

**Office of Continuing Education**

*Learn for Good*

# Best Practices in Social Work Continuing Education



PARTNERING **for** CHANGE

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey



**Douglas Behan, MSW, LCSW**  
*Director of Continuing Education*  
*Assistant Professor of Professional Practice*

**Louis Donnelly, MSW, PhD**  
*Student Research Assistant*

**Office of Continuing Education**

School of Social Work  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey 390  
George Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
848-932-8758  
[ce@sww.rutgers.edu](mailto:ce@sww.rutgers.edu)  
[socialwork.rutgers.edu/ce](http://socialwork.rutgers.edu/ce)



**Office of Continuing Education**  
*Learn for Good*

**PARTNERING  CHANGE**  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	Page 1
Purpose	
Limitations	
Credibility	
Feedback	
<b>Preparing For Your Workshop</b> .....	Page 2
Follow Workshop Description	
Set Goals and Objectives	
Stay Current and Up-to-Date	
Teach to Masters-Level Professionals	
Focus on depth, not breadth	
Be Applied	
Be Theoretical	
Be Empirical	
<b>Mixing Teaching Methods</b> .....	Page 4
Distribute Handouts	
Lecture	
Use PowerPoint	
Integrate Internet Resources	
Play Audio and Video	
Lead Group Discussions	
Present Case Studies	
Facilitate Group Exercises and Activities	
Encourage Small Group Dialogue	
Design Role Plays	
<b>Getting Started</b> .....	Page 9
Get Their Attention, Right Away	
Establish Your Credibility	
Know Your Audience	
State Goals and Objectives	
Review Time Schedule	
Set Ground Rules and Expectations	
<b>Engaging Your Audience</b> .....	Page 11
Speak Clearly	
Show Passion and Enthusiasm	
Get Participants Involved	
Draw Out Participants' Views and Experiences	
Share Your Views and Experiences	
Be Flexible – Allow Workshop to Evolve	
Take Advantage of Participants' Expertise	
Be Available and Approachable	
Use Humor	
Admit What You Don't Know	
Moderate Sharing and Discussion	
<b>Concluding Your Workshop</b> .....	Page 15
Review What Was Learned	
Encourage Feedback	
Thank Your Audience	

## Section at a Glance:

- **Purpose**

Equip social work continuing education instructors with specific best practice recommendations.

- **Limitations**

This is not a one-size-fits all model for all instructors and all workshops – use what works for your subject and style.

- **Credibility**

Recommendations within are supported by theory, research, and extensive mixed-methods evaluations.

- **Feedback**

Please share your feedback and let us know how we can improve this document [ce@ssw.rutgers.edu](mailto:ce@ssw.rutgers.edu)

---

### *Recommendations are informed by...*

1. Contemporary theories on adult learning and professional continuing education
2. Extensive mixed-methods analysis of evaluation data (2000+ evaluations reviewed)
3. In-depth interviews with highly rated and experienced continuing education instructors at CE
4. Professional judgment and experience of CE staff

# Introduction

## Purpose

This report aims to make best practices in social work continuing education easily accessible and relevant to instructors. Regardless of your level of experience, the strategies and techniques compiled in this report can help you become a more effective and engaging instructor in social work continuing education. We recommend that you read this report in its entirety; however the design and organization of the report also make browsing easy and worthwhile.

## Limitations

The report is not a step-by-step mandate for all instructors and all workshops. Instead, it is a collection of credible suggestions and best practice recommendations, informed by extensive research and evaluation. Workshop content, instructor style, and audience background, all influence how a workshop may best be designed and led. Take what works for you and your workshop and discard what doesn't seem to fit. There is no one-size-fits-all model for continuing education instruction. Diversity, creativity, and personalization of instruction are all strongly encouraged.



## Credibility

Not everything suggested may be relevant for your workshop and style of instruction. However, please take seriously the specific recommendations. Theory, research, and evaluation all support the best practices that follow. Recommendations in this report were compiled based on a wide variety sources: (1) contemporary theories on adult learning and professional continuing education; (2) extensive mixed-methods analysis of our evaluation data (2000+ evaluations reviewed); (3) in-depth interviews with a sample of highly rated and experienced continuing education instructors; and (4) professional judgment and experience of the Office of Continuing Education (CE) staff. There may be no unqualified truths in teaching, learning, or social work, but the recommendations that follow are credible and worthy of careful consideration.



## Feedback

This report is intended to evolve over time based on new findings and feedback from instructors and other stakeholders. Please contact the Office of Continuing Education with comments, questions, or suggestions about this report.

# Preparing for Your Workshop

*Preparation can make all the difference between a workshop that goes well and a workshop that falls short. Extensive preparation may be necessary even for workshops previously facilitated – there is always room for improvement. Before you start preparing for your workshop, please consider the following recommendations.*

## Follow Workshop Description

Before doing any preparation, read and reread the workshop description listed online or in the catalog. Most participants chose to attend the workshop based exclusively on this description. Therefore, the description should be concisely worded and engaging. You want to avoid any mismatch between what is taught and what is expected to be taught. *Think about what you would expect to learn if the only thing you knew about the workshop was the description.* Pay attention to all essential learning objectives, methods, and materials cited in the description. Also, pay attention to what is not said. You do not want to devote too much content on topics that were never mentioned in the description.



