

INFORMATION FOR WORKSHOP FACILITATORS

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1. THE ACADEMY FACILITATOR

The dictionary definition of a facilitator – “a person who makes an action easier by providing indirect or unobtrusive assistance” – scarcely begins to describe the pivotal role played by facilitators in the life of the Academy. Since 1991, they have imagined creative topics of inquiry, delved into the research, assigned reading lists, communicated and socialized with workshop participants, ensured a schedule of presentations is in place, and skillfully monitored discussions. Along the way, they have provided encouragement, problem solved, learned on the job and seen the value of sharing experiences with their peers. There is no “right” way to be a facilitator – what follows is a compendium of practical information and suggestions to assist those who are new to the job and to hopefully inspire old hands with timely reminders and new food for thought.

2. HOW TO START A NEW WORKSHOP

2.1 Getting a Proposal Accepted

In late October the Academy’s Curriculum Committee formally solicits proposals for new workshops to be included in the following year’s calendar on the Academy’s website. However, members also have the opportunity to submit suggestions for workshop topics for future years at any time [through the form on the Workshops section of the website](#).

You should be ready to expound on your concept and give some examples of the texts to which you will be referring. It may be helpful to consult previous years’ calendars on the website to see what topics have been covered in the past. [Click here to access the calendars in the archives](#).

The Curriculum Committee reviews all proposals and will work with you to prepare your submission. A key part of your proposal will be to describe your topic and workshop content in approximately 130 words. In early December, the Curriculum Committee meets to consider the relative merits of all new proposals that have been received.

The following criteria are used by the Curriculum Committee to select new workshops that will be recommended to the Board. The workshop:

- Provides an opportunity for self-directed peer learning through presentations and discussion.
- Provides the content and intellectual challenge suitable for the experience and maturity of Academy members.
- Encourages active participation and interaction among members.
- Has a suitable facilitator available who has been a member of the Academy for at least one academic year.
- Is likely to attract a viable number of participants, subject to review on a case by case basis.
- Adds to the breadth and diversity of the academic program being offered.

Once your proposal is approved by the Curriculum Committee, you will be asked to put your workshop description in final form. Care should be taken in this task since your description will be used to “market” your workshop on the website and give prospective participants a clear idea as to how much reading or other preparation will be required. We strongly advise you to clearly spell out your expectations with respect to workshop presentations and advance preparation.

You will also be asked to submit your preferred email address and a short biography (around 100 words) providing relevant background information on your interest in, and knowledge of, the topic.

Once all the information for the coming year’s workshops has been gathered by the Curriculum Committee, it is sent to the Academy’s webmaster for posting on the website. Prior to the posting going public, the webmaster will send the full text of your entry to you and ask for your final approval of the content. **This is not the time to decide to rewrite the content – you are asked only to check for errors and omissions such as a mis-spelled name or inaccurate email address.**

Registration for the workshops begins in early April and is conducted entirely online. You will be asked to specify the maximum number of participants you would like in your workshop. An upper limit of 25 – 30 is suggested but, if you feel that a smaller, close-knit group would be better suited to your workshop, you can state a smaller number. In setting the ideal number, be aware that there can be a significant drop-off in attendance during the winter months due to factors such as snowbirds flying south, bad weather, and increased incidence of colds and ‘flu.

2.2 Finding a Co-Facilitator

The Academy has a preference for co-facilitation although some workshops operate well with only one facilitator. Not only is it nice to have someone to discuss matters with, but it’s also good to have a back-up if you have to be absent (for holidays, illness, or family matters). A personal approach to a member you know often works well but the Curriculum Committee will help if you are unable to find someone. Whatever the division of responsibilities, facilitators are equal partners in the running of the workshop and need to work closely together.

You should consider what qualities you are looking for in a co-facilitator. For example, do you require someone to help with the development of course content or do you need someone to take care of administrative details and contact with participants? Perhaps you need someone who would be a good discussion moderator?

2.3 Requesting your Time Slot

Once your workshop is approved, the Curriculum Committee will ask you for your time slot preferences – time of day, day of week, and Week 1 or Week 2 **without offering any guarantees.** Facilitators of continuing workshops are offered the courtesy of retaining their existing time slots; the requests of new workshop facilitators will be accommodated on a “first come, first served” basis.

Please note that the Academy does not have access to classroom space on Tuesdays at Tartu. Workshops are conducted on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Workshops meeting on Mondays may be affected by public holidays in which case an additional workshop session will be added on at the end of the semester.

