

Care and Feeding of OLLI Audiences

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, University of Oregon



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

“Osher Lifelong Learning Institute,” or OLLI, as it is often called, is a noncredit program sponsored by Academic Extension division of the University of Oregon. Below are some pointers that will touch on the expectations of your audience. Audiences “expect” quite a bit from their presenters, but they also “give” in return.

What they give is enthusiasm. Responsiveness. Sometimes skepticism. Questions. Discussion. Just ask anyone who has given a presentation:

“An exemplary gathering of retired empiricism.”

“They ask better questions than any group I’ve ever addressed.”

“A convocation of the cognoscenti.”

“Be prepared—they’ll catch your mistakes.”

“They’re fun to tease—try making some outrageous, off-the-wall assertion and watch them tear into it.”

“If you can’t answer a question, chances are someone in the audience can.”

Audience characteristics: Age: mostly sixties through eighties. Sophisticated, savvy, intellectual. Lots of retired teachers and professors. Business and professional people. They have a “love of learning” in common. Articulate. Whatever your topic, you’re likely to find a few people well versed in it who may ask pointed questions. They read books, even buy them! They enjoy music, especially classical music, opera, jazz, and smooth oldies. They like to learn about and discuss current events and major issues of the day. They’re well traveled.

The learning quotient: Learning is the most important element in a presentation to an OLLI audience; no matter what the topic.

The entertainment factor. An OLLI presentation is like a good meal, starting with an appetizer, followed by a spicy salad, then on to the main course of solid intellectual fare that leads to epiphanous conclusion; maybe a tad of dessert at the end.

Audio-visual: OLLI-UO can provide a wide array of equipment, including carousel slide projectors with remote control, video, connections for PowerPoint presentations, microphones (wireless lapel and handheld), dry erase boards and overhead projection. Please indicate your needs. It’s a good idea to come in early—in some cases a couple of days early if your A-V needs are multifaceted and complex. Testing PowerPoint connections ahead of time is particularly useful. For further information, contact OLLI Program staff (contact information below).

The ideal presentation for OLLI audiences: Most presentations last two hours, generally starting at 1:30 and ending at 3:30 p.m. First hour for presentation, second for questions and discussion. Audiences expect a break fifty or sixty minutes into the session—about 2:30 p.m. (for coffee, restrooms: very important!). An “academic” approach works well with a central topical or philosophical theme buttressed with lots of anecdotal examples that support the theme. Folks love drama and audience participation. A presenter on opera, for example, brings live musicians to illustrate his points. A novelist talks about his book, but also addresses the topic the book covers: “hate crime.” A police “show of force” presentation is demonstrated by a woman officer, an expert on martial arts. She dramatically drops an “attacker” lunging at her with a rubber training “knife.” A lecture on Lane County’s “lost wagon train of 1853” is illustrated by a character’s reading from pioneer journals. In short, dramatize when possible.

The “Course Manager”. The person who contacted you usually serves as “Course Manager,” providing a liaison to work out details about the best way to present the material and what audio-visual equipment will be needed. You’ll be asked to provide contact information: mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address.

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Journalism and OLLI-UO Member**

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