## Set Goals and Objectives

Workshop organization structured around clearly defined learning goals and objectives is a major theme in contemporary adult learning theory and is necessary for any successful continuing education workshop. Goals refer to broad statements about what participants will learn. Objectives are more detailed than goals and contain a measurable outcome. Anywhere from four to eight learning goals and objectives are recommended for a one day workshop. Goals and objectives should be geared towards knowledge acquisition, skill development, and reinforcement of professional attitudes. Appropriately sequencing goals and objectives helps create a logical flow to the workshop and lends structure to a mixed-methods approach. *Use goals and objectives as your primary guide for selecting and preparing content, methods, and materials.*

## Stay Current and Up-to-Date

Participants who pay to attend a professional training expect and deserve the most current and up-to-date information on policy, research, theory and clinical interventions. All workshops have an expiration date. *The preparation process requires continual updating of the workshop content.* Are new data available? What new theories are emerging? Was the effectiveness of clinical interventions recently evaluated? How has policy changed in recent months? There is always something old to revise or something new to add.

## Section at a Glance:

- **Follow Workshop Description**  
Ensure that the content and methods match what is listed in the workshop description
- **Set Goals and Objectives**  
Clearly define what will be learned – broadly and specifically. Include measurable outcomes.
- **Stay Current and Up-to-Date**  
Review content and look for areas to update – new data, research, theories. There is always something new to add.

## When preparing:

*“...think about what you would expect to learn if the only thing you knew about the workshop was the description.”*

## Setting goals and objectives:

Focus on...

- Knowledge acquisition
- Skill development
- Reinforcement of professional attitudes

## Updating content:

Ask yourself...

- Are new data available?
- How has theory evolved?
- Has the effectiveness of interventions recently been evaluated?
- How has policy changed?

## Section at a Glance:

- **Teach to Masters-Level Professionals**

The majority of your audience will be very knowledgeable and experienced. Avoid too much time on elementary concepts.

- **Focus on Depth – Not Breadth**

Stay away from broad overviews of general topics. Focus on the most essential learning objectives with evolving layers of depth.

- **Be Applied**

Emphasize learning that is applied and related to skill development or real-world application and practice.

- **Be Theoretical**

Connect practice back to theory. But don't let too much theory drown out its application.

- **Be Empirical**

Support theory and practice by citing credible empirical research.

---

### Focus on application:

*"...Participants seek knowledge that goes beyond the nature of social problems; they seek solutions...."*

### Connect theory to practice:

*"...Incorporate theory as a pathway towards the ultimate goal of real world understanding, critical thinking, and skill development."*

## Teach to Masters-Level Professionals

Keep in mind that the majority of participants hold a master's degree and a wealth of professional experiences. On average, *nearly half of our participants have over 15 years of professional experience!* It can be challenging to find the right balance in difficulty level, especially with a diverse group of varying levels of experience; however, *participants generally prefer to feel challenged than bored.* A review of elementary concepts may be necessary, but be careful not to dwell too much on the easy stuff. Move quickly to the heart of the learning goals and objectives. Don't be afraid to challenge your audience!



## Focus on Depth – Not Breadth

Successful workshops go beyond broad overviews of general topics; they illuminate knowledge most relevant to practicing professionals. *Avoid the temptation to "cover everything"*. Workshops that attempt to be too comprehensive can feel rushed and unengaging. As you select workshop content, take time to identify what is most essential and expand upon the topics with evolving layers of depth. Let go of the less relevant topics in order to open up time to further explore topics most applicable to the learning objectives.

## Be Applied (especially for clinical workshops!)

Almost all participants are primarily looking for something concrete to take away from the workshop that can be applied to their work. An emphasis on applied learning is essential, especially for clinical and management topics. *Participants seek knowledge that goes beyond the nature of social problems; they seek solutions.* How can participants become better working professionals? What new skills, techniques, interventions are most relevant to social workers?

## Be Theoretical (but not overly theoretical!)

Theory grounds research and practice, making it an essential component of any learning exercise. Be sure to incorporate theoretical perspectives relevant to your topic; however, don't let too much theory drown out its application. Failing to relate theory to practice is a sure way to lose your audience. Explore the relationship between theory and practice. *Try to incorporate theory as a pathway towards the ultimate goal of real world understanding, critical thinking, and skill development.*

## Be Empirical (with references!)

When statements or advice are supported by empirical data participants are more likely to accept the content as trustworthy. *Any information presented as a fact should include a credible reference.* However, your primary audience is not made up of statisticians or scientists. If it only takes one statistic or chart to get the main point across, don't use two. *Be careful not to overwhelm your audience with too many facts and figures that detract from goal of improving the professional capacities of participants.*

# Mixing Teaching Methods

*The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Standards of Continuing Education requires instructors to incorporate “mixed instructional methods.” Contemporary adult learning theory supports that adults learn in different ways and that learning is a cyclical knowledge-building process. Therefore, it is vital that you use varied teaching styles, materials, and methods, transferring knowledge through different modalities and appealing to diverse learning styles. You do not want to use the same teaching method for long periods of time. Mix different modes of learning throughout the workshop, frequently switching from one method to another. Doing so, the participants are more likely to engage with the topic, retain the information, and enjoy their experiences at the workshop.*

## Distribute Handouts

Printed handouts are essential learning tools in continuing education. Participants expect something to reference during the workshop and something to take home that is professionally useful. All instructors are expected to develop and distribute printed handouts that focus on key learning objectives. When designing your handouts, focus on the relevancy of the material to professional practice. Try to develop attractive, concise, and comprehensive overviews that can be utilized in professional settings.



