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## Activity: What Makes a Good Workshop?

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Students involved with Gay-Straight Alliances are often asked to lead workshops and presentations for their peers, for other GSA members, and for school staff. But what makes a good workshop? This activity can help a group of students (or anyone!) come up with a list of qualities that are often present in successful presentations.

**Materials needed:** Post-its (or small slips of paper & tape); a whiteboard/flipchart; pens

**Directions:** Pass out a few Post-it notes or slips of paper and a pen or other writing utensil to each participant. Explain that you're going to spend some time talking about the qualities of a good workshop or presentation. For example, you could say:

*“As GSA students, many of us have been to workshops or presentations before, either at school or at conferences we’ve attended. Even if you’ve never sat through a workshop, you’ve been in a classroom, and each day of class could be seen as a workshop. Today we’re going to spend some time talking about what makes a workshop successful.”*

Next, ask the participants to spend some time thinking about a workshop or class that they’ve attended that was **not** so good. Ask them to write down two or three things on separate slips of paper that made the workshop unsuccessful. Ask them to be specific. Rather than writing, “it was boring,” ask them to write **why** it was boring.

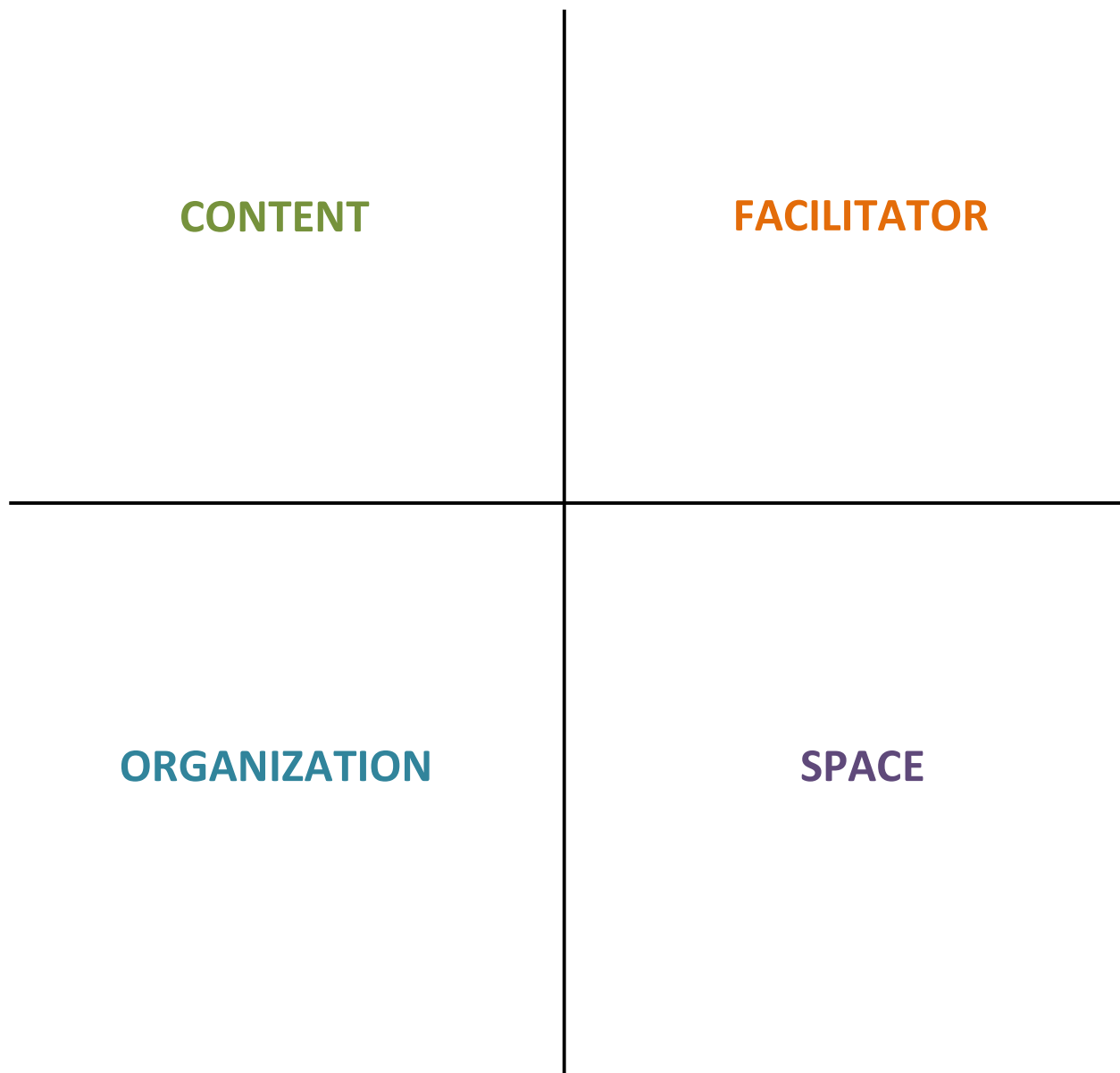
After the participants have had a chance to write their thoughts down, ask for each person to share just one of the things they wrote down. If needed, remind them that we don’t want to hear names of presenters or teachers; this is a conversation about the elements that make a workshop successful, not a chance to criticize certain individuals.

