



Session 1

Getting Started with Stories

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Prior to Session 1

- Conduct a workshop for the assistants and mentors to establish a protocol for providing effective coaching and note-taking/scribing assistance to the participants. Highlight the importance of individual needs being met through an ethic of accommodation. (Refer to OMOD Teaching Resources.)
- Ensure scribes, writing coaches, or audio recording devices are available for participants who require assistance.
- Ensure that the following equipment/supplies are available and in working condition:
 - White board or flip chart with suitable markers.
 - Sufficient number of handouts ready for distribution. (*Listen to Your World*)
 - Writing materials for participants who might not bring them
- **Read** Detailed Activity Instructions at the end of Session 1

Learning Objectives

- *Participants will explore the concepts of “Opening Minds, Opening Doors.”*
- *Participants will use free-writing techniques to develop story ideas.*

Session 1 Schedule

- **Introduction to the OMOD Process** (5-10 minutes)
- **Warm Up: Name Game** (10-15 minutes)
- **Class Rules** (15 minutes)
- **Activity: Informal Interview** (10-15 minutes)
- **Introduction to “Opening Minds, Opening Doors”** (20-25 minutes)
- ***Free-Writing* Exercise** (15-20 minutes)
- **Break** (15 minutes)
- **Read to Your Peers: *Free Writing*** (30-45 minutes)
- **Discussion** (10 minutes)
- **Encouraging Writing In and Out of Class** (5 minutes)
- **Participant Homework Assignment** (5 minutes)

Session 1

Workshop Activities

Introduction to OMOD

(5 minutes)

Explain to the participants that during the six-week workshop, they will be expected and supported to:

- write and revise a single autobiographical story
- incorporate simple public speaking skills and microphone techniques to prepare a memorable presentation (ranging from 4-6 minutes in length)
- participate in the OMOD Showcase (public performance) for a small showcase of friends, family, peers, and program staff at the end of the workshop.

Warm Up

(10-15 minutes)

Name Game: Each person in the room chooses an adjective that best describes him or herself as a person, an adjective that begins with the first letter of his/her first name. As the game progresses around the room, the new participants are asked to remember and recite the other participants' names before or after they state their own name.

Whenever a participant has difficulty remembering, encourage others to help so that the exercise is playful and engaging.

- Review everyone's name at the end of the activity by asking for group members to try to name everyone.

Class Rules

(15 minutes)

(flipchart activity)

Initiate a group discussion to establish class rules. Explain that we are all going to be sharing personal information and getting to know one another and it is good to have some guidelines about how to talk with each other and respond to other people's stories. Give examples if necessary, to encourage discussion. Write down their rules on the flipchart.

Examples can include:

- Respect other's opinions
- Pay attention when someone is telling their story
- Have fun.

Activity: Informal Interview*(10-15 minutes)*

Because participants will be working closely, sharing personal stories and offering each other constructive feedback on their stories and presentations, it is important that they grow comfortable and get to know each other. This exercise asks each participant to interview a peer and learn three things about that person and share that information with the group.

Introduction to Opening Minds, Opening Doors*(20 minutes)**(flip chart or chalkboard activity)*

Explore the meaning of the phrases, “open minds,” “open doors,” “closed minds,” and “closed doors.” Engage the group in a discussion about what those terms mean to the participants, then lead the group to identify specific “doors” that have been opened, or closed, to them. Encourage participants to brainstorm words and phrases for each of these phrases and record their input on a white board or flip chart. Use this activity to explain the goals of the workshop so that each person understands the meaning and significance of the metaphor as well as the structure and “end product” of the workshop process.

Free-Writing Exercise*(15 minutes)*

Invite participants to “free-write” for 15 minutes using the words they generated in their previous activity. This could include, but not be limited to, experiences of “open doors,” or “being left out,” or “surprising moments of success,” etc. Participants can use any method available for producing a story (written, dictated, scribe, etc.) These free-writes may serve as the foundation for Showcase stories.

* For participants needing scribes, coaches, or audio recording devices, establish quiet writing stations if possible so that each participant can comfortably dictate without distracting others.

**Be sure to have a method to collect all of the writings at the end of each class, as you will need to be familiar with them in order to select, revise and edit their final stories.

Break*(15 minutes)***Read to Your Peers: Free-Writing***(30-45 minutes)*

Invite the participants to share their free-writes with the class.

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Discussion*(10 minutes)*

Lead a discussion of participants' feelings about speaking in front of people. Conclude the discussion by inviting the group to brainstorm some things that people can do to make themselves feel more confident about speaking in front of a group.

