

Sharing Your Creative Skills

There is always the opportunity when you have been pursuing a creative interest for a period of time, you may be asked if you could share your skills with other people who would like to be able to enjoy it too. Most commonly, this will take the form of a single session or a series of sessions/classes. You may also decide to run a session to create interest in forming a group around your creative activity that will involve sharing your skills in some manner.



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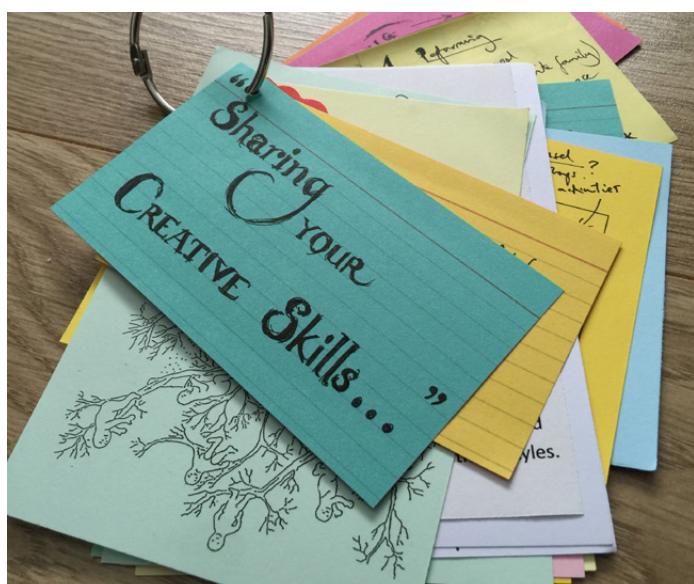
This Briefing should help you think about how you might approach fulfilling a request to share your creative skills or running a group or class on a longer term basis.

Be prepared!

Preparation is key – especially if this is the first time you are going to be sharing your creative skills.

If you can, find out about the group of people you will be sharing your creative skills with – likely ages (or age range), likely numbers, if they have any preferences for particular activities, what they have responded well to before. If it will be a completely ‘open to all’ – you may need to bring a variety of options to cater for different ages/level of abilities.

Consider the timings of your activity – things can go slower or faster than expected so try to have ‘stages’ you can stop at to have a satisfactory ending.



Try to check the location in advance and how you will get there along with any supplies you might be taking with you. It can be helpful to visit the venue to see what area/room you'll be in, the floor surface if you'll be teaching dancing, what they are happy with regarding things like glue, glitter if you are doing crafts, or

acoustics for singing/music. Will it be a separate room or in area with other activities and noise/distractions to deal with? Do you want it to have a very social feel eg in a cafe, or a more formal setting?

It is worth taking time to work out a ‘lesson or session plan’ and use it. You can decide how detailed it is depending on how much you feel you will need to have planned out in advance as well as allow for flexibility on delivering it all or bits of it. A plan is designed to give you:

- Confidence
- A list of materials/equipment to bring/provide - Don't assume people will all remember to bring any required items, bring spares.
- A record of what you did for when you repeat it/can take notes on what to improve/ change/ worked well
- A way to work out what you are going to do as the basics, the exercises to stretch people and how to deal with the levels expected of the group
- An opportunity to think about different ways you might cover each part of your topic – breaking it up into various sections with notes about your approach or points not to forget.
- Help around marketing the event & preparing the group for what they'll be doing.

Your plan may not end up covering every eventuality but if you have tried to account for the obvious things, you should be able to cope with most unexpected occurrences.

You may want to consider the following depending on the group you will be expecting to be sharing your creative skills with: Pace is not always easy to gauge – especially if it is the first time you are running a learning session. A good strategy is to plan to teach a basic version and then show ways people can experiment with the basics within or following your time with them. Remember to take a note of what worked well.

Adults often have other commitments which make it difficult to find time to do things between sessions. If it is a regular session, they may view it as ‘their time’ away from other pressures in life. If

you need them to do some activity between sessions think about how they can fit things in eg suggest they go over their lines on the bus journey or car journey; practice dance steps at the bus stop or waiting to cross at lights; think about what craft technique they want to cover next.

Children often pick up things quickly, but don't assume it will happen at the same rate for all. Some may have previous experience to draw on, others won't and some find it easier to pick up new ideas than others.

You may be aware that there are different 'learning styles' covering:

- Hearing
- Seeing
- Doing

Many people experience good learning when 'doing' things and fortunately most creative activity is based on 'doing'. Though to take account of the other ways humans take in information, it can work well to break up the session by teaching different content, for example you could talk a bit about the history of the dances you are teaching, or who wrote the song people are learning or the history of a particular quilt pattern.

