

Creating a Safe Learning Environment: Tips for Presenters, Trainers and Teachers

- Set the tone and pace from the beginning by:
 - Levity (we take ourselves too seriously – even if we are “only here to get the CEUs”).
 - Laughter (divulging our own mistakes and passions tends to set a safe and comfortable learning environment).
 - Detailing clear goals and expectations (discuss what the workshop is NOT about, so everyone is on the same page).
 - Soliciting the articulation of anxieties the individuals/class may be entertaining (this confirms that we are all alike, and defenses fall).
- Lead the workshop with ground rules:
 - Trust the process (encourage individual and interactive participation/stretching for professional and personal growth).
 - Respect all participants and all attempts (some arrive jaded, some fragile).
 - Minimize the “war stories” and keep the participants in the present.
- Start the session with the establishment of group norms / workshop guidelines / ground rules. With the group, answer this question – what do you need from each other and me to make this a safe learning environment for you? To that end, identify the answers to: how will we “be” together today? How will we communicate with each other today? How will we deal with conflict when it arises? Once you have a list, confirm that everyone can live with these guidelines for the day and post where everyone can see them. Invite changes, modifications and additions throughout the day as things arise.
- Make the distinction between a “safe” and “comfortable” learning environment. Often the best learning occurs out of discomfort... the environment you want is a safe one to learn and grow, not necessarily a comfy one at all times.
- Treat your workshop participants as the customers they are. If you begin the process with a customer-oriented mindset, then you are more likely to think about their needs as participants rather than your needs as a presenter. If you concentrate on their needs, you are more likely to succeed.
- Name tags are great, however discerning amongst who is certified, non certified, etc does not always create a safe environment. If everyone introduces themselves, that's a good time to talk about our background.
- Validate each contribution made.
- Reinforce contributions by participants - if they say something that is (in your mind) incorrect, you can ask for other ideas, you can say "maybe.... AND..." or some other leading comment to the correct point. Be open to the possibility that they may be right and you may have old or incorrect information. You can hold people accountable for the information they contribute, it's source and accuracy without demeaning them.
- Be open to your participants.

- Be yourself, mistakes and all. If you can make mistakes in front of your class they can feel safe to make mistakes too. Share your mistakes.
- Respect and involve the audience.
- Acknowledge differences in style.
- Separate the work from the interpreter.
- Model ways to discuss the work descriptively.
- Validate their experiences. Don't put down their ITP, their backgrounds or what they think. Provide them with new ways of thinking while not forcing them to give up years of habits in one second.
- Don't discredit or crush people and their answers.
- Do not have a "hot seat" in the workshop.
- Decide who may make comments/critique of participants' "production." If we were not going to make any mistakes/miscues/choose-your-term, we would not be here. It is OKAY! Mistakes are the best instructional tool sometimes...Explain the concept of a non-example and how it can benefit everyone. Some training styles call for: A) Make a positive comment about the production; B) Make a critique comment about the production. Have specific areas of comment (in writing) related to the instructional objectives making clear we will not discuss or comment on any other production area.