2.4 Encouraging Interest in Your Workshop

In early March the “Two Weeks at a Glance” version of the schedule is made available on the website as a “Teaser”. This schedule contains workshop titles and names of facilitators together with time slots (room allocations are added prior to the beginning of the academic year). It provides members and the general public with an overview of workshop offerings for the coming academic year and can be useful for generating interest in your workshop. Print versions are handed out at the Spring talks at Innis College as a means of attracting new members to the Academy.

In April, the complete academic schedule is publicly posted on the Academy website. It is alphabetical by title and contains each workshop description along with the facilitator’s names, biographies, and email contact. Following each entry is a FIND OUT MORE tab which brings the user to the Workshop Notes section. You may use this space for any and all information you would like your workshop members to have (subject to considerations of members’ privacy and [copyright issues](#)). The Notes section should include your detailed workshop plan and schedule (kept up to date at all times) and any reading lists. You can include more detailed information on the scope of your topic, the resources you will use and any other pertinent facts.

When establishing reading lists that include library books, or other library holdings, please ensure that there are multiple copies available in the Toronto Public Library system (this includes print editions, e-books, and audio books) to meet the needs of your participants.

We encourage you to use the opportunity afforded by the FIND OUT MORE tab to provide much more information on your topic than can be contained in your workshop description. This is your opportunity to really market your workshop!

Furthermore, by submitting your Notes to the webmaster ahead of registration opening, their inclusion on the website will enable Academy members to make more informed workshop selections.

2.5 How to Post Notes on the Website

- a) Create your document.
- b) Choose the “Save As” feature.
- c) Create a file name that **specifically identifies the content** - for example, not just “Reading List” but “Workshop ABC Reading List” – and the date of the version.
- d) Select PDF (portable document format) from the drop-down menu. Send the PDF as an attachment to website@allto.ca with the name of the workshop it relates to specified in the subject line.
- e) If you are not able to create a PDF, then you may send a Word version.
- f) You will receive a confirmation that your information has been posted along with a direct link to the item that you can include in an email to your workshop members once you receive your class list.

3. DESIGNING THE WORKSHOP

Most workshops run bi-weekly in Fall and Winter – 12 sessions of two hours each, for a total of 24 hours of classroom time.

- **By the end of May, you should have developed a workshop plan that lays out your expectations for each of the 12 sessions of the workshop over the academic year.**
Many workshops on specific subjects plan for 24 presentations - two per session. Your plan will include information about what will be covered in each session including information on the first introductory session and the last wrap-up session. Co-facilitators should work co-operatively on this list to ensure they are in agreement about the topics being offered.
- The “typical” workshop session will feature two 20 – 25-minute presentations on a predetermined topic, followed by a discussion period. However, there are a number of different types of workshop at the Academy – the film workshops, for example, are conducted using a variety of formats and current affairs workshops use daily or weekly periodicals as events dictate. Thus, the design of workshops is flexible.
- Some facilitators offer a very long list of topics and let participants select one and choose their preferred presentation time and date. Others prefer to make up a schedule with set topics but allow participants to determine presentation dates. Some are more rigid about both the topics and the order in which they are to be covered. As the designer of your workshop, the choice is up to you.
- While the Academy is focussed on peer learning, it can occasionally be useful to bring in an outside speaker, especially in workshops with low registrations. Unfortunately, the Academy cannot fund these speakers, but you may be able persuade them to come anyway.
- If you are requiring or suggesting reading in advance, please ensure you post the information to your Workshop Notes by May so as to give members sufficient lead time.

4. RANDOMIZATION

The Academy’s Membership Committee is responsible for registration procedures. If registrations in your workshop exceed the maximum you have specified, the Membership Committee will conduct a randomization process in early May. This allows for an equitable distribution of applicants in over-subscribed workshops and provides for the establishment of a waitlist for each such workshop.

You will receive a final class list prior to the first workshop in the fall. Should your workshop be oversubscribed you will also receive a “waitlist” of members who want to be in your workshop but were “randomized out”. Once the semester has started, it is vitally important that you advise Membership of any no-shows or, later, of any lengthy unexplained absences of members on your class list so that waitlisted members may have an opportunity to join the class.

5. SUMMERTIME PREPARATION

5.1 Emailing Your Participants

- When you have received your initial class list from Membership and you have a good idea of the shape of your workshop, you can send participants a ‘welcome’ email with your workshop plan. If presentations are required in the workshop you should urge members to

pick their topics as soon as they can. This can be a busy time – as the topics and dates get claimed you may have to send out an updated schedule several times in the day!

