



# Workshop and Facilitation Guidelines



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The concepts which were highlighted in the practical guide on peace education and global learning serve as tools to invent and facilitate high quality workshops aiming to promote peace. In this paper, we are further developing the aspect of workshop preparation and facilitation. Given that there is a lot of theory and practice on how to run good workshops and seminars regardless of theme and content, we are highlighting the most important points only.



# Workshop Guidelines

## 1. Vision and objectives

Before engaging in a detailed planning the overall vision and objectives of the workshop have to be defined. Why are we organizing this workshop? What do we aim to achieve?

The vision is often inspired by a concrete theme as well as the needs of the target group. The risk though is that over time it gets forgotten as more practical questions like efficiency, time, location and other contextual aspects are imposing their conditions. It is therefore advisable to crosscheck the detailed programme against the original objectives. Does the workshop still fulfill what it is supposed to do?

## 2. Target group

A good workshop is tailor made for the participants that will attend it. Think about their expectations, their background, their previous knowledge and experience. Your task is to challenge them without overcharging them. Not only the topic and the level of complexity have to be adapted, but also the intensity and the style of facilitation. Ideally, thinking about the target group also means offering them what they need and expect, and not what the facilitator wishes to give.

## 3. Workshop structure

The workshop structure should support and implement the vision, but some general aspects apply to almost any set-up. At the beginning it is important to state the objectives in order to guarantee that there is no unacceptable gap between the expectations of the participants and the prepared programme. It is advisable to have the programme visible for everyone on a wall paper. If there are differences in

expectations they have to be discussed and sorted out. After this the structure of a workshop follows a bell shaped curve: start with an introduction into the topic, then dig deeper and deeper in order to challenge the participants and to get to the core of the issue, to finish again more lightly with a closing part which could focus on the question of why the discussed content is relevant for real life and how it could be used and applied.

## 4. Time allocation

Think of the following aspect when putting together a detailed programme: it always takes longer than you think! It is therefore useful to have some built in flexibility in form of a joker activity for example. Also, less is often more. Don't cram the programme. Taking out an activity to have more space for the others often increases the quality of the workshop.

## 5. Team work

A good workshop (2-4 hours) should be animated by 2 facilitators, and a good seminar (1-5 days) by 3-4 facilitators. There are several benefits of co-facilitation: different skills are combined, weaknesses are compensated, the perspectives get more diverse, tasks can be distributed, time management is easier to handle, one gets support during personal black-outs, there is an opportunity for feedback within the team, etc.

Sound communication within the team is crucial, as well as a clearly defined distribution of tasks and roles. Also define rules of co-facilitation: how much should the others support you, in what situation, etc. Make sure that the whole team shares the same vision.

## How to elaborate a creative workshop?

1. Think of your aim! What do you want to achieve?
2. Brainstorm! Gather all information you have on the topic and write it on one big paper.
3. Look for methods that suit your content, aim and objectives (not the other way round!)
4. Think of your public! What do they expect? Are the methods appropriate?
5. Write a draft outline!
6. Leave the draft aside and let your subconscious work!
7. Note any new ideas on papers, as soon as you have several changes rewrite your outline!
8. Discuss your workshop with friends! Feedback is useful, and by explaining them you will notice yourself what still needs to be changed.
9. Don't be afraid to be creative and try new things; it pays!
10. Write your final outline and prepare for the workshop, but remain flexible to adapt any parts if necessary.
11. Evaluate your workshop and ask for feedback from participants; learn for the next time.



# Facilitation Guidelines

## 1. Become friends

Workshops are a success when there is a good atmosphere. And a good atmosphere depends to a large extent on interpersonal relations. Talk to the participants already before the workshop. Make sure that participants also talk among themselves, so if necessary, prepare a fun game for getting to know each other. A joke or funny situation at the very beginning can do miracles – but never force it.

## 2. Role of the facilitator

Be aware of your role as facilitator and also communicate it openly to the participants. You are not necessarily an expert, but a volunteer who wants to promote and engage in an open dialogue with the group. You do not need to have any answers, only challenging questions and suitable methods.

## 3. Objectives of the Workshop

Be transparent about the objectives of the workshop as well as the objectives of each sub-unit. Explain to the participants why a specific method is or was used. If participants do not agree with the objectives, the workshop should be adapted through constructive dialogue.

## 4. Aim for a balanced participation

In every group you'll find different personalities, from participants who can't manage to remain silent for 5 minutes to participants who never speak out of free will. Try to create a safe space for the second group (for example through small group work, more encouragement, giving more time for reflection, non-verbal interaction etc.) and challenge the more active ones to train their listening skills.

## 5. Pick them up

Grow participants' interest in the theme of the workshop by starting from their point of view. If you discuss peace (or environment or democracy etc.), ask them what peace (environment, democracy) means to them. Bring any "theoretical" input only after they were given the space to express their opinions. Also, try to link any formal input back to their views and experiences and show the relevance for their life.

## 6. Acknowledge contributions

Give space to participants to express their personal opinions, experience and stories and acknowledge them duly. Shortly thank the person after his/her contribution, and maybe support his/her arguments by linking them to previously expressed opinions or still upcoming parts of the

workshop. Make sure not to judge or interpret something you cannot fully understand, instead crosscheck with the person whether you have understood correctly.

## 7. Respond to emotions

Some contributions by participants ask for a response on the emotional level and not on the factual level (example: somebody is appalled and still shocked by the violence s/he has witnessed just a day before). In these cases it is important to acknowledge the feelings of the participant and to show empathy instead of explaining the incident and "rationalizing it away".

## 8. Handle difficult participants

Workshops are a form to engage in constructive dialogue – on a voluntary basis. If somebody is manifestly not willing to participate, ask about his/her reasons. If they can't be fixed, it is better to offer him/her to leave the workshop. Make sure that participants are there because they want to be there, at least to a minimal degree. Do not be afraid to address any kind of disturbances and clear them as early as possible, this is well invested time.

## 9. Time management

Be flexible without losing your original schedule out of sight. Many activities will take longer than what you expected, especially with large and very active groups. Use a parking lot to store "open issues" and rather leave out a whole sub-unit instead of doing every activity only half-way. Do not forget or shorten the breaks, they are crucial. Dare to give the choice to the participants: We are running out of time! Which of the following activity would you prefer?

## 10. Use diverse material

Always have a flip chart paper on the wall to note interesting contributions, draw schemes, link ideas etc. Have small paper cards ready for keywords, scotch them onto the flip chart, order and cluster them during the discussions. Use different colors for different functions (for both cards and pens). Invite participants to reflect on a topic and write down their views on paper cards before engaging in an open discussion, etc.

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For a deeper discussion of these and other points please consult chapter 1 of the Compass manual by the Council of Europe:

<http://eycb.coe.int/compass/en/contents.html>

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Author > Matthias Rüst

Layout and revision > Marilena Andrenacci and Brigitt Altwegg

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