- **Outline of the Day:** Develop a one page outline of the day’s schedule, listing times dedicated to specific topics, breaks, and lunch. One ten minute break in the morning (before lunch) and one ten minute break in the afternoon (after lunch) is suggested
- **Reference Sheets:** Prepare reference sheets that review the most essential learning goals and objectives. These summaries may focus on theoretical perspectives, definitions, assessment and diagnostic criteria, intervention techniques, or laws and regulations. Try to streamline large, complex bodies of knowledge into easy-to-understand operational parts.
- **Checklists and Step-by-Step Guidelines:** Develop checklists and step-by-step guidelines that provide directions for professional practice. Be specific about each point or step and illustrate with examples if necessary.
- **List of Resources:** Provide a comprehensive list of relevant resources (e.g. books, articles, and internet websites) that can steer participants in the right direction for further learning. Organize these resources by topic.
- **Brief Instructor Bio:** Prepare a short half-page description of your professional experiences that may help establish your credibility on the subject. Focus on qualifications and experiences relevant to the workshop topic.
- **Expectations:** State clearly what expectations you have for the group during the workshop. What do you expect participants to do? What do you expect participants not do?

## Section at a Glance:

- **Mix Methods**  
Mix different teaching methods throughout the workshop, frequently switching from one method to another.
- **Handouts**  
Develop handouts to be used during and after the workshop. Focus on key learning objectives and application.

### Why use a mixed-methods approach?

- NASW standards of continuing education requires it.
- Participants learn in different ways.
- Participants are more likely to remember and apply what was taught.
- Participants are more likely to be engaged, interested, and satisfied with their learning experiences.

### When designing handouts:

*“Focus on the relevancy of the material to professional practice. Try to develop attractive, concise, and comprehensive overviews that can be utilized in professional settings – material that participants might frequently reference or post on their desk at work.”*

## Section at a Glance:

### • **Lecture**

Lead multiple mini-lectures (no more than 30 minutes) throughout the day; avoid reading from text, rephrase and repeat yourself often, and illustrate with interesting real-life examples.

### *When best to use lecture:*

- Reviewing background information.
- Introducing new information.

### *Remember:*

Lecturing in continuing education is *very different* than lecturing in an academic course or professional conference presentation.

### *Effective continuing education lectures are:*

- Brief (15-30 minutes)
- Engaging
- Responsive to the audience
- Occur at multiple times throughout the day (separated by breaks or other teaching methods)

### *Fill in content with examples from your experiences:*

“...Come prepared to illustrate concepts with real-world examples. Participants greatly appreciate hearing about the unique personal and professional experiences of instructors.”

## Lecture

Your lecture is the backbone of your workshop. The knowledge most relevant to essential learning objectives should be clearly communicated through lecture. This is usually the best method to review background information or introduce new information. However, effective lectures in continuing education are very different from a traditional lecture in an academic course or professional conference presentation. *Continuing education lectures are brief, engaging, responsive to the audience, and occur at multiple times throughout the workshop.*

- **Limit time:** The lecture is not the whole of the workshop; it is only a part of it. Limit each lecture to 15-30 minutes. After a half hour, people’s attention will wane. Instead of one long lecture, lead several short lectures throughout the day, separated by breaks and other teaching methods.



- **Lecture more in beginning:** Participants are less attentive towards the end of a five hour workshop. You don’t want to lecture on key learning objectives at the very end. Lecture more in the morning when participants are most attentive and ready to absorb essential information. Later on, facilitate more interactive and stimulating learning experiences.
- **Talk – don’t read:** Reading prepared material is not lecturing. Long stretches of reading straight from text or PowerPoint is never appropriate for continuing education. Communication of knowledge to the audience should flow naturally with clarity and ideally some spontaneity.
- **Stay organized:** Lectures that are logically structured make learning easier. Take advantage of outlines and PowerPoint to stay on-task and on-time.
- **Rephrase:** There is never only one right way to explain something. Especially for difficult concepts and key themes, good communication demands frequently rephrasing what you’re teaching. Break down academic, clinical and technical jargon into easily accessible language that everyone can understand.
- **Repeat:** Don’t shy away from repeating yourself. Carefully structured repetition is perhaps the best way to reinforce learning. As you move through the day, review content most essential to the learning objectives.
- **Illustrate with examples:** Come prepared to illustrate concepts with real-world examples. Participants greatly appreciate hearing about the unique personal and professional experiences of instructors; reflect back on your own experiences and share with the group.





## Use PowerPoint

The appropriate use of PowerPoint can help instructors and participants stay organized and on-task. While PowerPoint is not required, it is strongly recommended as an organizing framework for your presentation. However, if PowerPoint is the whole of the workshop, something is wrong. *Too many slides or too much on each slide can bore or overwhelm the audience and take away from the necessary emphasis on mixed-methods instruction.* When using PowerPoint, try to incorporate the following recommendations.



- **Use as outline:** Each slide should help structure the presentation by distilling the most essential topics into titles and short phrases. A few points per slide.
- **Don't overload with text:** The PowerPoint is not the body of your presentation. Slides should not be stuffed with long sentences or other text-heavy content. Always use a 20pt font or larger. Save content for your delivery and explanation. Get the participants looking at you – not at the screen.
- **Don't give away content:** Try to present bullets one at a time, not the whole slide at once. Avoid distributing an identical copy handout of the PowerPoint before the presentation. Knowing exactly what is coming often takes away from participant interest and engagement.
- **Build in breaks:** Reliance on PowerPoint for long stretches of time will wear out participants' attention. After 15-30 minutes, pull participants' eyes off the screen and facilitate an alternate mode of learning.