- As part of your email, you should point out two helpful documents on the Academy website:
 - Information for Presenters
 - Information for Participants

[Click here to access these documents](#)

If you can, we suggest that you offer assistance to workshop members who need help developing their presentations. Many new members are nervous about this process. Some members would like to include visual additions such as PowerPoint slides or videos in their presentations but are unsure of how to do so or how to work the technology involved. Your first email should also let your members know that the Academy “Tech Team” is available to help them. [Click here to access the information for Tech Team members](#)

- When sending emails to your workshop members, send the email to yourself and include the names of recipients in the “bcc” (blind carbon copy) line. This will ensure their addresses will remain private and less vulnerable to hacking. Be sure to keep your own copy on file since the web versions of Workshop Notes are not archived.
- Whenever you submit additions or changes to the webmaster to be added to your Workshop Notes, the webmaster will confirm their posting and will send you a link which you can then email to your class. For example, once your class schedule is finalized you can post it in your Workshop Notes and send out the link rather than attaching the finalized schedule to individual emails.

5.2 Other Summertime Activities

- If new people register in your workshop or existing registrants withdraw from it, the Membership Committee will let you know. You should bring the new workshop members up to date as soon as possible.
- If you go away on holiday during the summer, **please check your emails regularly.**
- This is a good time to familiarize yourself with the Academy’s Code of Conduct in the MEMBERS section of the website, so you can model it for your participants and monitor it during your workshops. [Click here to access the Academy’s Code.](#)
- If you have a very low enrollment, the Curriculum Committee Chair will contact you in early August to discuss whether to withdraw the workshop or explore other options, such as running it for one semester rather than two. If the workshop is withdrawn, the Membership Committee will contact the people concerned to explain the situation and encourage them to register in other workshops with remaining space. You could call or email them too, as a courtesy.

- Around mid-August, classrooms are allocated – historically this has been based on the number of registrations. Room assignments are then added to the Two Weeks at A Glance document on the website. As a courtesy, you should also let your members know the workshop’s classroom number when emailing them.

6. JUST BEFORE THE FALL SEMESTER

- a) Ensure your workshop schedule is up-to-date and posted in the Workshop Notes on the website.
- b) Ensure you have the latest class list for your workshop with emails and telephone numbers as provided by the Membership Committee. Before sharing this information for use amongst class members, make sure you are in compliance with the Academy’s Privacy Policy. (Note: at time of writing, the Policy is being reviewed and revised in the interest of providing greater clarity. You will be advised of the new rules when they are available. In the meantime, it is best practice to **always** seek consent before distributing personal information.)
- c) Just prior to the first workshop, send an email to each member, including the workshop plan as an attachment and note that it can also be found in the Workshop Notes section relating to the workshop on the website. Attach the class list as a separate document. **Class lists are not posted on the website since that would make email addresses and phone numbers publicly available.** Since there are privacy concerns regarding the display of members’ email addresses, send the email to yourself with the workshop members in the ‘bcc’ line (blind copy) line.

In the email prior to the first session you should also –

- Welcome the members and explain the plan for the first session – usually introductions and organizing details in the first hour and a kick-off presentation in the second.
 - If you are organizing an informal get-together before the term starts, provide the details.
 - Remind them that the latest schedule and other pertinent workshop information can always be found in the Workshop Notes, following the Workshop description on the website.
 - Remind them to go to the website and read Information for Participants and Information for Presenters. [Click here to access them.](#)
- d) Your class list will indicate which members of your workshop are new to the Academy. If you are not organizing a general class get-together before the term, you might invite new Academy members to a smaller group social event. A casual get-together over coffee can go a long way to making newcomers feel welcome.
 - e) It is important to have a designated person in the workshop who can provide technological assistance, if required. A member of the Tech Team will attend your first session and will assist you in identifying the person(s) in your class list whom you might approach to serve as tech reps. It’s always good to name a back-up in case of absences. The Tech Team can provide any necessary training. Pass on the names of the people who have agreed to serve as your tech reps to the Tech Team.

7. FIRST WORKSHOP SESSION

7.1 Before the session

- a) If your classroom is locked for some reason, go to Tartu's business office for assistance.
- b) Ensure the projector and microphones are set up by your tech rep. Microphones should always have fresh batteries inserted at the beginning of the day.
- c) Find your workshop's folder in the hanging file located in the classroom (one file-box for Week 1, the other for Week 2).
- d) Set out the tent cards and markers so people can mark their names clearly.
- e) Set out the attendance sheet for circulation.

