



LIFE – Legal Information for Everyone | A PLE Toolbox

Resources for lawyers and paralegals delivering Public Legal Education in Ontario

Checklist:

STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING YOUR AUDIENCE

- ☐ **Think about the venue and how to best use the physical space** – The way a space is arranged can have an impact on the degree of audience engagement. A physical space that feels comfortable and safe can encourage dialogue. Consider alternative room configurations, like arranging the chairs in a circle for a smaller session. Also, consider where you should position yourself relative to the audience – standing behind a lectern can make a speaker seem formal and detached. Standing on the floor in front of the audience (as opposed to on a raised surface) and moving around the room while you speak will make you seem more engaged and lively. The audience will follow you, as well as what you are saying, as you move around the room.
- ☐ **Find out about the background of your audience** – Working with a community agency can be helpful to you in finding out more specific details about your prospective audience. During your first meeting with the agency contact, find out as much as you can about the anticipated audience and their background (age, culture, neighbourhood, etc.) Incorporating examples and anecdotes in the session that are relevant to your audience will help the audience relate to and understand the topic and it will also help the audience connect with you as the speaker.
- ☐ **Avoid lengthy introductions** – Instead, introduce yourself briefly to the audience and launch into your hook and the substantive material. Provide a more detailed biography in a hand-out or project it onto a screen.
- ☐ **Use plain language** – Review your presentation in advance and make a note of any legal or technical terms. Be prepared to define difficult terms at the beginning of the session, either verbally or with a glossary that can be handed out or projected onto a screen. Find helpful legal glossaries on the websites for the following organizations: Ontario Justice Education Network (www.ojen.ca), Legal Aid Ontario and the Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario. Also, find helpful tips for using plain language to create effective legal information in Community Legal Education Ontario's "Better Legal Information Handbook" at http://www.cleo.on.ca/sites/default/files/docs/cleo_betterlegalinfo.pdf

- ☐ **Check regularly for understanding** – Make a habit of stopping either every 10-15 minutes or after each concept is covered to ask the audience if they have any questions or to raise their hands to show understanding. Checking in with your audience will ensure that they stay engaged. If someone is confused on a key point you risk having them disengage from the rest of the presentation.
- ☐ **Incorporate interactive activities** – Early in the session, build in activities that let the audience interact with you or with each other. This will break the ice and encourage questions. Review the list of activity ideas in the sample session plan in Module 2.
- ☐ **Use visual aids** – Incorporate props (e.g. court robes, sample court forms), PowerPoint presentations, video and YouTube clips, a white board and newspaper articles to switch things up and to appeal specifically to visual learners.
- ☐ **Use technology** – Incorporate technology by showing YouTube or video clips, playing audio tracks, having the audience record their answers to your questions through Twitter or visiting relevant websites. This will add current components to your presentation and will vary your presentation style. You must ensure that your YouTube or video clips are part of the public domain. Otherwise, you will need to request approval from the copyright holder.
- ☐ **Share stories** – Use anecdotes (hypothetical situations or stories from your legal practice) to illustrate concepts. These stories should be typical examples of the area of law that illustrate how someone's problem will be resolved. Avoid 'war stories' or anecdotes that highlight lawyer interactions or have atypical facts. While these might be interesting to you, they can give a skewed perception of the law. Use stories to help the audience picture the type of legal conflict and the typical resolution. If you choose to use stories from your professional experience, make sure to keep the identities of all people involved anonymous and to properly protect your clients' confidentiality. The Law Society of Upper Canada's rules of conduct address the scope of public expressions and communications by lawyers and paralegals.
 - **For lawyers**, Rule 6.06(1) of the Rules of Professional Conduct states, "Provided that there is no infringement of the lawyer's obligations to the client, the profession, the courts, or the administration of justice, a lawyer may communicate information to the media and may make public appearances and statements." The commentary under this rule provides additional guidance about the way in which a lawyer should conduct himself/herself when making public appearances and communications, see <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/for-lawyers/resources-for-lawyers/>
 - **For paralegals**, Rule 6.01(4) states, "So long as there is no infringement of the paralegal's obligation to the client, the paralegal profession, the courts, or the administration of justice, a paralegal may communicate information to the media and may make public appearances and statements." Find the Paralegal Rules of Conduct here: <http://www.lsuc.on.ca/for-paralegals/resources-for-paralegals/>

- ☐ **Refer to current events** – Consider using examples from current events to explain legal concepts, especially as an alternative to referencing case law. News stories can be easier to understand and relate to and they will demonstrate how legal issues are relevant to people's lives.
- ☐ **Use scenarios** – www.ojen.ca has educational scenarios on most areas of law, available for free download.
- ☐ **Ask people in the audience what they think** – People appreciate being asked for their opinion. The social issues that underlie the law provide great fodder for engaging conversations about the different perspectives involved. Prefacing this type of conversation with comments about how the law is always evolving to address new needs can be a helpful way to encourage audience participation.