## Integrate Internet Resources

Internet technology is increasingly making accessible high quality content in the field of human services. It is very likely that your workshop topic has been extensively presented, many times over. This wealth of knowledge can be readily found on the websites of reputable universities, research and policy institutes, and government agencies. Do not feel pressured that all content presented has to be purely original. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Borrow what is useful for your workshop and give credit with necessary citations. Look out for good charts, visual diagrams, and short presentations that can be seamlessly integrated into your workshop.

## Play Video

Playing video clips can foster group engagement, reinforce knowledge and add an emotional layer of depth in understanding. Always try to integrate video relevant to learning objectives. Evaluations from participants reveal that video material is frequently thought to have contributed the most to their learning experience. Be creative in selecting video. Look for media that models interactions between clients and professionals. Short clips from documentaries or news stories can also enhance learning while sensitizing or refining professional attitudes. Afterwards, engage the audience in a brief discussion about the material; clarifying, if necessary, its connection to the workshop's learning goals.

## Section at a Glance:

- **Use PowerPoint**  
Use as outline – don't overload your presentation with too many slides or too much on each slide.
- **Integrate Internet Resources**  
Utilize or direct participants to credible internet resources that expand upon learning objectives.
- **Play Video**  
Integrate audio/video clips into lectures, activities, and discussion – excellent mode to model practice behaviors.

---

### Be careful using PowerPoint:

*"... Slides should not be stuffed with long sentences or other text-heavy content. Save content for your delivery and explanation. Get participants looking at you – not the screen."*

### Where to look for internet resources?

- Universities
- Research and policy institutes
- Government agencies

### When is audio and video most beneficial?

- Modeling clinical skills or therapeutic interaction with clients
- Sensitizing or refining professional attitudes

## Section at a Glance:

- **Lead Group Discussions**

Facilitate a structured forum for participants to share their knowledge, experiences, and views; focus discussion on learning objectives; redirect course when discussion strays too far off topic

- **Present Case Studies**

Emphasize application and skill development by presenting and analyzing case studies that are relevant to learning objectives

- **Encourage Small Group Dialogue**

Encourage problem-solving and collaboration in small group activities; give clear instructions about what to do and move around the room to support participants

---

### *What makes group work/discussion effective?*

- Aligned with workshop learning goals and objectives
- Emphasis on application of knowledge and skill development
- Time limited (10-20 minutes)
- Clear expectations for participation provided
- Adverse participation minimized or, if necessary, redirected
- Relevancy of method clearly explained

## Lead Group Discussions

Creating a forum for participants to share their knowledge, experiences and views encourages transformative learning and professional growth. As a result, all workshops should include time for structured group discussions. A block of time can be allocated for this purpose or discussion can be initiated periodically throughout lectures or in other learning activities. Either way, topics for discussion should be well defined and purposeful; discussion should clearly relate to the learning goals and objectives outlined at the beginning of the workshop. Like other methods, don't let discussion drag out for too long. No more than 15 minutes of continuous discussion is recommended. *Draw out participants' professional knowledge, experiences and their emotional and intellectual reactions to the content presented.* Look for those with special expertise and invite them to share. If dialogue goes too far off track, redirect the group immediately. Be careful that group discussions don't morph into something of little relevance to the initial topic. As the group leader, you are expected to discourage participants from dominating or monopolizing the conversation. Refer to the *Engaging Your Audience* section (Page 9) to read more about effective facilitation of group participation.



## Present Case Studies

Case studies are endorsed by adult learning theories and social work education because of their emphasis on problem-solving, critical thinking, and applied learning. Therefore, you are encouraged to lead participants in the analysis of real or fictional case studies, either individually or as a group, emphasizing real world application and professional skill development. Case studies are most effective when preceded by short lectures and followed by group discussion. It is generally advisable to present case studies on various topics at different times throughout the day, rather than doing many at one time. It is also vital to keep case studies concise and targeted to essential learning goals and objectives. Lengthy, drawn out case studies can overwhelm or distract your audience. No more than 20 minutes of case study at a time is recommended.

## Facilitate Group Exercises and Activities

Exercises and activities in groups are helpful in encouraging active learning, collaboration, and knowledge transfer among participants. Group exercises and activities do not just fill up time between lectures; they enhance a specific kind of learning on a topic essential to the workshop. *Carefully consider the usefulness of the activity and be creative in its design.* Most participants enjoy group activities, but only when it directly relates to the workshop topic and their practice. When explaining the group exercise or activity make instructions and expectations extremely clear. When participants get into groups they should know exactly what is expected of them. Groups of more than five persons are not recommended – such sizes can become difficult to manage. *Remember that this is not a break time for the instructor- move around the room and check-in with each group at least once.* If you notice two or more groups having trouble with the same thing, interrupt and address the issue with all participants. At the end, conclude by facilitating a short discussion with the whole group. Finally, connect the method back to learning goals and objectives by highlighting the purpose of the activity.

## Encourage Small Group Dialogue

Highly structured group activities are not always the most effective way to encourage reflection and critical thinking. Sometimes, it may be a good idea to allocate a short amount of time for participants to form small groups and converse with each other about a specific topic, exploring their views and experiences from a personal and professional perspective. *Give participants clear instructions about what to discuss* – otherwise participants might end up silent, looking at each other blankly. This form of semi-structured group dialogue is recommended to be used periodically throughout the workshop. However, don't let this form of group dialogue go on for too long - after around 5 minutes, expect conversations to start wandering. Even for very engaging topics, many group discussions will veer off track quicker than you might expect.

