Team members host a drop-in tech time for that purpose as well as being available to answer other technical questions you may have. If you are having problems *creating* your presentation, please bring in your own computer. If you want to test your completed presentation, it is only necessary to bring in your USB drive. If this time is not convenient, it is still possible to email your presentation to a member of the Tech Team so they can advise you as to its compatibility with Academy equipment. [Click here to see Technical Resources for Presenters](#).

While the use of technology can make a significant contribution to the quality of your presentation, it helps to always have a back-up plan. Even a total power blackout will not ruin the day if you have a typed, or even handwritten, script on hand!

As a courtesy, it is always a good idea to inform your facilitator that you will be making use of the A/V equipment in your presentation so that the requisite technical support can be assured.

If you choose not to do an audiovisual presentation but still wish to have a visual component you can distribute photocopies, attach items to the display walls in the classroom, or make use of the blackboard.

Any tips for delivering my presentation?

Yes - the most important thing is to relax. You are in a supportive environment!

Remember that you are speaking to people who are interested in the topic, have come to the workshop prepared and are looking forward to weighing in with their opinions.

Look around the room and make eye contact when you speak. Try to convey what excited you about the topic. Think of it as an informal conversation with your peers.

Ahead of time, it's always good to have a couple of run-throughs of your presentation, speaking out loud and asking a partner or friend to give you feedback.

Most importantly, time your presentation and don't exceed the prescribed length! Also, keep an eye on the time during your presentation - you may need to skip parts if you are running longer than planned.

Consult with your facilitator as to how you wish to handle questions. Are you comfortable answering questions as you go along? If so, allowance for discussion will be made in the time allocated for your presentation. In the general discussion period following a presentation, your facilitator will usually moderate the proceedings but may defer to your specialized expertise. Not all of your research can be included in your formal presentation, but your additional knowledge can be a very useful resource to the group in the discussion period.

What if I want to try something different?

Certain topics lend themselves to more unusual formats. For example, if your topic is political in nature, you may wish to organize a debate to dramatize competing ideologies. If your topic is historical, you could choose to impersonate a historical figure.

Generally speaking, facilitators are more than willing to have presenters try something different - just consult with them first!

Last thoughts?

A good presentation will leave your colleagues looking for more. Apart from itemizing the sources you have used in your presentation you may also wish to give recommendations for further reading or links to other resources. You may distribute this information at the end of the workshop or ask your facilitator to post it in the Workshop Notes on the website.

Prepared by the Curriculum Committee
Revised April, 2019