For example: *“The workshop I attended was all lecture, and that made it boring”*, rather than *“Mr. Smith is a boring presenter because all he does is lecture.”*

As participants are sharing, ask clarifying questions if necessary, or simply affirm what they're saying. When each person has had a chance to share, ask if folks have other qualities they'd like to share that didn't get mentioned. Feel free to add your own.

Now, ask the participants to set the slips of paper aside that list the qualities of a not-so good workshop. Explain that now we're going to focus on what **does** make a workshop or presentation successful. Ask the participants to do what they did before, but this time think of a class or presentation that they thought was really great, and write down on the slips of paper what made that presentation so great. Again, be specific.

While they are writing, draw the following diagram on the whiteboard or flipchart:



When the participants have finished writing, go around the group once again and ask folks to share what made the workshop they had in mind so good. Ask clarifying and follow-up questions as needed, and feel free to share your own examples.

Now, explain that all of their examples can most likely be placed into one of four categories: content, facilitator, organization, or space. Give quick definitions for each:

*Content* – This is **what** is presented in the workshop. The information, ideas, and actions that you learn and take away from the presentation.

*Facilitator* – This is **who** presented the workshop. How did they work to engage the participants, and what kind of atmosphere did they create with their presence.

*Organization* – This is the **how**: How well was the content researched and prepared, and how well did it fit within the given time frame? Did it flow? Was everything covered?

*Space* – This is the **where**: The space in which a workshop takes place can play a role in the success of the workshop. This could include how quiet the space is, whether it's big enough, and any technology or a/v issues that can arise.

Next, ask the group to take their slips of paper that have qualities of a **good** workshop and place them on the whiteboard or flipchart in the category that they feel best fits. (This is why it's good to use Post-its, or to have tape on hand.) Explain that some of the qualities they wrote down may feel like they fit in two categories, and that it's okay to place them on the lines between the categories.

Ask the group if a few volunteers would like to comment on why they placed one of their slips of paper where they did. If there are noticeably more slips of paper in one of the four categories than in the others, ask the group why they think that happened.

To close the activity, comment on how easy it was for the group to come up with this list of qualities. We all recognize a good workshop when we see one, but sometimes we forget to think about all of these pieces when we're preparing a workshop ourselves. Remind them that it takes practice to become a good facilitator, and that no one gets it perfect the first time. But by thinking about these different elements of a good workshop and by putting some thought into the style, content, and organization, we will be much more successful in our presentations.

# Sample Qualities of a Good Workshop

*As brainstormed by GSAFE's Youth Leadership Board*

## CONTENT:

- The facilitator knew what they were talking about and the content was well-researched
- The content was up-to-date and relevant
- The information being presented wasn't over our head and the facilitator didn't use a lot of jargon or acronyms we didn't know
- The content was based in fact, not opinion
- Information that is theoretical or not entirely understood was presented from multiple perspectives
- Information was shared about how the content could be applied in other areas
- Audience learned from the information presented and got to ask questions
- Action steps were given (i.e. audience was told how they could take this information and do something with it)

## ORGANIZATION:

- An agenda was presented at the beginning and the facilitator (mostly) stuck to it
- There wasn't too much or too little content for the time we had; agenda was realistic
- It was clear that the facilitator had spent time preparing and practicing
- Handouts and visual materials were well prepared and well organized
- There was time built into the agenda for the audience to ask questions
- The content flowed; it didn't jump all over the place or go off on unrelated tangents
- When there were co-facilitators, they worked well together and didn't step on one another's toes or talk over one another

## FACILITATOR:

- They were passionate and enthusiastic
- They used small-group activities and interacted with the audience to engage all of the participants; it was interactive
- They used humor and stories (in appropriate ways) to keep it light
- They were good at answering questions, but didn't make it up if they didn't know
- They spoke in a clear and loud voice that wasn't monotone; didn't speak too fast
- They were respectful towards the participants and knew how to handle side conversations or disruptive behavior
- They used language that was inclusive
- They were open to receiving feedback
- They asked for input from the participants
- They had a positive attitude

## SPACE:

- The room was the right size for the number of participants and wasn't too hot or cold
- The audio/visual equipment worked the way it was supposed to
- There wasn't outside noise or other external distractions
- The room was accessible to people of all abilities
- If the workshop or group requires it, the space was private and allowed for some level of confidentiality
- There were gender-inclusive bathrooms nearby or in the facility
- There were snacks!