## Design Role Plays

Role plays are excellent methods of modeling and practicing skills involving interaction between two or more persons. For workshops with an emphasis on clinical skill development role plays are strongly recommended. Role plays can be slightly intimidating for some participants, but usually less than you or participants might anticipate. To minimize any participant unease, consider organizing role plays in small groups or only ask for volunteers to perform in front of the whole group. Make sure to fully explain and model the skill before expecting participants to act out the skill in a role play. Role plays are most effective when they follow a comprehensive modeling and presentation of the interactive skill. Constructive critique of role plays is also helpful for learning; however, ensure that you are delicate with your critique, highlight strengths and show appreciation for all participants' efforts. Finally, conclude with a group debriefing session, evaluating overall performance and reviewing the most essential learning components of the exercise.



## Time Recommendations

A mixed-methods approach to continuing education requires that you switch teaching methods frequently, avoiding long stretches of time devoted to any single method. The following time recommendations may help you plan how much time to devote to each type of activity.

<u>Method</u>	<u>Time Recommendation</u>
Lecture/PowerPoint	15-30 minutes
Audio/Video	5-20 minutes
Class Discussion	5-15 minutes
Case Studies	10-20 minutes
Group activities/exercises	15-30 minutes
Small group dialogue	3-5 minutes
Role Plays	10-20 minutes

## Section at a Glance:

- **Encourage Small Group Dialogue**  
Allocate a few minutes for reflective dialogue in small groups; provide clear instructions regarding what to discuss.
- **Design Role Plays**  
Model a practice or clinical skill; provide participants with an opportunity to observe or practice the skill through structured role plays; debrief with encouragement, constructive critique, and discussion.

## Benefits of small group dialogue:

- Sensitizes participants to diverse views and experiences
- Encourages reflection and critical thinking
- Fosters participant engagement
- Reinforces learning components

## How to minimize participant unease with role plays:

- Call on volunteers only to role play in front of large group
- Facilitate multiple role plays in small-groups
- Highlight participant strengths
- Show appreciation and praise for all participants' efforts

## Section at a Glance:

- **Get Their Attention, Right Away**

Start with an engaging activity or story related to learning goals and objectives – anything to get their attention. The quicker you get their attention, the more likely you are to retain it.

- **Establish Your Credibility**

Briefly talk about your expertise, experience, and values; relate to the audience's work, fostering respect, trust, and understanding.

- **Get to Know Your Audience**

Facilitate brief introductions of all participants – find out about their professional backgrounds and expectations for the workshop.

---

### Experienced continuing education instructors say:

“... if you don't get your audience's attention in the first five minutes of the workshop, you've lost them for the rest of the day.”

### What to find out about your audience:

- Where they work
- What work they do
- Years of professional experience
- What they expect and desire to gain from today's workshop

## Getting Started

*The introduction to your workshop sets the stage for the rest of the day. Effective introductions allow you to get to know your audience, establish your credibility, set expectations and define goals and objectives. Getting off to a good start is perhaps the simplest and most effective way to enhance the overall workshop experience. Before you dive into the details of course content, consider following the recommendations that appear below.*

### Get Their Attention, Right Away

The quicker you get their attention, the more likely you are to retain it. Many of the most experienced and successful continuing education instructors report that if you don't get your audience's attention in the first five minutes of the workshop, you've lost them for the rest of the day. Certainly, there are always opportunities to reengage your audience, but don't underestimate the importance of first impression. Start off with something creative and interesting – an engaging story or activity, anything to get their attention. However, this is not only a time to entertain; there should be a clearly defined purpose to this introduction that goes beyond entertainment value and relates back to the workshop's primary learning goals and objectives.

### Establish Your Credibility

Before anything else, participants begin sizing up the speaker. They want to know who you are: what motivates you to do the work you do; what knowledge and experience you bring to the workshop. *It is extremely important to quickly establish your credibility with the audience by being appropriately reflexive and speaking candidly about your values and professional, educational, and training experiences.* What can you offer participants? Why should participants trust your advice? How important is this topic to you? Can you relate to the participants' work? Speak to these questions immediately and form a relationship with the audience that is built upon professional respect, trust, and understanding.



### Get to Know Your Audience

Knowing your audience is as important as your audience knowing you. Knowledge about your audience will later empower you to create an engaging and personalized learning environment. *The best way to get to know your audience is through brief introductions.* Introduction should be structured and *move quickly* – anything more than ten minutes can become a time-drain and bore your audience. Specify a few specific details you would like participants to share, such as professional background (location, position, years of experience) and expectations for workshop (what they expect or desire to learn). Even for large groups, introductions can be carried out effectively without taking up too much time. This process also allows the audience to get to know each other, encouraging professional networking and collaboration. It is critical to remain attentive during this time. Concise note taking is recommended. Introductions are not a formality; information obtained about participants should be thoughtfully incorporated into the presentation and discussion of course material.

## State Goals and Objectives

It is vital that you start by clearly communicating to the audience what will be learned. *Be as specific as possible.* Communicate the learning objectives in simple language, visually presented on a blackboard, flip-chart or handout. Participants should be able to refer back to these learning objectives throughout the workshop. You are also encouraged to include individual participants' learning goals and expectations shared during the introduction session. *If participants expect to learn something beyond the scope of the workshop, address this conflict right away.* There should be no surprises about where the learning is going and not going. Politely inform the participants that the topic does not relate to the workshop goals and objectives as advertised in the course description. However, if participants' desires or expectations for learning compliment the workshop topic – and you feel equipped to facilitate learning on the proposed topic – you are strongly encouraged to expand upon predefined learning goals and objectives.



