



**Washington University  
in St. Louis**

## **FACILITATORS' GUIDE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Washington University is a non-credit educational program for people 50+. A variety of courses are designed by members of the OLLI and offered to other members. Courses may follow a variety of formats, including writing groups, curricula that are created by the group as they sign up for various reports or topics, discussion based on reading a common text, or lecture-based learning.

The person(s) who lead courses are known as "Facilitators." Facilitators do not have to be experts in the particular field being presented, but it is helpful to have a genuine interest in the subject so that enthusiasm may be imparted to the learners. Classes can be led by more than one person, or "co-facilitated." Some facilitators may find it helpful to divide up the work of designing and preparing a class. It can also be helpful in running the class to divide those tasks between two people, especially if the class is on Zoom or in a hybrid (in person and Zoom) format.

### **PRINCIPAL FUNCTIONS OF THE FACILITATOR:**

The role of the Facilitator has four components:

- The Facilitator designs and proposes the course. This includes preparing a course proposal for consideration by the Director and the most relevant interest group chair. Proposals may be submitted using [OLLI's online form](#) or by sending an email to the Director.

The proposal should clarify the course's format and maximum class size, while including a bibliography (where appropriate), brief course description, and a week-by-week outline of subjects to be covered during the term. Facilitators are asked to provide three potential time slots to aid OLLI staff's scheduling decisions.

- The Facilitator has certain logistics functions. These include making certain the staff understand your course design so that a classroom (and/or Zoom resources) are assigned that are adequate to the needs of the course. Duties may entail scheduling

audio-visual equipment, soliciting volunteers to bring snacks, scheduling guest speakers (if appropriate) and providing class members with reminders or updates concerning class materials and logistics.

- The Facilitator conducts and leads the class. This may entail introducing the subject, describing the course format and goals, preparing or delegating formal presentations, developing activities, or leading group discussions.
- The Facilitator leads the group in case of emergency or evacuation (in-person only). Information regarding emergency procedures will be provided prior to the first class.

## **ORGANIZING THE COURSE:**

The Facilitator identifies a particular subject that is consistent with the OLLI mission statement and the OLLI Way community values. In general, subjects should be intellectually challenging, have a bit of academic rigor, and lend themselves to an organized curriculum design. This should in no way prevent courses from being enjoyable, light-hearted and stress-free. Courses are proposed to the OLLI Director for consideration.

**Format.** OLLI courses run either 4 weeks or 8 weeks in duration and meet for 2 hours at a time, including a break time in the middle. Courses may include lectures, reports, free discussion, listening to tapes and recordings, watching videos, etc. Selecting a variety of activities helps accommodate a range of learning styles. A course on a technical topic will benefit from lectures from a person competent in the particular field. A course which contains much common knowledge may lend to free discussion among the class members.

Classes that are primarily reports should make that expectation clear in the syllabus and description, especially if all class members are expected to deliver a report. State the parameters of acceptable topics clearly. It is wise to have a few volunteers arranged in advance, especially for the first class meetings.

**Research.** In preparing for the course, the Facilitator should seek available literature on the subject. A bibliography may be assembled and made available to participants who register for the course for further reading.

**Description.** The Facilitator should propose a brief (limit 100 word) write up of the course, describing the content and activities. OLLI staff or the interest group chair may request edits to your description for clarity or to increase the appeal of your class.

**Syllabi.** The course syllabus should provide an outline on the course content, including approximately when topics will be covered. It should also clearly indicate reading that is required or recommended. Courses with extensive reading should clearly state those

expectations in the course description. It is important to adhere to the general outline of the syllabus. Any substantial change should be communicated to the class.

**Text/Handouts.** You may select books that you are requesting the learners to access – by purchase or by borrowing. Please make selections with an eye to affordability. OLLI staff can make shareable digital resources or printed photo copies of resources on request. Please make your requests a week in advance of the class and limit your request to no more than 20 pages, using black and white copies as much as possible. Note that OLLI observes fair education use copyright rules; no more than one chapter or 10% of a work may be reproduced.

**Course Descriptions.** The Facilitator should prepare a brief (limit 100 word) write-up of the course, describing the content to be covered and activities you expect to include. OLLI staff may request edits to your description prior to publication of the course catalog to clarify or increase the appeal of your class.