7.2 Housekeeping tasks at the beginning of the session

- a) Ask people to put their names on the tent cards using the Sharpie provided. (Since tent cards have been known to fall out of file folders or get mixed in with another workshop's, ask people to also write the name of their workshop in ballpoint pen on the inside.)
- b) Ask people to tick the attendance sheet and mark with an A if they know they will be absent on a future date. Ask the members to let you know, if possible, if they unexpectedly find they are unable to make a session. **Reinforce that it is essential that the facilitator has as much notice as possible if a scheduled presenter is unexpectedly unable to attend on the day that they are scheduled to present.**

7.3 During the session

- a) Welcome everybody, introduce yourselves as facilitators to the group. Make a point of introducing any members who are new to the Academy.
- b) Go around the room, asking everyone to introduce themselves and speak briefly about their background.
- c) Remind people of the mandatory use of the microphones, since many members have hearing problems but may not wish to advertise it.
- d) Advise that participants wishing to speak should raise their hand.
- e) Consider bringing up the website on the screen and showing participants how to navigate to your Workshop Notes and Information for Participants and Presenters.
- f) Talk briefly about the expected format for presentations. Emphasize that presentations should ideally lead to lively discussion.
- g) Remind participants that if they are having trouble with their presentation, you are there to help.
- h) On that note, mention that less common formats often add value to presentations. Use of guests, field trips, games, debates, interviews, panels, etc. could all be considered. However, ask them to run their idea by you first, so you can be sure it is practicable and also fits with the workshop theme and schedule.
- i) Advise that you can even help with the presentation if they cannot attend the Academy in person (broken leg, for example). If they have a computer, and there is advance notice, it could be possible to link them into the class digitally.
- j) Explain that discussion time is important, so you will give the presenter a time check at 20 minutes and, unless there has already been some time taken up with questions/discussion, ask for closure of a presentation at 25 minutes. You should provide a short break in the middle of the two hours.

- k) If there is a workshop after yours, the class will need to leave at 5 minutes to the hour so there can be an orderly changeover.
- l) Ask anyone that has any problems with the course to approach you personally.
- m) Let the members know that the Academy conducts a survey at the end of the fall term in order to gain feedback about its workshops, the results of which help facilitators decide if there are any adjustments to be made in the second term.
- n) Open the floor to the participants for comments or questions.

8. ALL SESSIONS

1. Hand out tent cards and attendance sheet at the beginning.
2. If your primary tech rep is absent, ensure the backup rep. gets the A/V equipment readied. Keep an eye on the routine use of the microphones, so that their use becomes a simple habit in the workshop.
3. Mention special events coming up at the Academy such as Forums, Presenting the Presenters, Debates, Holiday lunches, etc. You might also mention upcoming cultural events, T.V. shows, or movies that have a direct connection to the theme of your workshop.
4. Remind workshop members that their phones should be muted.
5. Keep an eye on the time during the presentation. Give a time check at 20 minutes, ask for wrap up at 25, unless there has already been time taken up with questions/discussion.
6. During the discussion, keep track of people indicating they wish to speak to ensure everyone gets a chance to contribute. Encourage the quieter ones to participate (e.g. What do you think, Alan?)
7. Break at 5 minutes to the hour to allow the next workshop to take over.
8. After the session, put away the tent cards and attendance sheet and tidy up any display items, coffee cups, etc.
9. If your workshop concludes at 4 p.m. make sure that A/V equipment is powered down and microphones are returned to their storage spaces.
10. It is good form to send out a group email after the class, thanking the presenters and commenting on the discussion. Members may also ask you to circulate additional information or post links to relevant sources arising from the discussion.

9. MONITORING YOUR ATTENDANCE LIST

Make an effort to contact members who are “no shows” or irregular attendees with no explanation. Ask if they have a problem that you might be able to assist with. If it appears they wish to withdraw, advise Membership accordingly. Similarly, if your workshop has a waitlist, contact Membership if you have been advised of lengthy snowbird absences.

10. COPYRIGHT MATTERS

Most of the material that Academy workshops duplicate on paper or circulate by email falls within the bounds of “student use” and its distribution does not infringe on copyright rules. However, copyrighted images and information cannot be posted on the website unless they are password protected for use within your group. Posting the full content of articles or material copied from published documents would contravene copyright law. The way to avoid this is to always use links

to articles or videos. Consult the webmaster at website@allto.ca for any guidance you may require in this regard.