Encouraging Writing in and out of class*(5 minutes)*

- ✓ Review how writing personal stories can “open doors.”
- ✓ Encourage each participant to complete the assigned writing homework every week and share in class.
- ✓ Ask the participants how to best accommodate their needs to make these assignments accessible and successful.

Participant Homework:*(5 minutes)*

Distribute the *Listen to Your World* handout and instruct the participants to listen and make a list of all the night sounds they hear before going to bed and then write a paragraph or more about what fears or thoughts or images the sounds may have triggered. Allow at least 5 minutes before the end of class to read through the assignment instructions and answer any questions the participants may have.

FACILITATOR Homework

- ✓ ***Make sure that you have a copy of every written piece that each participant produces, including in-class and at-home writing.***
- ✓ Depending on your situation, you can keep either a paper or an electronic file of the writings. Some options for capturing text from writers: use a USB to transfer stories from tablets or laptops, make Xerox copies of hand-written work, encourage email exchanges of written work as possible, arranging for a scribe to transcribe from speech to text for homework, etc.

Session 1

Detailed Activity Instructions

Session 1: How to Conduct the **NAME GAME**

Here are the basic instructions for this activity:

1. Make sure all participants and volunteers are either seated or standing in a circle and facing each other.
2. Ask participants to think of an adjective that begins with the first letter of their first name and describes their personality.
3. As some participants may not know what an adjective is, ask the group if anyone can tell the group what an adjective is. If no participant offers a definition of “adjective,” then you will need to provide it, along with some examples of adjectives that correspond with your name.
 - a. *Example:* “An adjective is a word that describes. Here are some adjectives that I could use for my own name: Energetic Eric, Easy-going Eric, Earthy Eric, etc. But today I'm feeling more easy-going, so I'm going to call myself Easy-going Eric.”
 - b. Defining adjective is helpful to get the participants thinking about how they might describe themselves, but don't feel compelled to use a strict definition of adjective for this activity.

Example: A participant might have difficulty finding an adjective that describes her personality, but may be able to think of a favorite animal, place, or hobby with relative ease. If so, accept what they come up with. “Tabby Cat Cathy,” and “Football Fred” work fine. The goal of this activity is for participants to introduce themselves, share a little about who they are through the words they select to describe themselves, and start to remember each other's names.
4. The first person who provides their ‘adjective name’ shares it with the group. The second person repeats the first person’s name, then shares their own. The third person needs to repeat the adjective names of the first two participants, add his or her own, and so forth until everyone has provided an adjective name. If it’s difficult for anyone to remember the names of people who came before them, encourage others to help, so the exercise remains playful and engaging.
5. At the end of the exercise, ask if anyone can name everyone else. If nobody offers, try it yourself and then move on to the next activity.

NOTE: There is a lot to get done on the first day, so keep the activity moving forward as best as you can. Try not to spend more than 15 minutes on this activity.

Session 1: How to **Generate Class Rules**

Here are the basic instructions for this activity:

1. Everyone can remain seated in the same circle arrangement as the previous *Name Game* activity.
2. Explain to the participants that since they will each be writing and sharing personal stories that are sometimes emotional to share, it's important to set some ground rules so that everyone feels totally comfortable and safe to tell their stories in class.
3. Find a place on the wall to hang a flip chart or a blank space on a whiteboard to write on. Write "Our Rules" or "Class rules" at the top.
4. Ask the participants what some good rules would be for the class. Write what they say on the flipchart. If anything is not clear, ask the participant(s) for clarification. Be open to their suggestions.
5. If the participants cannot think of any rules, you can give a few examples to help them get started, but it's important to let the participants contribute as much as possible. This will encourage further participation in other activities and help the participants gain greater confidence and ownership in the class.

OMOD rules might include the following:

- a. Respect each other's opinions.
 - b. Pay attention when someone is telling their story.
 - c. Confidentiality. Don't share someone else's story outside of the class if you don't have their permission.
 - d. Have fun.
6. Review the list of rules and ask everyone to agree on them.

As the facilitator of this activity:

- You will be responsible for keeping the discussion to no more than 10 – 15 minutes.
- You will stay open to any suggested rule, asking for clarification if the contributor's meaning is not clear.
- Encourage people who may not feel comfortable contributing to the discussion by asking them a direct question that might put them at ease.
 - *Example:* "What do you think about this rule?" or "How could you follow this rule" or "What happens if any of us don't follow this rule?"
- Help generate rules if needed.
- Find a place to keep the rules in view during the entire OMOD workshop so that people can refer to them if needed.
- Refer to them yourself if/when you need to remind participants that they have agreed to specific rules of conduct.