## Review Time Schedule

Before you get going it's generally a good idea to review the general structure and time schedule for the day. People like to know what to expect. Prepare and distribute a one page 'Outline of the Day' as a handout to participants, listing times dedicated to specific topics, breaks, and lunch. One ten minute break in the morning (before lunch) and one ten minute break in the afternoon (after lunch) is suggested. You can quickly go over this schedule with the participants and clarify any questions. You want to leave some flexibility in the schedule and explain that the schedule is not set in stone. Nothing goes 100 percent as planned; moderately shortening or expanding a part of the workshop is often beneficial to learning and the overall workshop experience.

## Set Ground Rules and Expectations

Reviewing the basic ground rules and expectations for participation can encourage a learning environment that is safe, supportive and taken seriously by the audience. Many instructors speak about sharing experiences and opinions, addressing issues of confidentiality, relevancy to topic, and respectfulness of diverse points of view. In order to minimize potential monopolization of group discussion, you may also request that participants sometimes defer to those who have yet to share. Finally, some basic behavioral expectations are usually in order – appropriate use of cell phones and electronic devices, for example. However, when addressing these issues, remember that you are speaking with adults – not young children. A tone of graciousness and mutual respect is especially important to foster good will between you and your audience.



## Section at a Glance:

- **State Goals and Objectives**  
Clearly state and review workshop goals and objectives, addressing stated goals and expectations of individual participants.
- **Review Time Schedule**  
Briefly go over the timing for the day; explain when topics will be covered and review break and lunch times.
- **Set Ground Rules and Expectations**  
Minimize potential adverse participation by politely asserting how you expect participants to participate in the workshop.

### *Make no surprises about where the learning is going:*

- Clarify what will be learned, and will not be learned.
- Address, right away, conflicts between participants' learning expectations and stated goals and objectives.

### *When is it appropriate to add new learning objectives?*

- Participants' goals for learning complement existing workshop goals.
- You believe yourself to be competent on the proposed topic and equipped to facilitate learning.

## Section at a Glance:

- **Speak clearly**

Deliberately speak loudly and slowly – large rooms can make it difficult to hear; rephrase participants' comments; check-in with the audience if you are concerned about being understood.

- **Show Passion and Enthusiasm**

Use tone, inflection, and appropriate self-disclosure to communicate your passion and enthusiasm about the topic.

- **Get Participants Involved**

Look for ways to encourage audience participation; move back and forth between audience involvement and more traditional didactic approaches.

---

### *Show that you care about course material:*

*“... Come prepared to speak openly about why the topic resonates with you, on a personal or professional level. This type of appropriate self-disclosure builds rapport between you and the group and underscores the meaning and significance behind course material”*

### *More audience involvement is not always better:*

Find a good balance - move back and forth between talking with and talking to the audience.

## Engaging Your Audience

*Engaging your audience is essential to the effective facilitation of any continuing education workshop. Adult learning theory and extensive evaluation reveal that engaged participants stay interested, learn more and are generally more satisfied with the learning experience. Effective instructors look to actively engage participants in learning. There is no secret formula to keep your audience engaged, but some basic strategies can go a long way in fostering a dynamic learning environment.*

### Speak Clearly

No one will be engaged by someone whom they can't understand. With a large audience, some background noise, and possible chattering, it can be difficult for participants to understand a soft-spoken speaker. It is usually best to deliberately speak loudly and slowly. When soft-spoken participants share something, rephrase what they said so that the whole audience can understand. If the audience can't understand what is being said, they are more likely to mentally check-out rather than ask you or someone else to speak up. So, if you are concerned about being understood, check-in with your audience and ask if you are being understood.

### Show Passion and Enthusiasm

Effective instructors are often described by participants as passionate and enthusiastic. Participants' interest is greatly influenced by these personal qualities. If you don't show that you care about the workshop material, chances are your audience won't care much either. Tone, voice inflection, and emotion that express your enthusiasm about the topic encourage audience engagement and inspire participants towards learning and professional growth. Come prepared to speak openly about why the topic resonates with you, on a personal or professional level. This type of appropriate self-disclosure builds rapport between you and the group and underscores the meaning and significance behind course material.

### Get Participants Involved

Interaction between you and the participants (and between participants themselves) is critical to an effective continuing education workshop. Workshops that receive negative feedback from participants frequently lack opportunities for participants to get involved in the learning process. Whatever you are doing, look for ways to involve participants and encourage audience participation. Ask probing questions and call directly on participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and expertise.

However, more audience involvement is not always better. Participants also expect to learn from your expertise through traditional didactic approaches. A good balance may require pausing a lecture and inviting discussion or wrapping up discussion and moving back to lecture. The best way to broadly appeal to the diversity of the audience's preferred learning styles is to avoid too much continuous time on either approach. Instead, try to move back and forth frequently between talking with and talking to the audience.

## Draw out Participants' Views and Experiences

Eliciting the views and experiences of participants is an effective way to engage participants through involvement while broadening the scope of learning. Your audience has a wealth of experience – the average continuing education participant has around ten years of professional experience. Not only are participants eager to share their own views and experiences, participants are also eager to hear and learn from other participants. In workshop evaluation forms, the sharing of participants' experiences is frequently cited as having contributed the most to the overall workshop experience. Call on your audience to share their views and experiences during your lectures or through organized activities and structured group discussions. Encourage reflection through critical analysis of these perspectives. Explore the diversity of your audience's views and experiences and compare these perspectives to your presentation of theory, research, and best practices.

