

Sample Learning Formats



Directions: Use this table to identify possible learning formats for your session.

Format	Description	Considerations
Expert Lecture	An expert speaker conveys information to a large group.	Familiar and comfortable to many participants. A well-designed lecture can be effective, but if used too often or for too long, participants will lose interest and won't learn as much. Most effective lectures incorporate audience interaction in some form—e.g., soliciting audience responses or asking audience members to discuss ideas in pairs.
Panel Discussion	A small group of experts, led by a moderator, discusses an issue from a variety of perspectives.	Important to select a skilled moderator or facilitator with prepared questions. Lends itself to better conversations than a lecture because it provides more varied opinions. Again, should not be used too often or for too long and audience interaction should be encouraged.
Debate	Two or three debaters holding clearly differing points of view exchange insights on a topic of import to the audience.	Important to select a skilled moderator or facilitator with prepared questions. Abstracts should be made available to participants and should: identify the topic, why the topic is of interest, and the contrasting positions of the debaters.
Workshop or Breakout Session	Led by a moderator, it usually allows for more interaction.	Important to select a skilled moderator or facilitator. Engaging activities should be included.
Think Tank or Buzz Group	A facilitator will frame a key issue or question. Participants break into small groups to discuss it. A facilitated large-group discussion follows. The small groups share what they identified/explored.	Important to have a clear assignment and defined expectations for output. One member of the group should serve as recorder.
Fishbowls	A number of participants form an inner circle to debate an issue. Others sit outside the circle to listen and observe.	The outside group gives feedback to the fishbowl group after it finishes debating and discussing.
Case Studies	Reports of real-life events and problems. Audience discussion is the main learning method.	Important to select a skilled moderator or facilitator. Discussions should be primarily audience driven.



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Peer-to-Peer Round Table Discussion	A structured system to provide peer engagement around specific topics. Each table has an established topic and facilitator. The facilitator frames the discussion and encourages participation from each person at the table.	Important to select a skilled facilitator. Most successful when topics are identified by participants and not the session organizers.
Paper	Lecture-style presentation(s) made by one or more speakers to share research results, completed work, and innovative concepts, methodologies, or tools.	Each presentation should be no longer than 20 minutes with additional time allotted for questions. A full paper or a synopsis should be available for distribution or download during the session. Time keeping is important for this type of session.
Birds of a Feather or Idea Exchanges	A relatively small and informal topic-based discussion with NO formal presentation. Networking, idea exploration, and information sharing are the main goals.	The facilitator ensures introductions and kicks off the session with a question or idea for the group to discuss.
Lightning talk or Ignite	A very short presentation, usually between five and ten minutes in length. The short format forces the speaker to only include critical information. Several lightning talks will usually be delivered by different speakers in a single session.	Slides may be required or not permitted depending on the organization of the session. For sessions requiring slides, a fixed number may be set. Time keeping is important for this type of session.

Adapted from *The Association Educator's Toolkit*. Washington, DC: American Society of Association Executives; 1995.

Additional Sources:

CES SCÉ Types of Presentations. <http://c2016.evaluationcanada.ca/types-of-presentations/index.html>
 American Evaluation Association Conference Session Types. <http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=170>

