

How to Select OMOD Speakers for a Specific Conference



When selecting OMOD speakers for a specific conference, consider the following criteria:

1. Connection to the Conference Theme. Choose a speaker who has stories or life experiences related to the theme/topic of the conference and/or your specific presentation. Don't rule out a speaker or a story if it seems unrelated at first glance. Here are a few tips to keep in mind when determining if a story will work for a specific conference:

- Be open to creative interpretations or connections to the theme. For example, the conference may have a theme of "independence," but many things can fall under that category. Although each of the following stories is considerably different, they each still connect to the theme of independence:
 - A participant talks about how he convinced his parents to let him move into his own apartment.
 - Another participant talks about how she worked with her case manager to resolve an issue with her roommate in a group home.
 - A third participant still lives with her parents but discusses how she asserts herself at home and makes small strides everyday toward becoming more independent.
- A speaker's story can also be revised or reframed slightly to better address the theme and/or the attendees of the specific conference. Sometimes adding a sentence or a paragraph is all a story needs to fit for a conference.
- If a speaker's story flat out does not work, ask that speaker some open-ended questions to learn more about them. What is their living situation? Do they work? Do they go to school? What do they do for fun? You may uncover a whole new story that fits the conference theme perfectly. You don't know until you ask.

2. Readiness for Conference Level Presentations. Choose a speaker who is ready to bring their presentation to the next level. They don't need to be a polished speaker to deliver a good conference presentation, but there are important questions to consider:

- ***Are they reliable?*** The first six-week class is a good opportunity to assess this. Did they attend every class they said they would? Were they on time? If they were not punctual or dependable during the first six-week class, they will likely pose challenges in preparing for a conference presentation.
- ***Do they have a good work ethic?*** The first six-week class is a good opportunity to assess this as well. Were they able to complete the assignments in and outside of class? If they struggled with the class work, were they available to meet outside of class for extra assistance?
- ***Are they passionate about the theme of the conference, or do they enjoy telling their story?*** If the participant is interested in the topic and enjoys speaking, they will be more willing to devote the time and energy necessary to succeed.
- ***Are they able to memorize their presentation or present from minimal notes or an outline?*** Memorization is part of what distinguishes a professional speaker from an amateur. If your speaker is simply not able to memorize, provide an accommodation that would help your speaker achieve the same effect. Here are some accommodations you might try:
 - If you are presenting a panel of questions and answers with a moderator who is familiar with the speakers' answers ahead of time, they can prompt or ask helpful questions of the speakers to help them recall their answers.
 - If you are doing a showcase style lineup of several different speakers' stories and one of the speakers struggles with remembering their story, you may pair that speaker with another speaker who can "interview" them through their story, or you may split the lines between the two speakers.
 - Or you can also break a story into its main parts or take the first sentence of each part and arrange these prompts on notecards on a ring or on a one-page outline. Pictures and icons can also be used as prompts.
- ***Will they present alone or in a group?*** After completing a single six-week class, most OMOD speakers will not be ready to present a compelling hour-long conference session, but many will be able to engage an audience for a solid 5-10 minutes, possibly more. A panel or a series of stories by different presenters may be a dynamic alternative to a solo presentation. These group presentations also have the added benefit of lessening the stress on each individual presenter, especially if it's their first time presenting at a conference.

3. Availability and Accommodations. Last but most important, you need to confirm that the speaker you have chosen will be available for the dates and times of the conference, the amount of travel time to and from the conference required, and all prep sessions leading up to the conference. You may be able to set alternative meetings with speakers who are unable to attend one or two prep sessions, and a speaker may also be able to provide their own transportation to and from the conference. Beyond that, you must confirm each speaker's availability upfront and get a firm commitment. At this point, it is also essential to consider any accommodations your speakers will need and ensure you are able to provide these accommodations before officially inviting your speakers to participate.

- For example, if you have a limited budget for a conference presentation that includes travel out of town and an overnight stay and you want to bring a speaker that needs a caregiver to travel with her, that may alter your lodging and transportation arrangements, which may in turn limit how many other speakers you can bring to the conference.
- Similarly, if you select a deaf speaker to present at a conference, you must first allocate funding for a sign language interpreter – or ensure one will be provided during the conference – before inviting additional speakers to present at the conference.