## Share Your Views and Experiences

Participants not only want an opportunity to share; they want to hear from you. What have your working experiences been like? What makes the most sense to you? Illuminate facts, figures and key concepts with real-life examples from your professional practice. Participants describe this form of self-disclosure as extremely educational and engaging. Next, explain to your audience how you make sense of these experiences – what have they taught you? Participants expect to hear from you about the lessons you've learned as a professional. Speak openly about the evolution of your understanding of topics most relevant to learning objectives. However, avoid being too forceful with your opinions. Especially for sensitive topics (such as religion or politics), be considerate to the diversity in the room and always address and speak fairly about alternative points of view.

## Be Attuned and Responsive to Audience

Engaging instruction requires high levels of self-awareness and perceptiveness of the audience. How is the audience responding to your presentation style and teaching methods? Are participants engaged in the learning process? Audience responses are often impossible to predict ahead of time. Play close attention to participants' facial expressions, eye contact, and movement – these are key behavioral indicators of possible resistance. Disengagement will likely worsen without some acknowledgement or adjustment in approach. Be responsive to your audience and willing to improvise or make changes when necessary to reengage participants.



However, no matter how perceptive you are, it's never possible to know exactly what participants are thinking. Therefore, it's usually a good idea to check-in with the group throughout the workshop. Pause for a minute and ask the group how everything is going. Do they understand? Are they interested? Is this relevant to them? Most of the time, the only way to know for sure is to ask.

## Section at a Glance:

- **Draw out Participants' Views and Experiences**  
Call on participants to share their views and experiences; encourage reflection through critical analysis; compare these perspectives to theory, research, and best practices.
- **Share Your Views and Experiences**  
Illuminate facts, figures and key concepts with real-life examples from your professional practice; speak openly about your understandings of topics, while addressing and speaking fairly about alternative points of view.
- **Be Attuned and Responsive to Audience**  
Continually assess participants' level of engagement by paying close attention to participants' body language and directly asking for feedback; be willing to improvise or make changes when necessary to reengage participants.

---

### *Participants want to hear from you:*

- What have your working experiences been like?
- What makes the most sense to you?
- How has your understanding of topics evolved over time?

## Section at a Glance:

- **Be Flexible – Allow Workshop to Evolve**

Respond to your audience and allow your workshop to evolve in approach and direction; it's okay to twist and turn, so long as you stay on track.

- **Take Advantage of Participants' Expertise**

Identify participants who have special expertise in relevant topics; encourage these participants to share their knowledge, experiences, and unique perspectives.

- **Be Available and Approachable**

Engage and support participants in dialogue during break times.

- **Use humor**

Make learning more interesting and memorable through use of humor; be careful, however, to use humor only when appropriate.

---

### *Workshop schedule / lesson plan is not set in stone:*

- Be attentive to the audience and evaluative of your performance.
- If a teaching method is not going well, try something else.
- If a non-essential learning objective is not relevant to your audience, emphasize something of higher relevance and interest.

## Be Flexible – Allow Workshop to Evolve

Knowing about participants in the room will empower you to guide the direction of the workshop in a way that is most beneficial to your audience. Be prepared to be flexible – willing to moderately adjust reliance on learning methods and emphasis on learning objectives. Your workshop schedule and lesson plan, while extremely important, is not set in stone. Be attentive to your audience, evaluative of your performance, and allow your workshop to evolve in approach and direction. If a teaching method is not going well, try something else. If a non-essential learning component is not applicable to your general audience, emphasize something that is of higher relevance and interest. However, stay on track; too much change can lead to disorganization. It's okay to twist-and-turn, so long as you stay on track. Draw a clear line between the parts of the workshop that can change and the parts that cannot.

## Take Advantage of Participants' Expertise

Expect to come across a handful of highly knowledgeable and experienced participants with high levels of special expertise. Don't let their skills and knowledge go to waste. These participants can educate you and the rest of the group, enhancing the overall workshop experience. Group introductions and discussion are good times to identify these "experts." For relevant topics, defer to their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Participants do not usually raise their hand to offer their expertise – try to remember who knows what and call on them directly. These participants are likely to be flattered and eager to share with you and the rest of the group.

## Be Available and Approachable

Instructors described as being "approachable" often receive outstanding feedback from participants. These instructors initiate conversation with participants and encourage participants to come to them with questions, comments, and concerns. It is strongly recommended that you make yourself available and continue engaging participants during breaks in the workshop. During these times, invite questions from participants and engage in dialogue with individuals and small groups. Many instructors bring their own lunch and remain in the workshop room during the break for lunch. While not required, this is a good time to learn from and build rapport with participants. Finally, don't leave the room as soon as the workshop ends. Make yourself available to participants in case anyone has any questions or feedback.

## Use Humor

The appropriate use of humor can be very helpful in maintaining your audience's interest and making some key points. While your primary role is not to entertain, sometimes a funny story, if relevant to the topic, can help engage your audience and make learning more memorable. Sometimes humor can serve to create a more safe and open learning environment, however, *be cautious and thoughtful about humor as well*. Humor can be inappropriate for very serious or sensitive topics. It is good to amuse the group, but never at the expense of professionalism or at the risk of offending anyone.