11. MEMBERS' SURVEY

During the last two weeks of the fall semester, members of your class will be sent an on-line Members' Survey regarding their workshop experience. Responses are anonymous and space is allowed for write-in comments. It is good to advise members they will be receiving the survey and encourage them to participate and speak freely. Make sure they know that responses are anonymous. The feedback from this survey can be valuable in judging the success of your workshop and making any necessary adjustments for the second semester.

Remind members that they need not wait for the survey in order to communicate concerns or ask questions. They can speak to the facilitator(s) at any time.

12. FACILITATORS' SURVEY/FACILITATORS' FORUM

The Academy holds a Forum for all facilitators each April. In February, a survey is sent out to all facilitators to get their input on the topics they would like covered at the Forum. You are encouraged to bring forth any matters that you believe may be of general concern.

13. GOOD FACILITATION

13.1 Building Cohesion

Every facilitator has his or her own unique style, but there are certain qualities that are shared by all those who achieve success in their workshops. The attitude and behaviour of the facilitator is critical in ensuring a worthwhile learning experience for all members of the group. One of the most important tasks for a facilitator is to foster a sense of cohesion - a feeling of acceptance or belonging. Once established, this comfortable milieu gives members the confidence and trust that they can freely express contradictory ideas, without any loss of respect or acceptance from their fellow participants.

You can help build cohesion by suggesting a get-together before the semester starts, asking workshop members to introduce themselves to the group at the first session, and organizing opportunities to socialize. During discussion time, ensure that everyone has an opportunity to express his or her views, especially those who may be more timid. Skillful moderation of the discussion will demonstrate respect for the opinions of all participants. Mandatory use of microphones will also ensure that everyone, including those with hearing impairment, is included in the discussion.

13.2 Preparation

Preparation also contributes to success. This is true for facilitators, presenters, and participants alike. Some facilitators find their discussions are enriched if they post a quick reminder between sessions, noting the subject of the next session, and after consultation with the presenter, offering links to relevant articles or videos. (This needs to be handled judiciously as some members might feel overburdened.)

Help presenters be better prepared by referring them to the [INFORMATION FOR PRESENTERS](#) document on the website and let them know you are willing to assist or to suggest a co-presenter if

they are in need of some support. Since discussion time trumps presentation time in Academy workshops, communicate with your presenters to ensure their material will provoke debate. Many facilitators ask presenters to come up with some questions ahead of time. By emailing these questions to the group, they can be thinking about their responses while preparing for the class.

Be prepared with questions to help segue into the discussion and have further questions on hand should the conversation lag. Well-prepared facilitators also have a back-up plan in the event that illness, bad weather, or other unexpected life events prevent their scheduled presenter from showing up. A good YouTube video, a Ted Talk, a film, or an already prepared presentation on a related subject can save the day. Be sure to check with your Tech Rep if you will require sound for your presentation so that the sound device can be checked.

If you have some advance notice that a presenter or a participant will be unable to attend the Academy, it may be possible to set up videoconferencing with an off-site location. Contact a member of the Tech Team for more information. [Click here for access to the Tech Team's Frequently Asked Questions.](#)

Be flexible and open to innovation.

13.3 Recognition of Your Presenters

Some facilitators will make a personal call to thank each presenter, while others will send out a group email highlighting the strengths of the presentation. The latter has the additional benefit of helping the group understand the elements that make for a good presentation. If someone in your workshop makes an exceptionally interesting presentation, please speak to the Talks Committee so they can consider including it in the Presenting the Presenters Forum held in the fall and winter semesters.

13.4 Attention to Feedback

A skillful facilitator will sense the mood of the group and will be attentive to body language and other signals. Are people getting bored, frustrated, angry? Does the conversation need to be set on a new path? Are some people feeling excluded from the discussion? Be attentive to a discussion that generates comment and follow it up by asking for additional input and comments before moving on to a new topic.

Feedback about your workshop from the Members' Survey before the beginning of the second semester can provide insight. Pay particular attention to the write-in comments for suggestions on changes you might incorporate in the following semester.

13.5 Communication with Other Facilitators

Talking over issues with a more seasoned facilitator can be of great practical help. You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback through the Facilitators' Survey towards the end of the academic year. The Facilitators' Forum held in April hosts roundtable discussions on various topics to promote the generation of new ideas.

14. CHECKLIST ([click here to access a checklist that you can use and/or modify with your own items](#))

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