NOTE: The rules can be useful for resolving any interpersonal or behavioral issues that may arise later in the class, so creating them is an important activity and should take at least 10-15 minutes.

Session 1: How to Conduct the Informal Interview Activity

Here are the basic instructions for this activity:

1. Ask each person to quickly find a partner (or turn to the person closest to them).
2. Tell them that they will be asking their partner 3 questions (chosen from the sample list of questions below).
3. Partner # 1 will have 3 minutes to ask the questions, write down the information
4. Then Partner #2 gets to ask the questions, also in 3 minutes.
5. When everyone is finished with the interview part, Partners introduce each other to the rest of the group using the information they discovered.
6. **Note:** If participants are confused how this works, demonstrate with a quick 2 question interview with a partner of your choice.

As the facilitator of this activity

- You will need to **make sure everyone has a partner**. If there aren't enough people, be a partner yourself and/or find a volunteer.
- You will be **responsible for time-keeping**: Tell participants when it's time to switch roles and when Partner # 2's time is up.
- **Checking to see that each pair understands the exercise**. Remind them that they need to write down the person's answer (or use whatever memory aid is needed) because they will need that information when it's their turn to introduce their partner to the group.

Note: You may need to find a third person to assist if one or both partners have limited skills for remembering the responses to the questions.

- **Provide or generate the interview questions**
 - *Your options here are:*
 - Suggest questions to the group
 - Ask them for suggestions, then write them on a chalk board or flip chart
 - *Or:* Make a flip chart before or during the session with a short list of questions to ask/choose from. Give participants a chance to add a question of their own. Decide as a group which 3 questions to use for the interview. Indicate that on the flip chart/chalk board.
 - Leave the completed chart up during the interview activity to provide written reminders for anyone who forgets the questions.

- **Note:** It's best if everyone answers the same questions, primarily because sometimes this information can become a group piece.

Sample interview questions:

- a. What's your name, and why are you in this Opening Minds Opening Doors workshop?
- b. What would you like people to know about you today? (What's interesting about you? What's unique about you?)
- c. What's the thing you're most proud about?
- d. What's the most important thing in your life?
- e. Have you done public speaking before? If so, how did you like doing that?

Session 1: Conducting the **Introduction to Opening Minds, Opening Doors** (Group Brainstorm)

Here are the basic instructions for this activity:

1. Place four flip charts on the wall or create four columns on a whiteboard or chalkboard. Each flip chart, or column, should have one of these four phrases written at the top:
 - a. Open Minds
 - b. Open Doors
 - c. Closed Minds
 - d. Closed Doors

2. Engage the group in a discussion about what those terms mean to the participants, then lead the group to identify specific “doors” that have been opened, or closed, to them.

Examples: Ramps to doorways, curb cuts, automatic door-openers “open the doors” to people who use wheelchairs; learning to speak in public can “open the door” to social interaction and getting to know people better; fear of difference or disability can “close doors” to education, social life, and employment

3. Then, beginning with "open minds," encourage the participants to think of words and phrases they associate with each of the four phrases above. Record their input on each corresponding chart. If the participants get stuck and cannot think of anything for a particular phrase, provide an example or two, as during the class rules activity, or ask a volunteer or assistant to chime in. Here are some frequent responses:
 - a. **Open Minds:** kind, compassionate, understanding, listen
 - b. **Open Doors:** opportunity, accessible, welcoming, travel
 - c. **Closed Minds:** ignorant, fearful, isolated, judgmental
 - d. **Closed Doors:** inaccessible, barriers, exclusion, rejection

As the facilitator of this activity:

- **You will be responsible for keeping the activity within its time limit.** Give each group about 10 minutes to complete their lists before rejoining the big class group and sharing.

- **You may need to vary the activity to suit the size and composition of your group.**
 - *If you have a large class group (10-12) of vocal participants, you may want to split the class into four smaller groups, each with its own facilitator, and assign one flipchart, or column, to each group.*
 - *Or, split the class into two smaller groups and assign each group two of the flip charts.*
 - *If you have a small class group (6-10), or a group that struggles with these concepts, it may be best to do this activity as a class.*

NOTE: The goal of this activity is to make sure each participant understands the meaning and the significance of the metaphor "Opening Minds, Opening Doors" and the role their own stories can have in opening the minds of their audience. Open minds can open doors to opportunities for greater inclusion and participation for people with varying abilities.