## **BEFORE THE FIRST CLASS SESSION:**

- Finalize the course materials.
- Coordinate duties with any co-facilitators, guest speakers, etc.
- Familiarize yourself the space and/or equipment you will be using. If you would like access to a classroom or OLLI equipment, please arrange this in advance with the staff.
- Send a welcome email to learners. This allows you to confirm you have accurate addresses, while providing an opportunity for any logistics reminders such as assignments prior to first class.

## **THE OPENING CLASS SESSION:**

- Take time to welcome everyone. Consider allowing time in the first course meeting to allow class members to introduce themselves. If the class is in a hybrid format, be sure to let the people on Zoom introduce themselves.
- Please make an extra effort to be sure new members are acknowledged and invited to participate.
- The course description and outline should be briefly visited to help assure that all in the class have shared expectations for the course.
- For in-person classes, review safety and evacuation procedures with the class.
- Consider establishing norms or ground rules such as: raise hand to be acknowledged, do not interrupt, respect others' opinions, no side conversations, etc. Remind people on Zoom (hybrid or online only) to use the "raise hands" reaction emoji to be recognized. Also, it is important to remind people on Zoom to keep themselves

muted when they are not speaking. Also set expectations regarding how any communications between class meetings will be conducted (e.g., email).

A roster will be shared with you, including contact information for your class. Especially for in-person learners, it's important to take attendance weekly, so that for any given class meeting you know who is in attendance. For large classes, it may be better to ask learners to sign in rather than you taking attendance.

Please notify the office if a member of your class misses 2 consecutive meetings so that we can follow up.

## **CONDUCTING THE CLASS:**

Anyone who is reasonably well organized and articulate should be capable of organizing an OLLI class. Each course will be different and require slightly different things from the Facilitator. The Facilitator is not expected to be the "Authority" on the subject. It is perfectly acceptable not to know the answer to every question raised, but it is ideal if the Facilitator finds out the answer to lingering questions or assigns this research to another class member.

**Be early.** The Facilitator should arrive (or log in) at least 15 minutes prior to the class start time to assure that all technology and arrangements are in place. It lends a sense of order and respect to the class if you start on time, set clear guidelines for presentations and breaks, and end the class on time.

**Maximize participation.** Regardless of the class style, facilitators should seek to maximize the participation of class members, especially those who need encouragement to speak out. If the class is in hybrid format, be sure to pay attention to the Zoom screen so that people who are online are not ignored, and have a chance to participate in the discussion.

**Stay focused.** Have a clear idea of what you want to cover in the session. Keep the discussion focused. Summarize key points.

### **Facilitating Discussion**

- Encourage the class to speak loudly and clearly. Use a microphone if there is any indication that class members are struggling to hear each other.
- Repeat questions to assure that everyone can hear. This is especially important if the class is hybrid, as video conference equipment may not pick up the comments of soft-spoken people in the room.
- Begin each class with a summary of the previous session.
- Acknowledge individual contributions, e.g., "You have an interesting point."

- Summarize the discussion occasionally relating it back to the main topic.

## **Assignments**

- At the end of each session, make clear what is to be read/prepared for the following session. Assignments should be reasonable in length, consistent with a non-credit offering taken for the joy of learning.

## **Teaching Tips**

- Draw out quiet members without putting them on the spot. It may be helpful to speak to more reticent members outside of class to increase their comfort level.
- Do not allow more talkative members to dominate the conversation. Remind the group that “air time” is to be shared.
- Be aware of body language. If a participant looks particularly happy – or unhappy – ask, “Is there something you would like to share with us on this topic?”
- Some conflict in discussion is healthy. Keep it topical, never personal. Handle personal conflict firmly and quickly. A private conversation might be helpful.
- If a class member challenges you directly, handle it with grace. Allow the participant his/her opinion. Invite the class to comment and engage. Do not see it as a personal matter.
- Remember, your job is to “facilitate”, which according to the American Heritage Dictionary means “to free from difficulties or obstacles, to make easy.”
- It may be helpful to designate one facilitator as a "moderator" if the class is on Zoom, in a hybrid format, or if a lot of audio-visual content will be shown. The moderator can act as an advocate for the people on Zoom, making sure they are heard in the discussion and trouble-shooting audio issues. The moderator might also run the AV equipment, allowing the facilitator to focus on class discussion.
- Be mindful of time. Discussion will often run longer than expected, and you may not get to address every point you prepared. This is just fine. Do not rush or feel obligated to complete your plans for the class; rather, know that you have been successful if you created an engaging experience.