Also think about how you want to come across as a tutor and how you would like to be taught if you were the student. It is fine to give critical feedback but consider how you can use positive reinforcement rather than negative comments to help the person understand what is working and what may not.

Finally once you have done your planning and still need a little more confidence, maybe ask someone you trust from your group or friends to come with you to be an extra pair of hands and/or support in case you need it.

Example of a lesson plan: This is a very basic example of a lesson/session plan we suggest you to prepare - especially if it's your first time sharing your creative skills.

Crafty Cross Stitch Session – Everytown Gala Day Location: The New Hall, High Street Time: 2-4.30pm (half hour allowed each side for set up and clear up) Equipment for 8 participants: Needles Material (Aida bands) Threads on cards Charts (Basic Flower 'bookmark' design) Scissors Examples of previous work		
Task	Action	Notes
Set up 1.30-2pm	Check table is as booked and cover with tablecloth Lay out materials and equipment	Make sure there's 8 chairs
Teaching 2-4.30pm	Quick introduction about myself and my interest in cross-stitching. Show a few examples of what is possible including early and later work. Distribute needles, chart & material to each participant (8 in total allowed for). Demonstrate the basics of cross stitch using large canvas and needle so people can see from around the table Go through the process of separating out threads: 2 from 6 and then threading the needle Ask participants to hold the fold the material in half & then quarter to identify the middle to start the cross stitching. Show how to start with 'waste knot' technique and then how to do the stitches through following the chart. Then leave them to continue, going around the table talking through any individual query, including changing colours. If anyone finishes quickly, offer one of the other quick charts for a bookmark or put their name on the bookmark (show how to do this) if they want to. Ask people to finish off about 15 minutes before end of session to make sure they can stop at helpful point including if they want to finish it at home. Talk about how they can continue their interest if they would like and gauge interest in potentially creating a group longer term. Take names and contacts if they are happy to do so. Ask for any feedback if I was to run this session again or something similar.	Bring the sunflower, Seaside and Tractor pieces to show. Check everyone has got a chart before beginning to teach Check if people are right or left handed to make sure they are comfortable with which hand does the needle work NB: make sure second cross is always the same way. Take a note of comments
Clear up 4.30-5pm	Pick up any material, thread & needles left and pack away Say thanks to Anne (organiser) and give her any feedback.	Remember to take tablecloth!

Don't worry if things don't go completely perfectly the first time you try 'sharing your creative skills'.

Take the time to reflect afterwards to note what went well and what could have been better. Especially if there is the prospect you may do another session again, it will be useful to be able to have to hand what worked and you should keep the same, as well as what ideally can be changed. Also remember if you ask for feedback it may not all be pleasant to hear but treat it as a learning experience!

What next?

With your first session being successful there may be demand for future events – either one-offs or more regular ones and you may want to consider how you can continue to grow more confident and proficient in sharing your creative skills.

There are a number of methods you can use and you can use more than one at a time:

- Think of your own experience of teachers you have responded well to and how they imparted information.
- Observe how other people pass knowledge/teach/tutor and their results with different techniques. (Ideally reference these people as sources for any exercises of theirs you use, as appropriate).
- If you belong to a group - offer to tutor/mentor other members
- Find someone who is a good teacher and ask them to mentor you
- Attend formal training such as 'Train the trainers' courses. Such courses are offered by different organisations on a generic basis such as Workers' Education Association (WEA), adult education providers such as your local authority, voluntary sector infrastructure organisations, Further Education (FE) colleges. Similar training may be available specifically for your art or craft form through the relevant umbrella body or creative tuition based groups. You may also want to take a teaching certificate/degree if you want to improve your skills to a higher level.

If your sharing session becomes a more regular event, you will probably need to start thinking about how you or the group you are working with/are part of, attracts people to each session or term of classes.

Taking some time to consider what gets in people's way to taking part is a helpful exercise in working out what will attract people to the group as well as what you need to be doing as a person sharing your creative skills to not create barriers inadvertently.

Some of the main barriers are:

- Lack of information – where, when, who and what
- Fear / confidence
- Motivation
- Travel
- Cost
- Time of day
- Prioritising time
- Keeping it interesting and fun!

Once you've identified what might be proving a barrier to people taking part on a regular basis you can think of ways to solve the issue. See *Voluntary Arts Briefing 172: Breaking down barriers* for a way to work through this process and how you can take solutions forward.



