



IO3 Guide for Interactive
Workshop

What is an interactive workshop?

An interactive workshop engages the participants actively in learning new information or techniques. It has a dynamic nature which encourages creative thought and can quickly yield ideas and solutions.

An “interactive workshop” could be defined as a structured set of facilitated activities for groups of participants who work together to explore a problem and its solutions, over a specific period of time, in one location (Pavelin et al., 2014).



An interactive workshop is distinct from a standard meeting because it aims to stimulate creativity through collaborative working. Its core activities are brainstorming activities. The minimum time needed for an interactive workshop is 2-3 hours but it could be a part of a longer training course.

An interactive workshop is sometimes called “process-oriented” because the participants productively work through a process rather than simply receiving the product.

Who are the 'players'?

The effective planning and running of an interactive workshop requires clear distribution of roles and responsibilities. There should be a person or a team who will plan and manage the delivery of the interactive workshop. The moderator could be a part of the team or he/she could be hired additionally if the topic of the workshop requires specific expertise and know-how.

The moderator leads the workshop, presents the agenda, aims and instructions for each activity.



Facilitator moderates activities of the group.

Participants are split into groups. A group usually consists of 3-8 participants and one facilitator. Number of groups depends on the room size, availability of participants and the topic. Maximum of eight or so groups is advisable.



The workshop facilitator makes it possible for audience members to participate actively:

- Participants might help set the agenda
- Participants have chances to apply new information to their teaching
- Participants can analyse problems or difficulties in order to figure out solutions
- Participants often share their experiences and ideas.

The facilitator guides and supports the learning, and create the ethos of collaboration and a supportive environment. The facilitator does not need to have expert knowledge on everything that is discussed during the workshop, but he/she would need some knowledge, some skills in facilitating ideas.



How do you prepare an interactive workshop?

Good and careful planning is key for successful interactive workshops. Interactive workshops require extra time and resources to plan and deliver because activities, templates, and materials need to be prepared in advance. It is also important to decide at the preparatory stage whether you will need help, for what aspect exactly and who you might ask.

Planning is important, but you will need to be flexible with the timing on the day, for instance, if an activity is completed early or it overruns.

1. Choose the participants

Deciding who you would like to attend is crucial. It is important for you to know who would benefit from learning about this topic. It is advisable to answer in advance to the following questions:

- Who should be coming?
- Why are they coming?
- Why these people and not others?
- Are they really the right participants in this workshop?

If you are not able to choose the participants yourself, you will still need to find out who they are and see how their perspective and/or background fits with the objective(s) of the workshop. It is always better to aim for diversity in experience, opinions, seniority, and interests because these people will bring different perspectives and points of view which in turn will spark the discussions.



2. Plan the agenda

Ensure the agenda balances different types of activities, such as individual, paired, and collective tasks. Start with a hands-on activity as soon as possible and keep electronic-based presentations to a minimum. Try to ensure a creative atmosphere throughout the workshop which sometimes takes a full day.

The phases of an interactive workshop are as follows:

- “opening” (generating ideas),
- “exploring” (experimenting with the ideas, finding patterns), and
- “closing” (evaluating, deciding, and listing actions).



To conclude each planned activity, ensure you schedule enough time for presenting back to the group and discussing outcomes of each activity.

3. Prepare and/or analyse your materials/information

For each of the planned activities you should be prepared in advance by answering to the following questions:

- What will I do?
- What will the participants be doing?
- What learning does this activity allow to happen?
- What objectives am I addressing?
- Is it boring?
- Is it creative?

- What resources do I need for this activity (e.g. flipchart, sticky notes, etc.)?



The techniques segment of the workshop usually works best if participants practice at least one of the techniques with each other.

4. Prepare practical techniques and tips

Participants always compliment workshops offering practical, hands-on ideas with understandable examples. It is important to choose your examples from different business fields and apply your techniques to different situations especially when your workshop includes participants with different background or at different stages of their entrepreneurial ideas.

A “workshop” by definition gives participants something they can use. The most useful and impressive workshops give participants various perspectives and recognise different needs and styles.



5. Use interactive and creative techniques

Role play

This can be a good way to let participants ‘experience’ an approach or to let them try out some ideas in a safe environment. It is important to have the scenarios prepared, for example by printing them out on card beforehand.

Sharing feedback

Thinking carefully about how ideas and feedback will be shared is important in an interactive workshop. Asking groups to report or present their findings will mean that the others are simply listening, or even not listening at all. You can use the following techniques:

- Asking only two of the groups to present their findings. Do not say in advance which groups will report – this will keep all of the groups engaged. When the two groups present their findings, the other groups then have to add their own ideas, but they are not allowed to repeat what has already been said.
- Asking groups to report back in the style of a ‘Twitter feed’, e.g. one minute, five sentences, etc.
- Asking groups to identify one issue or aspect that they want to focus on in their group feedback.
- Groups write their ideas on a poster that is put on the walls.



Recording of ideas

Asking participants to record their ideas on posters and put these on the walls will help to keep the thinking process and ideas 'live' throughout the workshop. They can also take pictures of the posters to capture what has been shared.

Working in different size groups

Vary the size of the group, and the composition of the group, depending on the objective of the activity.

Parking questions

Questions from participants can distract you from staying focused on your objectives. One technique to deal with this is to ask participants to write down their questions on a card and put it in the 'question box' so that you can deal with it later, when it fits into your planning. Alternatively you can ask participants to 'park' their questions on a big sheet on the wall and answer them later.

Brainstorming or brainwriting

The aim of brainstorming is to quickly share as many ideas or opinions as possible by saying them out loud and having someone write these down. You can use a "creative silence" approach, where participants brainstorm ideas on sticky notes individually before sharing with the group. This can help generate ideas and ensure that everyone participates.

6. Prepare a handout

If your workshop involves the participants in determining problems, discovering solutions, and making decisions, they will be too busy and engaged to take lots of notes. Note your main points and describe useful techniques well enough for someone to make sense of them sometime in the future. Decide ahead of time whether you will distribute your handout during your workshop or at the end. Each technique has different advantages.



How to conduct an interactive workshop?

- Consider logistics, facilities, and how to record outcomes
- Meet your audience

Come early, if possible, and introduce yourself to individuals in the audience. Both they and you will be more comfortable if you feel any personal connection.

- Set the mood at your workshop
- Announce the interactive nature of the workshop
- Turn audience members into workshop participants
- Incorporate creativity into your workshop plan
- Get the best from your participants
- Finish on time
- Ask for feedback from your facilitators and from your participants

References and useful links

Pavelin K, Pundir S, Cham JA (2014) Ten Simple Rules for Running Interactive Workshops. PloS Comput Biol 10(2): e1003485. doi:10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003485

http://faculty.virginia.edu/marva/Teaching%20Workshops/conduct_workshop.htm

Teacher Education Guidance Notes: Running an effective participatory interactive workshop [available on the following link:

https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/pluginfile.php/159529/mod_resource/content/4/TEGN_Workshop.pdf]