Session 1: Conducting Writing Exercise 1: *Free-Writing*

Here are the basic instructions for this activity:

1. Once you have completed the group brainstorm using the phrases “open minds,” “open doors,” “closed minds,” “closed doors,” you are now ready to facilitate the first writing exercise.
2. Participants can use any method available for producing a story (written, dictated, scribed, etc.).
3. Invite participants to “free-write” for 15-20 minutes using the words and phrases generated in the group brainstorming activity to prompt personal stories. Provide at least one or two of your own personal examples to help explain how to do this:
 - a. *Example 1:* If you choose the word “exclusion” from the list of “Closed Doors,” you may write a story about a time that you were excluded from an activity or a time that you felt left out of a group.
 - b. *Example 2:* If you choose “travel” from the list of “Open Doors,” you may write about an international trip you took and how that felt like a door opening in your life.
 - c. Most important is that participants write about events that actually happened to them and that this first round of free-writing sets a positive tone for continued generation of personal stories during the workshop.
4. For this first free-writing activity, and throughout the OMOD workshop, if any participant has difficulty responding to the writing prompt for that activity, offer this as an alternative: *“Write about a powerful memory.”* This open-ended invitation to write from memory frees participants to use already established personal or family “stories” as their way to complete the writing task, and these stories are often well suited for presentation during the OMOD Showcase.

As the facilitator of this activity:**Before assigning the prompt:**

- a. Ensure that all participants who will need scribes or assistive technology devices to write have those **accommodations available**.
 - For people who will need a scribe, create a list of potential writing partners, so every participant knows who they will be working with before they begin the assignment.
- b. **If you have extra quiet spaces or rooms available for participants to work in** during this exercise, make these available and assign these spaces to those who request them. These will be especially helpful for participants utilizing scribes or dictation.
- c. Be sure to have a method to **collect all of the writings at the end of each class**, as you will need to be familiar with them in order to select, revise, and edit the participants' final stories.

NOTE: Let the participants know that what they produce during this first free-writing may serve as the foundation for their showcase story but that they will write several more stories and will be able to choose the one they develop into a presentation. Make sure they understand that they will not be asked to share publicly anything they aren't 100% comfortable sharing outside of the class.

Session 1: How to Conduct “Read to Your Peers”

Here are the basic instructions for this activity:

1. Once participants have finished writing and are back in the classroom, encourage them to sit in a circle again to read their stories out loud to their peers.
2. Before the readings begin, reiterate that writing and sharing a personal story is a brave and often difficult thing to do and it's easier for each person to succeed if everyone else in the class supports them each step of the way.
3. Remind everyone to keep their feedback constructive and focus on the positive aspects of each presentation. Critique will come later in the writing process.
4. Ask if any participant would like to read their story first. If there are no volunteers, choose someone to read first and then proceed around the circle. People can stand if they want and are able to, but it's not required for the first day's informal reading.

As the facilitator of this activity:

- As for feedback on the first day, focus on the strengths of each piece and what each person does well during the reading.
- You may also want to read through the Class Rules established earlier in this first session so that all members of the group provide the most useful feedback possible.
- In response to each reading, offer feedback for each participant about what seems to be the most important part of their story and what parts of the story seem to have the most power (introducing the idea of “power punch”).
- You are responsible for keeping track of the time.
 - Depending on how many people are in the workshop, how much they write, and how efficiently they read out loud, the suggested 30-45 minutes allotted might need to be extended.

- If you notice that you are running out of time, ask each remaining participant to offer a shorter summary of what they wrote so that everyone can share.

NOTE: It is extremely important in the OMOD process that from day one each participant has the experience of sharing their story with the group.

Session 1

Participant Homework

Session 1
Participant Homework Assignment

Listen to Your World

STEP 1: Spend AT LEAST 15 minutes one night this week to LISTEN to the night sounds just before you go to bed. Listen for the sounds inside of your room, from the hall or the kitchen, and for outside sounds, such as a dog barking, car brakes squealing, the wind rattling the window, etc. LIST as many of these different noises as you can.

**** If "listening" doesn't work for you** (hard of hearing, Deaf/deaf, or difficulty identifying sounds, etc.) take 15 minutes to visually explore some part of your home or other favorite environment, looking for things you don't usually notice. Make a list of at least 5 things that are in the place you explored that don't usually get your attention.

**** If vision is not a reliable information source** for you, do this exercise using your hands to explore (tactile/touch) a space you live in. Run your hand across the table in the kitchen, or pick check out the material that covers the sofa. Make a list of at least 5 things you either have more information about, or noticed for the first time.

STEP 2: WRITE a paragraph or two about these sounds (or sights, or things you touched)—including what fears, joys or thoughts the sounds may have triggered. For example, the dog barking may have reminded you of your first pet, or a radio playing your favorite song may have reminded you of an old school friend.

This activity adapted from Real Stuff The Matters: An introduction to Journal Writing in Inclusive Settings, published by VSA arts, 2003, 2007.