Developing groups and session structures

Part of sharing your creative skills is often about creating a group or bringing a group together. Gill Thomas, who ran Sharing Your Creative Skills training sessions for Voluntary Arts, utilised Bruce Tuckman's *Lifecycle of a Group* (1963) model of group development and how it can apply to both the development of a creative group as well as an approach to structuring a single skill sharing session. You may recognise Tuckman's terms as they have been in use for a while.

1. Forming

Groups usually form in two ways - people come through and you work with what you've got or you go out looking/network to bring in people and their skills. This is similar to how you would populate a session.

Aims of a group or session could include:

- Providing healthy lifestyle options
- Confidence building
- Creating a 'product'
- Going through a process
- Creating cohesion Social (inclusion)
- Having fun!

Group

A group usually begins based on a need or opportunity. Tasks at this stage will involve actions such as bringing people together to decide on the aim of the group, deciding on a name, planning advertising its existence, modes of communication, establishing a budget, timescale – one-off or long-term, agree rules/organisation.

Session

This stage would usually be welcomes, introductions, name badges, cuppa/glass cake, possibly icebreakers (if appropriate), establishing ground rules

2. Storming

Group

This is when roles and personalities emerge in a group – not necessary in line with any official job titles. For example the leader, innovator, researcher, strategist, negotiator, harmoniser, Tea-maker, anchor, magician, bureaucrat – you probably will recognise people who are these personalities and have others in your group!

Session

You will be finding out people's approach to learning something new coupled with their prior knowledge and confidence. As a tutor, especially when teaching something longer term, it is helpful to understand how different people react and respond as these ways can be the way to help people understand the subject or process you are trying to impart to them.

3. Norming

Group

The sense of community and commitment is consolidating along with a responsibility for continuing the group, a regular programme, creating events, – though still looking for ways to change it about/shake it up, explore new skills such as getting in a guest speaker/tutor, developing benefits such as discounts, branded items and exclusive access to things such as a 'members only' area on the group website. People are more settled in their roles though need to be aware of complacency – invite feedback to 'take the temperature' with people.

Session

This is when people are starting to get into the subject or activity and are no longer so conscious about not knowing their fellow students as they are making friends and socialising. As a tutor you may need to check that people are still engaging and not feeling left out of getting your attention.



4. Performing

Group

In creative terms this is often the goal that was set to be achieved - from the monthly meeting with a guest speaker, or the annual theatre performance, a group exhibition, a publication, passing skills on through education work, a drop-in session or open day for new members – i.e. 'showing off'! This might also be a point where you report to funders and where keeping records from the beginning helps or publishing information online including social media.

Session

This is often the reason for the session - the item that is being made or lesson being learnt by the end of the time allotted. It could be anything from a crocheted granny square, to a dance, to a pot ready to be fired in the kiln, to learning about a period of local history and showing each other what has been achieved - the conclusion of the learning experience.

5. Adjourning

Group

This is the point to stand back, take stock, pause and reflect on your measures of success. Did you achieve your aims? What was the response to your performance, what feedback did you get? Did you keep within your budget? What would you change? Have you documented your activity and reported to funders? See how far we've come – say thanks, rest and celebrate! Then what's the next thing and plan the next stage.

Session

Generally similar to the group, though you may have more skills specific reflections such as will people like these sessions to continue? What would be the next topic or activity people would like to do/learn? If this is a new session, you as the tutor might like to get a bit of feedback about what worked for people and what might be good to change. Reflect what people have achieved even over the single session. For example, people have learnt three new dance steps, completed a patchwork quilt square or managed to make it though the wet weather!

You can measure success in various ways such as:

- Checking what were your aims – did you achieve them?
- Budget (on, over or within?)
- Responses/feedback

This is also possibly a stage you may need to review your group and/or session's aims to check that everyone agrees with the way forward. And then the cycle begins again!



Further Information

Useful contacts & websites

Find Courses: [Train the trainer courses](#)

City & Guilds [learning training](#) - covers UK and Republic of Ireland

[Workers Educational Association](#) (WEA) - covers England and Scotland

[Artsworld](#) - training courses across the UK

[NCVO](#) - Training for charities in England

[NICVA](#) - Training for charities in Northern Ireland

[The Wheel](#) - training for charities in Republic of Ireland

[SCVO](#) - Training for charities in Scotland

[WCVA](#) - Training for charities in Wales

Further reading

Bruce Tuckman (1965), *Developmental sequence in small groups* available in PDF on [OpenVCE website](#).

Voluntary Arts Briefings

Voluntary Arts Briefings provide guidance on a number of topics around running and marketing events such as:

Briefing 128: Events checklist - disability and access

Briefing 141: Finding a Venue

Briefing 67: Risk assessment for event organisers

See the [Voluntary Arts website](#) for a full list of available Briefings.

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