

Resources for Presenters — Workshops

Workshops are among the most popular formats at IUT conferences — both for presenters and for their audience. It is not difficult to see why. Workshops give you a chance to engage in concrete, practical activities with your participants. In other words, you get to practice active teaching and learning — the pedagogy IUT favors most! Conference workshops can be either 60 or 90 minutes long, depending on the number of activities you wish to include. In general, the most common activities take 15 minutes. Therefore you should plan on three separate activities for a 60-minute workshop (plus introduction and conclusion), and four to five for a 90-minute workshop.

Far more than the other possible formats, workshops depend for their success on “audience participation.” Therefore it’s a good idea to begin with a quick round of introductions. You can ask people to state their names and countries of origin, or amplify this a bit by also asking what they are looking for in the workshop. Soliciting and listing the learning goals of participants at the beginning of a workshop on a whiteboard or flip chart is an excellent way of getting to know who these people are, and an equally excellent way to track your success in covering the topics of most interest to your audience.

Be aware that your primary audience members are college and university faculty from throughout the world. Most have taught for a few years, though some will be relatively new to the profession. The good news is that IUT conferences tend to be relaxed and informal, which is a definite plus when it comes to workshops. What you shouldn’t forget, however, is that you are not the only expert in the room.

The following are some suggestions to help you conduct the best possible workshop:

1. Preparing for your workshop

Whatever activities you have planned should be (a) clearly explained; (b) pedagogically relevant. In other words, workshop activities are tools, rather than ends in themselves. Try to keep in mind the broader pedagogical goal of the session and make sure your participants understand them.

One besetting danger of workshops is a formlessness. It is not enough to keep your participants busy; they should be doing things that lead towards a GOAL. Therefore it is useful to think about the logical sequence of your activities, how you want one to lead into the next, and how you will inform the participants about the structure of the workshop.

2. Conducting the workshop

At the start of the session you should remind participants what the topic of the

workshop is (you might write the title of your session on a blackboard or flip chart) and what you aim for them to accomplish at the end of the 60 or 90 minutes. Remind them of the problem that the workshop activities will address. Your introduction should answer the unspoken audience question: “What’s in it for me?” 90-minute workshops are the longest sessions at any IUT conference, and should have the biggest payoff.

Most workshop activities take place in small groups. You can pair people (“turn to your neighbor”) or divide the participants into three’s or four’s, depending on the type of activity you have in mind. Whether you keep the same groups together for the duration of the workshop or mix them up after an activity or two is your decision. Keeping the same group together may mean that they work better together; mixing up the group composition may mean that participants are exposed to a broader variety of inputs. Either decision is defensible, but you will need to choose.

Maintaining the right pace is one of the essential ingredients of a successful workshop. If it’s too fast, then participants will not have time to complete the tasks you have assigned them; if it’s too slow, people will get bored. And of course different participants will work at different speeds. Therefore it’s good to announce the impending end of any specific activity before time is up: “OK, we have five more minutes to wrap this up!” Paper sessions have moderators who mind the clock. In a workshop, YOU are the moderator—the person who controls how much time is allotted to which activity. So be sure to keep track of the time.

It will get a bit noisy during some workshop exercises, so you will need to speak loudly and clearly and slowly enough for participants to hear you. This is somewhat unfortunate, but a byproduct of the type of session that workshops are. The best workshops liberate a lot of energy. That complicates communication, but is still a good thing.

3. Concluding the workshop

About five to ten minutes before the end of the workshop, call a halt to the final activity and take a little time to summarize what you have collectively done during the entire time. Mention the pedagogical purpose of the exercises (some people may have forgotten), and be sure to THANK the participants. As stated above, workshops are collective enterprises. The success of your own lies as much with the other people in the room as with yourself. Therefore you should acknowledge their contributions. If any individuals have stood out for contributing more than the norm, now is the time to thank them in particular.

If you have handouts, distribution should wait until the END of your workshop. If you distribute them too early, they may distract from your talk. Just as experienced teachers wait until the end of class to hand out corrected exams or papers, you should wait as well. If you run out of handouts, collect the email addresses of those participants who request one and email them a pdf as soon as possible. **Waiting**

longer than a week to do this is a bad idea. You may forget to send the promised pdf or (worse) the person who requested the handout may soon have other things on their mind and begin to lose interest.

NB: If you have any questions regarding this format, please contact Janina Lenger or James Wilkinson at iutconference@gmail.com.