If discussion is ongoing at the end time of class, acknowledge the time and allow those who wish to leave to gracefully do so. If you choose to continue to engage those who are interested in staying, please make sure that the discussion wraps up no later than 12:30 for morning classes and 3:30 for afternoon classes.

## **Promote interesting discussions**

- Plan questions to get discussion started.
- Consider small breakout discussion groups.
- Insist on hand raising – ask that each wait his turn.
- There are no stupid questions!
- Provide a safe atmosphere so shy members and those who are taking a class outside of the primary expertise can be heard.
- Keep control of time and stop private conversations.
- Be inclusive and encouraging.
- Ask yourself who in your group knows a great deal about your subject? How can you use leverage their knowledge?

## **Use of Powerpoint:**

- Test what you have created before classes start.
- Slides should keep you organized and support your points. You shouldn't be reading verbatim from slides.
- Powerpoint provides an opportunity to incorporate imagery that helps convey your points and encode them for visual learners.
- Use a font size that is large enough to be easily seen.
- While Powerpoint has options to be quite complicated and intricate, if you are not an expert with it, keeping things simple is likely to yield your best presentation.
- Ask for questions at several points during your lecture.

***Be certain to praise and thank students for their presentations or other contributions. A positive, supportive learning environment starts with you.***

## **CHALLENGING SITUATIONS:**

Facilitators should consider their style to deal with these class situations:

- **Dead Wood.** Some students come to class to be entertained and do not prepare, even when readings are assigned. If a critical mass of students do not volunteer to participate, the Facilitator may need to initiate additional strategies to get the group talking. This could include dividing the class in dyads or small groups to discuss,

calling on learners by name to provide their thoughts, or asking individual class members to come prepared the following week to contribute in a particular way.

- **The Learner Takes Control.** Some students are overly assertive. This manifests as dominating the discussion, moving discussion into fields beyond the scope of the course, or presenting anecdotal information which may be ego satisfying but which adds little to the main thrust of the course. The Facilitator will need to exercise control by interrupting overly dominant speakers by imposing a time limit or by explicitly asking to hear from others. Frequently other class members can be helpful by asking questions which may divert the overly talkative student.
- **Presentations That Are Not Well Constructed.** Some students, with the best motivations, are challenged to deliver an organized and compelling report. Rather than making the class sit through such presentations, interruption may be the kindest act. Set a time allotment for the presentation in advance to limit the impact of poorly organized content. Be sure to exercise tact so as not to embarrass the presenter or scare off other class members. In order to keep up course continuity, the Facilitator may need to give a summary presentation of what the unsuccessful student was trying to impart.
- **Equipment That Does Not Work.** Arrive a few minutes early for every class meeting. Test projectors, internet links sound equipment, video equipment and/or Zoom features in advance. Notify staff of difficulties.

## **CLOSING THE CLASS:**

Consider closing the course by sharing resources or ideas on how learners may continue to build on the inquiry and content you have shared together. Try to infuse a sense of celebration and closure in the last class, to the extent possible.

Toward the end of the course, the Facilitator distributes evaluation forms to in-person classes, providing the five to eight minutes for completion. The Facilitator should a class member to collect the forms and place them in a box in the OLLI office. Zoom classes are evaluated with an online link, distributed by the office.

Evaluations are shared with the appropriate Interest Group Chair for summarizing to the Curriculum Committee and then provided to the respective Facilitators.

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We gratefully acknowledge the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Brandeis University for sharing their Facilitator's Guide, which inspired many of these suggestions. Also, credit is due to the following OLLI at Washington University contributors:

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Catherine Compton  
David Gee  
Janet Gillow  
Ruby Lapin  
Jane Kahn  
Nancy McKee  
Thomas Mitchell  
Amanda Rhodes

Last revised: December 2022

We recommend the OLLI Director and Curriculum Committee Chair revisit this text every two years for accuracy and completeness.