## Admit What You Don't Know

Active demonstration of your knowledge and expertise helps you earn credibility as a qualified and engaging instructor. However, being upfront about the limits of your knowledge is just as important. When you are open about what you don't know you gain the trust of your audience and ensure accurate knowledge transfer. It is always better to present no information than wrong information. Right away, participants' sense when an instructor is stretching the truth. If you're discovered presenting inaccurate information, much of your audience is likely to tune you out for the rest of the workshop. *So, if you don't know, be honest and say you don't know – you are not expected to know everything.* If you are nearly (but not entirely) certain, you may want to add a disclaimer, cautioning your audience about your uncertainty. If possible, take advantage of break times to reference the internet or other resources.

## Moderate Sharing and Discussion

Creating a forum for participants to express themselves is likely to engage your audience and enhance learning. But participation should never become a free-for-all. Sharing and discussion must be purposefully directed, and at times, redirected or restrained. You are likely to encounter two forms of adverse participation: participation irrelevant to learning objectives and monopolization of participation. Participants who monopolize conversation or detract from learning quickly cause others to feel bored, flustered, or disempowered. The problem will almost certainly worsen if unchecked. As the leader, you are responsible for deterring these adverse forms of participation when they surface.



- **Confront, politely and immediately:** As soon as someone begins monopolizing or going off track, an immediate, polite and empathetic confrontation is usually the best fix. *Quite often, interruption may be necessary.* Model basic social work clinical skills: thank the participant for their openness and acknowledge the value in what was shared. However, be honest and direct about the importance of keeping discussion relevant and open to all participants.
- **Talk with participants individually:** Repeated confrontations in front of the group may be ineffective for some participants. Individual one-on-one discussions during break times are good opportunities to deliver a more compassionate and compelling message to these participants. They are less likely to feel embarrassed or offended and more likely to change future behavior.
- **Ignore:** If all else fails, it may be necessary to simply ignore participants who continue to adversely participate. Avoid eye contact, turn your body away from them, and limit calling upon them. This is the least desirable solution and will not solve the problem completely, but it will, at the very least, improve the learning environment for the rest of the participants.

## Section at a Glance:

- **Admit What You Don't Know**  
Be honest and upfront about the limits of your knowledge; honesty earns you credibility and ensures accurate knowledge transfer.
- **Moderate Sharing and Discussion**  
Be assertive in redirecting participants who go-off track or monopolize group discussion: confront, politely and immediately and talk with participants individually.

---

### *Don't pretend you know more than you do:*

*"... If you don't know be honest and say you don't know – you are not expected to know everything"*

### *Look up information during break times:*

If you don't have the answer to a question, look up the information on the internet or other resources during break times. This is sure to impress your audience.

### *Sharing and discussion should never be a free-for-all:*

*"... Sharing and discussion must be purposefully directed, and at times, redirected or restrained"*

*"Quite often, interruption may be necessary."*

## Section at a Glance:

- **Review What Was Learned**

Talk about how each learning goal and objective was achieved; address related concepts that emerged during the workshop and guide interested participants to resources where they can obtain more information.

- **Encourages Feedback**

Request participants to provide thoughtful and honest feedback in evaluation surveys; stress that their feedback is taken seriously and helps improve future workshops.

- **Thank Your Audience**

Show your appreciation for your audience's participation and contributions; if possible, try to acknowledge and thank each participant, individually.

---

### Contact Us:

Office of Continuing Education  
School of Social Work  
Rutgers, The State University of  
New Jersey  
390 George Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
848-932-8758  
[ce@ssw.rutgers.edu](mailto:ce@ssw.rutgers.edu)  
[socialwork.rutgers.edu/ce](http://socialwork.rutgers.edu/ce)

## Concluding Your Workshop

*You finished! Now what? As the workshop comes to an end there are some simple things you can do to professionally and graciously wrap up the learning process.*

### Review What Was Learned

At the very end, it's good to return to the beginning. Take the time to once again review the workshop learning goals and objectives. Talk about how each of these goals and objectives were achieved throughout the course of the day. This review process makes learning topics more memorable and helps participants appreciate the amount of learning that took place. You may also want to address other related topics (such as topics that came up in discussion) that emerged during the workshop but were not sufficiently covered. Give some guidance to interested participants about where they can learn more about these topics, recommending books, articles, or internet resources.

### Encourage Feedback

Take a few minutes to encourage participants to provide thoughtful and honest feedback in the evaluation surveys. The evaluation data obtained from these surveys are immensely valuable to you in preparing for future workshops. Instructors who emphasize the importance of these surveys benefit from more reliable and constructive feedback. When you emphasize the value of their feedback, you also communicate to participants that you value their opinions and care about their learning.

### Thank Your Audience

Each individual participant uniquely contributed to the success of the workshop. Before everyone runs out the door, make sure to show your appreciation for their participation and contributions. Most instructors address the whole group, praising the positive attributes about the audience as a whole. As participants make their way out the door, many instructors also choose to position themselves near the exit and individually thank each participant with a handshake and a comment about their unique contribution to the workshop. With a quick handshake and a personalized message of support, you'll conclude your workshops on a positive note with each participant.

## Thank you

*Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. We hope that you find it helpful in delivering an informative and engaging workshop. Also, if you have any recommendations or advice on how this guide can improve, please contact us. Your insights and experiences are greatly appreciated.*



Office of Continuing Education  
*Learn for Good*



Office of Continuing Education  
School of Social Work  
Rutgers, The State University of New  
Jersey 390 George Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
848-932-8758  
[ce@ssw.rutgers.edu](mailto:ce@ssw.rutgers.edu)  
[socialwork.rutgers.edu/ce](http://socialwork.rutgers.edu/ce)

PARTNERING  CHANGE  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey