Content design and methodology
of seminars, workshops and congresses

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The opinions expressed in this publication are not to be regarded as reflecting the policy of any government, of the Committee of Ministers or the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

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Foreword

Since its establishment in 1995 the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) has organised over 100 workshops and conferences. They form a very strong element in the operational instruments of the Centre. Gerard Westhoff and Alex Drougas, who were responsible for two very successful workshops held at the Centre in 1997 and 1999 have combined the results attained from these events into a practical handbook on the organisation of the content side of conferences, congresses, colloquies, workshops and seminars.

Both the workshops and the publication itself reflect a need perceived by the member states of the Centre with regard to the development of a methodology for content design for such events. Remarkably little literature is currently readily available, which is specifically related to the content area of the different organisational formats. The principles outlined in the handbook, although drawing upon experiences from the world of language teaching, can equally well be applied to a host of other areas. It is therefore intended that a wide public, either already involved in the content side of event organisation or those faced with the daunting task of organising a conference or workshop for the first time may benefit from the guidelines of the handbook.

Introduction

Conferences and workshops belong to the core business of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). They are the most prominent way of fulfilling its mission through collecting and disseminating knowledge and expertise. For the financial investment of the participating countries in the Partial Agreement, the quality of these workshops should be high in terms of efficiency, efficacy and impact. Although countless conferences and congresses are being organised all over the world every day, and though there is some literature available regarding logistic and organisational aspects, there is virtually nothing focussed specifically on what makes such events effective and efficient in terms of content and methodology. If the ECML wished to develop guidelines for workshop animators in its own programme in order to enhance the impact of their events, it had to develop the underlying theory by itself.

For this reason two workshops were organised on this theme. They were originally intended for future animators of ECML workshops but the target group soon expanded to include all those interested in seminars, such as Teachers' Associations, Teacher Training Bodies, Universities, etc. The intention was to present theory on conference methodology as far as it existed and to develop upon it. These workshops served aims at two levels. The first was at the "normal" level. The participants were expected to enhance their expertise in content design of seminars and congresses in general. The second aim was at the meta level. The ECML tried through these workshops, by means of research and development, to contribute to a theory of content design and dissemination.

Conferences and workshops are mainly perceived by their organisers as organisational phenomena. As a consequence their main concerns are logistic problems such as rooms for the meetings, hotels, getting attractive speakers, funding, etc.

That is not what this booklet is about. *What we have tried to do is to formulate principles about the effectiveness and appropriateness of organisational formats, such as round tables, workshops, presentations, etc. related to the purpose they should serve and to the conditions under which they are to be performed, such as number of participants, available facilities, etc. These 'purposes' will be defined in terms of targeted outcomes, as expected by presenters as well as by participants.*

In this view, conferences or workshops are first of all perceived as events in which processes of exchange and acquisition of information have to be arranged. In principle these processes obey the same laws as other settings, where the acquisition and exchange of information is the main objective, like teaching and learning in normal educational institutions, such as schools. These laws or guiding principles are mostly labelled as "*pedagogy*" or "*methodology*". *The aim of this Handbook can therefore be described as attempting to formulate a methodology of conference organisation.*

A number of experts were invited to the above two workshops. They worked in an interactive way contributing expertise, experience, emerging ideas and case studies to considerable input prepared by Professor Dr. Gerard Westhoff. This Handbook is the outcome of these two ECML workshops edited specifically for a wider readership not necessarily directly involved with the ECML.

In the first chapter we discuss general issues, such as definitions of roles and organisational frameworks, organisational and methodological principles, the organiser's heuristic and interpretation. In chapter two we define the aims, needs and interests of both presenters and participants and match them. Formats of specific events are described and defined in chapter three. In chapter four we take a closer look at these formats in terms of characteristics and constraints.

The outcomes of chapters two to four are combined in chapter five where we make an effort to match the presenters' aims to the appropriate formats, so as to have the maximum possibility of meeting the participants' interests needs and expectations. Chapter six deals with the issue of directing, steering and influencing your presenters. The final chapter is devoted to quality control.

Chapter 1:
General issues

1   Definition of roles and organisational frameworks

As there does not seem to be a generally shared international terminology, it appears important to make a clear distinction between larger, stand-alone organisational frameworks such as congresses, on the one hand, and smaller, more specific types of activities, (like "plenary presentation"), that are generally a part of much larger organisational frameworks, on the other. Furthermore, it was felt concepts such as convention, congress, colloquy and the like should be more clearly defined.

When looking for clear definitions confusion appeared to exist, even in dictionaries ("A congress is a conference in which..."). To avoid confusion it was decided by the experts who convened for the two ECML workshops, mentioned in the introduction, to agree on some definitions. At this point we will attempt a short overview of the most commonly accepted terms and their meaning. In this whole process three roles and six organisational frameworks can be distinguished.

1.1   Roles

The presenter, who, content-wise, is the central person in an event. He or she sets the issues, directs the content, often provides input in the form of information and has substantial influence on the format of and the working procedures during the event. He or she is often the person who submits a proposal, but can also be an invited presenter.

The participant, who attends this event. His or her role can vary broadly, from just being there and listening, to discussing and co-operating in order to work out something or to helping the presenter find a solution to presented problems.

The organiser, usually a committee, who often asks for proposals through a "call for papers", but also sometimes invites presenters for certain events and decides upon the format of the presentation or event.

1.2   Organisational frameworks

Convention. It is the largest of the events, aimed at large audiences of over two thousand people. It is often political in character and of divergent content. It lasts two or three days. Typical examples are the Democratic and Republican Conventions in the United States of America where the presidential candidates are selected or confirmed, party programmes are worked out in working committees, decisions are taken etc. There

are all sorts of meetings, ranging from small working groups to larger assemblies where provisional decisions are taken. In addition, there are festivities, parades and it all culminates in a General Assembly in which amendments are debated and where the eventual definitive decisions are taken.

Congress. It is a very large event, with between three hundred and fifty to two thousand people taking part, often scientific or professional in character with differentiated content and form. An example would be the annual congress of teachers of German in Slovakia. A congress would normally consist of some plenary and sub-plenary meetings and a considerable number of concurrent sessions on different topics, such as 'grammar in language teaching' or 'new directions in dealing with literature' or 'national curriculum guidelines'. There will also be an exhibition of schoolbooks, a cultural performance, lunch meetings and so on. It usually lasts two to four days. In actual fact, a congress is often a sort of grouping of more or less cohesive conferences that are tied together in one organisational framework.

Conference. This is a smaller organisational framework for approximately seventy-five participants, but still in the same league with Convention and Congress. The content of the conference is rather specific and its major aim is to provide an overview of the relevant field and discuss issues. An example would be a conference on teaching literature with an introductory plenary followed by a series of workshops and a summarising overview at the end. It usually lasts one - two days.

Seminar. Probably the most widely used "catch-all" term. It is usually a small framework for approximately twenty people. It is learner-oriented with the purpose of learning and practicing new things. The content is very specific, it is quite intensive and it normally lasts three to five days. The essential characteristic of a seminar is the fact that it is organised to enhance professionalism. The participants enrol in order to learn something. For that reason the size should not be too large. We have seminars that only last one afternoon or one day. They may as well last two weeks. The seminar may be concerned with new ways to teach literature, run a teachers' magazine, or integrate culture in language classes.

Workshop. This is a fairly small framework lasting three to six very intensive hours, in which the optimal effect is achieved when the number of participants is of a size that allows their productive co-operation as a group. A workshop is a small establishment or place where manufacturing takes place or handicrafts are made. In our case, too, the participants of a workshop work together to develop or construct something that often did not exist before. The difference with a seminar is that in a real workshop something new is being developed or produced, whereas a seminar is similar to teaching or training. An example for a workshop is a session in which the participants experiment with new techniques, like counselling or supervision. A workshop might consist of developing examples of interactive exercises for the language class in order to better understand such exercise frameworks. A workshop could be devoted to the development of a repertoire of techniques to promote language learning.

Colloquy. As indicated by the term, a colloquy is a high level serious discussion. It lasts one or two days and it is an event for seven to twenty people normally of high expertise.

As decisions are usually taken during the course of the colloquy, only people in key positions are invited and they all have an equal say in the discussions and decision-taking. Good examples of a colloquy are the 'expert meetings' in Graz. These are meetings of selected experts to contribute to the development of a given aspect of the ECML's programme of activities. Another example is an expert meeting on methodology of in-service training, in which educational researchers, headmasters, teacher educators, in-service trainers, members of the inspectorate and teachers share their knowledge and expertise in order to create a synergetic process of producing new knowledge regarding the issue. Colloquies are also very common among international professional federations, such as the FIPLV (Fédération Internationale des Professeurs de Langues Vivantes), where representatives of the national Associations meet mainly to discuss and decide on policy.

2 General organisational principles

Most conferences, congresses, seminars and the like form the organisational framework for a variety of single events. These single events constitute the "micro level". The framework can be characterised as the "meso level". Regarding this meso level, a series of principles can be formulated in order to create the optimal prerequisites and conditions for the micro level. Therefore, before discussing the actual decisions at the micro level of the single events, we will firstly discuss some of the main principles at the meso level. Some of these principles are important *before*, others *during* and some *after* the congress or conference.

2.1 Before:

- The timing should be considered with great care. For instance, do not plan national conferences during vacations of participants, or at times unfavourable for sponsors.

- Periods of, usually, extreme weather conditions inhibiting travel should be taken into consideration.

- Take sufficient time to set up a detailed schedule. It may sound paradoxical, but a detailed schedule is a prerequisite for flexibility in dealing and coping with necessary changes.

- Organise the monitoring of the preparation carefully, especially when the organising committee consists of members from different countries. If, for example, you are organising a European Congress for Teachers of German as a Foreign Language, make sure the organising committee is formed one to two years in advance. It is advisable that they should all be able to communicate via e-mail, have a first meeting where tasks will be assigned, deadlines will be set and next meetings will be arranged to assess and reorganise, if needed, the process of the preparation.

- Define issues to be disseminated beforehand. Do you want to specify the profile of your participants? Is your event open to all or only to experienced professionals? Do you want your participants to have done any homework beforehand? Do they need to be sent any literature before the event? Are they expected to contribute during the sessions? The answers to such questions will most probably affect the content of your conference.

2.2 During (general / organisational):

- Leave more time for small group work than for plenary meetings.
- Organise many possibilities for interaction between presenters and participants.
- Organise many social events and other possibilities to meet informally (breaks are very important and fruitful parts of conferences!).
- Leave the social events as optional.

2.3 Afterwards:

- Make sure that at the end of your conference or workshop materials are available, which can be used by the participants for their reports when they return home.
- Publish your materials / proceedings / reports quickly.
- Publish your evaluation data and conclusions quickly.

3 Methodological principles

Both presenters and participants will have interests, needs and expectations. Make sure that they are not conflicting regarding the content as well as the format of the activity. They should be clear to all the parties involved and visible to those who consider attending the event. Ensure that the formats of the events are appropriate to the interests, needs and expectations of both presenters and participants. Take the prerequisites of the chosen format into account regarding time, space, presenters' skills, etc.

4 Organiser's heuristic

Summing up, this leads to an organiser's "heuristic" in the form of a series of questions to be answered in order to acquire optimal balance between the objectives of the presenters and the wishes, needs and expectations of the participants. A heuristic is a

more or less systematic rule of thumb to aid and guide the process of searching, problem-solving or taking decisions in a more productive and efficient way.

The organiser's heuristic

1   What are the presenter's interests and aims and how do you find out?

2   Are there complementary needs and interests for participants?

3   If so, are you as the organiser willing to meet these needs and interests?

4   What would be appropriate formats to meet these needs and interests?

5   What are the characteristics and constraints of these formats?

6   What format best fits the situation, taking into account time and room available, expected number of participants, required equipment and the presenter's profile?

7   How do I direct presenters to choose or accept an appropriate format for their event?

8   How do I monitor the process?

9   How do I organise the evaluation?

5   Interpretation

Organisers of international meetings will often have to deal with translation and interpretation. If you decide that interpretation is necessary and your budget allows it, it might be advisable to let the team of interpreters be chosen / organised / recruited by a "consultant interpreter" you can rely on! One such that we are aware of is the Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence, which is present in seventy countries. Always discuss details and ask for a price to be quoted beforehand. The same principle applies for the technical equipment. Work with a good "consultant". Brähler Conference Technique, present in Europe, can be trusted. Interpretation is expensive.

Before starting to engage interpreters it is advisable to ask yourself whether the investment is really justified. If so, in order to be as economic as possible, it is worthwhile to establish precisely and systematically what must be understood by whom and to what degree of accuracy. It makes a large difference whether only your keynote speaker has to be translated or also the complete discussion with the audience after his or her speech.

Decide beforehand what the languages of your event will be. It makes a major difference whether you decide for two working languages or three. Each additional language will, roughly estimated, double the cost. Estimate carefully whether more languages will add enough to justify the costs. It helps immensely to brief the interpreters in advance. All

documents, such as texts, notes, slides and even reports from previous meetings are useful to them.

Make sure you have a clear contract drawn up. You can sign a master contract with the consultant to cover all the interpreters or with each interpreter individually.

A good consultant will try to serve your interests by recruiting locally, thus avoiding travelling and accommodation expenses. But obviously the larger your event, the more interpreters will have to be "imported", or the later they are recruited the fewer will still be locally "available". Keep in mind that for each language you want interpreted, two interpreters are needed.

Chapter 2:
Presenter's aims
and participants' interests, needs and expectations

A perfect starting point is knowing the participants' needs and interests. In most cases, though, this is not possible so we start from the supply side, the presenters, establishing their aims and subsequently estimating whether there will be a body of participants with corresponding interests, needs and expectations.

1   Presenter's aims

A presenter's aims can be categorised. This is of importance for several reasons. Among others a presenter's aim is not interesting as long as there is no corresponding set of participants' interests, needs and expectations. Categorising aims makes it easier to establish that there is such a corresponding set. Each category implies its own preferences for organisational formats. Knowing the category makes it easier to choose the format. Categorising makes it easier to help presenters make their aims clear. Below is an attempt at categorising the presenter's most common aims, interests and even needs with some clarifying examples. Benoît Cliquet further clarifies the presenter's aims in the form of cartoons.

Disseminating ideas, results and products. The student evaluation procedure is changing in a country or Educational Area and the presenter wants to inform the teachers concerned. On a different occasion the presenter wants to talk about the results of a two-year trial implementation of a new testing system. Another example could be a team of experts who were commissioned by an Educational Authority to write a textbook and they want to present it to the teachers of the schools where it will be introduced.

Receiving feedback, having ideas examined critically. Let us take the case of the above-mentioned team of textbook writers. Their textbook has been designed and a first draft can be presented. The authors would like to have as much feedback as possible before they have it printed, in order to determine whether it needs to be altered, improved, expanded into a series of textbooks or scraped from the surface of the earth altogether! The presenters, in this case the writers, need this conference to get the right information from the teachers who will be working with the book in their classes.	
Gathering, generating ideas. The presenter has a problem and wants the participants to help him/her solve it. A new concept for foreign language curricula is introduced in secondary education' called "partial competences", i.e. learning and teaching of separate skills, such as, *reading and listening* only, without paying explicit attention to the other skills. The presenter wants to use the conference to get ideas about how the teaching of these partial competences could be implemented. He or she wants to see the practical ins and outs, the pros and cons of different models, etc.	

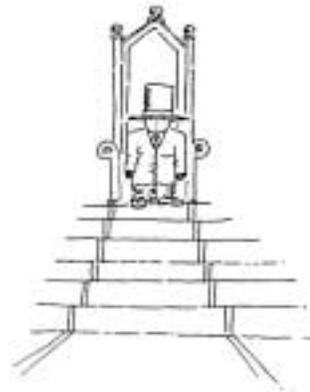|	
Demonstration of how certain didactic insights can be implemented in concrete teaching material. A presenter wants to show that tasks to elicit output production by students are not only necessary, but should also be attractive and involve as many pupils simultaneously as possible. He or she wants to make clear that these tasks should elicit realistic and functional utterances and wishes to show that songs and games not only can function as fillers or 'monotony killers' but are, seen from insights in language acquisition, very valid and powerful learning tasks in this context.	
Helping participants improve their skills. The presenter wants to train a group of teachers, for example, in how to organise pair and group work in their classes. We have numerous examples of workshops where Total Physical Response (TPR) experts wanted to train participants in non-verbal communication skills.	

Finding partners for projects. The Metropolitan Manchester University had a good idea for a Leonardo European Union Project called "Empowerment Through Life Skills." A prerequisite to getting EU funding was to have as many partners from other European Union member states as possible. In order to find them they organised a meeting.

Being considered important. In some Annual National Congresses of Teachers Associations the Minister of Education is invited to address the participants. The aim of the Minister in such cases is mainly to improve his/her image. He/she usually puts in a brief appearance, congratulates the organisers, wishes for a successful Congress, gets applauded and leaves.

Entertaining. There are entertaining and witty speakers who love to please and are happy when their audiences leave the room with a smile on their face. They mostly want to be remembered for their "fun" session rather than for the topic of the session.	

Sightseeing / having fun / change from home. This might not be the main aim of most presenters, but it can certainly play a background role.	

Commercial interest / selling things. Overtly and totally accepted in the form of publishers' fairs with straightforward commercial book presentations. Frequently a promotional textbook presentation is disguised as a professional workshop.	
Imposing on participants, campaigning (dogmatic). Gurus or would-be gurus, who are on a mission to win converts to their gospel-like method or approach.	

Personal reassurance (do I still count?). In many scientific conferences the fact that a paper is accepted and if so, what "rating" the paper gets in the form of the attached format, 30 minutes in a room for 200 participants or a poster at the poster market, is a form of getting one's status assessed. Submitting a paper is often in fact also submitting one's work to peer review.

Gathering credits for one's career. This aim is a strong variety of the previous category. Having been invited for a plenary at a large conference is an important influential feature for the Curriculum Vitae of someone who wants to improve his or her position in the academic "labour" market. In some cases presentations along with publishing (publish or perish?) are even considered a 'sine qua non' for career advancement.

2   Participants' interests, needs and expectations

Seminars and similar events are not organised in order to fulfill the presenters' aims. On the contrary, the rationale behind most of these events is to meet the participants' interests, needs and expectations. Very often it is not possible to know these beforehand with certainty so they have to be estimated. This leads us to three questions an organiser will have to answer. First, is there, theoretically speaking, a corresponding set of participants' interests, needs and expectations to the known aims of the presenters? Second, to what extent do I estimate that this set is present among my target group? And third, am I willing and/or justified to consider aims and needs such as 'sightseeing' or 'commercial interest' and if so, to what extent?

In the following section we will try to formulate participants' interests, needs and expectations that can be considered as possible matches to the above mentioned presenters' aims. As we will see this is possible in all cases. The importance of making these participants' interests explicit lies in the rule of thumb that, in order to make an event successful, it is more important to choose a form according to the interests of the participants than to serve the aims of the presenters. Explicit awareness of these participants' needs makes it easier to choose and design the most appropriate working format.

Presenters' aim: Disseminating ideas, results and products
Corresponding participants' interests: Participants may be interested in being brought up to date. They are interested in new information and ideas, outcomes of experiments, new insights or even in getting reassurance that they are on the right track. They want to learn something by being taught.

Presenters' aim: Receiving feedback, having ideas examined critically
Corresponding participants' interests: Participants may be interested in being taken seriously as discussion partners, peers, colleagues or even as an authority. Being asked for your opinion, judgment, or feedback makes you feel important. It creates the opportunity to show your expertise, ideas and creativity. But also, in itself, it can be very rewarding to participate in a process of mutual development and critical assessment of ideas, expectations and experiences. It emphasises the active, productive aspect of being a participant.

Presenters' aim: Gathering, generating ideas
Corresponding participants' interests: The participants' interests, here, are similar to the previous ones but there are some differences. In this case the collaborative aspect of creating something together with a group, to solve a problem in a collaborative way, to take part in an open process of brainstorming, receives more emphasis. The chance that a participant opts for participation, because he or she wants to learn rather than to teach is greater than in the previous one.

Presenters' aim: Demonstration of how certain didactic insights can be implemented in concrete teaching material
Corresponding participants' interests: Some participants may be more interested in practical applications than in their theoretical backgrounds, let alone in theories whose practical implications cannot yet even be estimated. They do not want to be bored with justifications; they want convincing demonstrations and the recipe to reproduce the trick by themselves!

Presenters' aim: Helping participants improve their skills
Corresponding participants' interests: This presenters' aim meets the needs of participants who prefer learning by doing, especially with regard to practical skills. They like training sessions and do not hesitate to expose their weaknesses and problems and are looking for solutions. This event in principle involves practising actively with colleagues.

Presenters' aim: Finding partners for projects
Corresponding participants' interests: Participants may be looking for some activity or kind of project, possibly together with others, but do not have any idea of exactly what or how. They may want to find partners who have ideas about content and implementation but are in need of support, help or co-operation, because they cannot execute their ideas on their own. This type of participant prefers to support or to contribute instead of to initiate.

Presenters' aim: Being considered important
Corresponding participants' interests: This participants' interest is probably more frequent than it may seem at first sight. Many people are interested in meeting celebrities, in seeing their idol's live performance, or having been in an event together with a person one normally only reads about and whom you can mention at home to make a great impression.

Presenters' aim: Entertaining
Corresponding participants' interests: People want to be entertained. Maybe some participants even hope to discover entertainment techniques to incorporate in their own teaching, lectures or speeches.

Presenters' aim: Sightseeing / having fun / change from home
Corresponding participants' interests: A perfect match for seminar-goers whose main interest is sightseeing, having fun and getting away. However, most participants will have this interest to a certain degree. We are human beings, after all. Although this should not be the main "course", it might be useful not to be rigid and meet this need, too, to a certain level.

Presenters' aim: Commercial interest – selling things
Corresponding participants' interests: It is extremely useful to people who want to buy things or need to be informed about what is on the market.

Presenters' aim: Imposing on participants, campaigning (dogmatic)
Corresponding participants' interests: Two different groups of people can be interested in such events. Those who are looking for guidance and certainty and those who want to challenge, criticise, oppose and point out negative aspects.

Presenters' aim: Personal reassurance (do I still count?)
Corresponding participants' interests: Assessing other people is a beloved game among human beings, especially among teachers, perhaps. In principle it is nice to help others to find out what their ideas are worth. However, events, aiming at such wishes might attract people who like to feel powerful in a presenter's anticipated weakness. That is the risky aspect of this match. Organisers should be aware of that and protect speakers from being harassed.

Presenters' aim: Gathering credits for one's career
Corresponding participants' interests: The most obvious interest on the part of the participants in this case would be their wish to support the presenter. Another sort of audience that could be attracted by such presenters are those who like to keep track of developments in the academic world.

Chapter 3:
Formats for specific events (The micro level)

A great number of sessions in conferences, etc., have the same format. We very often see varieties of a presentation which, roughly speaking, takes up 75% of the time, and leaves 25% of the time for some form of discussion between presenter and audience. However, there are many more possibilities. You choose other forms not only to make the event more attractive and varied, thus avoiding boredom, but mainly to have a greater impact and retention effect. Moreover, not every format is as appropriate to every set of complementary aims and needs. For example, a plenary session would be totally inappropriate when the aim is to help participants improve their skills and a workshop is a poor choice of format for disseminating ideas, results and products. Below are a number of successfully used formats.

Plenary lecture

The presenter speaks usually to a large audience, the audience listens and sometimes there is a possibility of a short question and answer session at the end of the presentation. Already, due to the practical consequences of the size of the audience, the emphasis is on the speaker and on presentation techniques, like PowerPoint, or transparencies for an overhead projector. The character of the communication is basically one-way.

Presentation with discussion

The presenter speaks usually to a not too large audience. The size of the audience should permit a real discussion. A substantial part of the allotted time is spent on the presentation and the rest is used for discussion and exchanging of ideas. Skilled chairing is more important than in a plenary.

Symposium

This is a coherent sequence of presentations. Often the members are convened by a single member or group of colleagues who work together more or less closely. The aim is usually presentation of a topic they have all worked on, or announcement of research findings. Often, each member presents a part or an aspect of the whole, most probably from a different point of view. Usually, each member of the symposium is allocated a relatively short time (10-20 minutes) to present his or her part of the work. There can be more or less time for discussions between presenters and between presenters and participants. The term, as described in our definition, has become rather usual at scientific congresses. Originally the term 'symposium' referred to a rather small conference in which experts or scholars discuss a certain problem on the basis of mutual

equality. In order to avoid confusion, the term '**expert symposium**' can be used for the latter.

Panel discussion

A panel discussion can be organised for a rather large audience. The members of the panel are usually experts in their field. They discuss a problem, dilemma or conflicting point of view. There is a large amount of interaction among the panel members. There may be time for questions from the participants.

Video presentation

The presenter starts with a short introduction/explanation of the video. There is receptive activity on the part of the participants and an opportunity to comment, ask questions and exchange ideas.

Show and tell

A fairly informal, low profile meeting in which participants are offered space and time to invite other participants and show and explain something to them, to discuss a subject or a plan with them, to work out an idea, etc. Announcement is possible during the conference, in the conference newspaper, on a bulletin board, (electronic) notice board, etc.

Poster market

Presentation of ideas or materials in a "market". During "market hours" one can talk to the "market vendor". In a sizeable room a space of about 2.5 m is allocated to each presenter, plus a small table and chair. The presenters put their posters on the wall. The posters give a schematic overview and / or keywords, illustrations, theses, etc., which summarise(s) the presenters' contributions.

The table may be used to display further materials, such as applied teaching materials, tests, products of their projects, a comprehensive paper or a scientific report. In this manner a kind of market forms. The posters remain on display for a longer period of time, which is determined by the organising committee. Visitors move along the "stalls" and may discuss the various exhibits with the presenters. The presenters need not be there all the time; therefore it is important that the poster offers a clear picture of the contribution. Furthermore there should be a timetable next to each poster, which shows exactly when the contributor is present and can be approached for discussion, exchange of ideas, explanations.

The presenters make their own poster, in a maximum size of about 100 to 150 cm and a minimum size of 60 x 90 cm, in "flip-chart" format. The letters should measure at least 0.6 cm, font 36. Every detail on the poster should be clearly visible from a distance of 2 m. It is important that a poster draws attention and stimulates discussion. The number of visitors who wish to discuss a poster is an indicator of its success.

Basically, any subject is suitable. More specifically subjects that are interesting, anyway, but most probably only for a small, specific and most of all unpredictable group of people. They are also very suitable for "smaller" subjects or theses, ideas, experiences, dreams one would like to discuss or share with colleagues. A successful teaching project, a new way of testing skills, a very successful literature class, ideas to further a more fruitful international students' exchange, a new way of learning vocabulary, results of a small practical classroom experiment, research and development, etc. Plans, drafts or intentions, which have not yet been fully completed, also constitute useful subjects.

A round table discussion

All the participants have an equal say in the discussion, which starts with a very short introductory statement or presentation of a problem. It is not to be confused with the symposium or the panel discussion. In the round table everyone present has the possibility of equal input.

Workshop

The word "workshop" summarises a form, which presupposes substantial activity on the part of the participant. A workshop can be held by two participants or by small groups. Another possibility is group discussion. An essential characteristic of a workshop is that it is a training session or that the activity of the participants consists of constructing or developing something that did not exist before. This something can be a material product like a set of new exercises for use in the classroom. The product can also consist of new, elaborated ideas, principles, concepts and the like. A workshop is called a workshop because something is being produced in it. Working together in a collaborative way is difficult in large groups. So effective workshops are of a size that allows productive co-operation of the participants as a group.

Plenary stage tribune

On the stage is a small tribune on which VIPs, celebrities and important bodies, such as executive committees, are seated with the most important individuals in the first row. They are presented to the audience personally or as a group. The important VIPs are given a few minutes for a welcoming address or poignant statement.

Theme-related excursion

For example when you take a group of participants, interested in setting up a Teacher Training Centre, to a well established existing one to have a first-hand experience on how it works.

Exhibition

The best-known examples are the exhibitions of learning materials by publishers, present at most congresses. But it may also be the showing of the products of a learner contest, in order to demonstrate the possibilities of such a contest as a learning activity.

Hands-on computer work

Either teaching computing skills or demonstrating computer assisted language learning. It is essential that every participant has access to a computer on which he or she can practice what is taught or demonstrated.

Informal thematic meeting with colleagues

Very open sessions in a café-like setting. The issue is the only thing that is settled beforehand. Sometimes there is a person to introduce some basic ins and outs. Furthermore, the discussions take place round small tables and everybody is free to contribute what, when and for as long as he or she wishes or to change tables as he or she likes, and to take a cup of coffee or a beer as he or she wants. It is very informal. The only rule is that everyone present is interested in the issue and is willing to participate in chat-like discussions. There is no agenda. There are no proceedings. It is like going to a chess café if you feel like discussing chess.
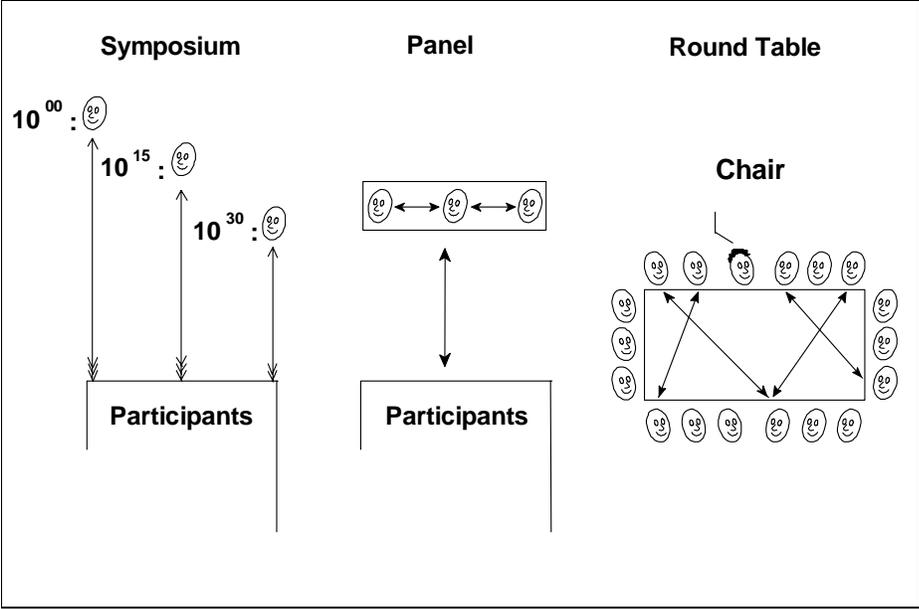
Official lunch or dinner meeting

Often medium- to large-sized gatherings. Mostly invitational or only accessible with a ticket purchased in advance. Besides the food, speeches by important people belong to what is being served. They are a good opportunity to announce who has been given an award.

Debate

A setting in which two or more representatives of conflicting sides or issues defend their views in front of an audience.

Below are some illustrations to further help clarify the above formats of specific events.

Symposium　　　　**Panel**　　　　**Round Table**

10^{00} :

10^{15} :

10^{30} :

Chair

Participants　　　　Participants

Chapter 4:
Characteristics and constraints of formats

It is clear that not every format is equally appropriate to every complementary pair of presenters' and participants' interests. A plenary speech, for example, is not very useful when the aim is skill improvement. On the other hand there is often more than one appropriate format for a single complementary pair of interests. In this case a rational choice can be made by looking at the context in which the event has to take place. A presenter's interest of being considered important, for instance, can be covered in a 45-minute plenary, but also almost as effectively in a plenary stage tribune or at an official lunch. What the best choice is could depend on the time and room available at your conference. To make this type of choice easier it is useful to look at the practical and logistical characteristics of the formats described earlier. Each format has its own profile in terms of characteristics and constraints. The parameters of these profiles can be described as:

Required or desirable participation ratio of both presenters and participants

How much time will be given to the speakers and how much to the participants? The higher the desirable degree of participation, the smaller the possible number of participants. Very few formats, i.e. 'round tables' and 'workshops' allow a high degree of participation.

Desirable and maximum length of time

How much time is needed or appropriate for the event? How much time is endurable? Some formats, such as plenary lectures can easily become boring if they last for more than 20 minutes. Others, like real workshops often require a minimum of several hours in order to achieve a substantial and satisfactory product.

Desirable and maximum number of participants

What is the ideal format for the number of participants we are expecting? What is the ideal number of participants for the type of presentation we are offering? For example, we can have a plenary session in a large auditorium for seven hundred people to listen to a distinguished speaker talk about the future of foreign languages. On the other hand 10-15 participants is a good number for a round table discussion on streaming. More participants than that will make it less probable that the aims of the event will be reached.

Desirable / appropriate information beforehand

In many cases time allocated to a workshop will be used much better and more efficiently when the participants have read the information, needed to be able to work, beforehand. The same is true when the presenter wants to gather ideas. Every minute used to expose the problem is a minute less available for the real purpose, which is brainstorming and discussing ideas. In these cases it is useful to consider the possibilities of traditional communication like 'snail-mail' or modern means like e-mail or a website, for sending this information to the participants concerned. It should be noted that a number of participants will not read the information that is sent to them beforehand when it is labelled as just information. They plan to look at it on their flight or train trip to the conference and then they are too tired or have interesting company and do not read it at all.

Having your participants read the information is stimulated by adding some sort of task to it. For instance, ask them to give an opinion, make an evaluation, express wishes or preferences and send their products or answers back to the organiser before a certain deadline. The effect can be enhanced by announcing that the answers will be made public in some way. In choosing a format it will help organisers to ask themselves whether such a task is realistic given the target group or the issue to be discussed.

Desirable / appropriate materials, handouts

Will the participants need handouts or any other materials to work with? Can the event take place without them? And if not, do you have the opportunity and the facilities to provide them?

Desirable / required equipment, such as beamer, OHP, video, flipchart, etc.

Success and functionality of a given format can to a substantial extent depend on the availability of certain equipment. Large plenary sessions, for example, usually have a much greater impact and can be endured longer if accompanied by a skillful PowerPoint slide show. But such a presentation can on the other hand become ridiculous by the use of a 1.5 by 1.5 meter screen in front of an audience of 1500. Do you have the appropriate equipment? Can you afford to rent it? Do you need a technician?

Probable / sought product

Sometimes success and functionality of a format is substantially increased by the fact that the aim is to produce something. This is not necessarily always teaching material or a publication. A simple form of desired product could also be the self-assessment participants' logbook. It is a kind of diary that the participants keep during the event, where they record the activities, their personal involvement, as well as some assessment. This could look take the format below.

time	general activity	form	own activity	personal 'learning profit'	assessment

The question is whether you will be able to technically and logistically facilitate the production. If not, the chosen format might be frustrating. In this case it could be wiser to choose an alternative.

Required skill of the presenter

Most formats require certain skills from a presenter. Not all formats require the same skills. There are very gifted authors who might be useful and strong contributors in a round table or good chairs in a workshop, but a real nuisance if they are reading out a 45-minute plenary lecture. What do you know about the presenter? Can he or she deliver what is promised? Should you steer the presenter into a format which he or she would feel more comfortable with?

Profile of the participant

What was said about the skills of presenters applies equally to participants. It always helps to know exactly who your participants are. It might be unwise to organise workshops or round tables for participants coming from a culture in which such formats are not associated with sophisticated learning and communicating with experts. These kind of participants are not only unaccustomed to such formats, but also lack the experience and skills needed to learn in a collaborative setting. It would also be very useful to clarify the required experiences, skills or expertise of the participant.

Chapter 5:
Appropriateness of formats for interests and needs

A comparison of characteristics and constraints of formats, combined with the available facilities on the one hand and sets of corresponding aims and needs on the other, enable us to make quite rational choices about the organisational formats to be adopted for our event. We have already matched presenters and participants, and listed the formats. What follows is an effort to match the presenters' aims to the appropriate formats, so as to have the maximum possibility of meeting the participants' interests needs and expectations. The assessment of appropriateness was made by the participants of the ECML workshop No. 11/97. The appropriateness of the format is ranked by the number of stars, with three stars (***) being the highest. Of course this cannot be more than an estimation. Furthermore, this estimation is based upon the average form in which the formats occur in conferences. A broad range of varieties do exist, where the estimated appropriateness may be different. In many cases you will have to decide for yourself.

Some formats such as debates, lunch meetings and demonstrations are difficult to assess because they are vaguely defined and can take on rather different forms. However, it is useful to consider them because it deepens the insight and makes it easier to decide on the spot.

Disseminating ideas / updating knowledge

Estimated appropriateness:

plenary lecture***

presentation with discussion**

video presentation **

symposium*

show & tell*

Receiving / giving feedback

Estimated appropriateness:

presentation with discussion**

workshop**

debate*

show & tell*

meetings with colleagues*

Gathering / sharing ideas

Estimated appropriateness:
Workshop***
Debate**
meetings with colleagues**

Demonstrating / getting a practical impression

Estimated appropriateness:
video presentation ***
demonstration**
poster presentation*
show & tell*
workshop*

Helping participants to improve their skills / learning

Estimated appropriateness:
Workshop***
show & tell*

Finding partners for projects / presenting oneself as a partner

Estimated appropriateness:
meetings with colleagues***
poster presentation**

Being considered important / "meeting" important people

Estimated appropriateness:

plenary lecture***

panel discussion**

official lunch meeting**

presentation with discussion*

symposium*

video presentation *

plenary stage tribune*

Entertaining / being entertained

Estimated appropriateness:

plenary lecture*

Sightseeing / having fun / change from home and work

Estimated appropriateness:

theme-related excursion**

Selling / buying things

Estimated appropriateness:

exhibition***

video presentation *

poster presentation*

demonstration*

Imposing on participants, campaigning / looking for guidance and certainty

Estimated appropriateness:

plenary lecture***

presentation with discussion*

debate*

Personal reassurance / assessing other people

Estimated appropriateness:

plenary discussion**

presentation with discussion**

panel discussion*

debate*

Gathering credits for one's career / supporting this endeavour

Estimated appropriateness:

plenary lecture***

panel discussion**

presentation with discussion*

Chapter 6:

How to direct, steer and influence your presenters

After having chosen the most appropriate format, given the presenters' and participants' interests, the required skills, and available facilities not all the problems are solved. Very frequently, some presenters are not clearly aware of their real aims nor of the appropriateness of the format they propose. The next question is, therefore, how to convince my presenters to accept my choice of format for their presentation. As in many cases the best way to solve a problem is to prevent it. In this case the best way to convince presenters is to help them to structure the preparation and submission of their proposal in such a way that their thinking leads them more or less automatically to the right choice. Therefore, the question should not be how to convince but how to steer my presenters.

One of the most influential ways of steering your presenters is by sending them the right questionnaire. It is possible, simply by the form of your questions, to make them aware of their aims and the effect of their plans on the participants. When you ask very open questions, such as 'what would you like to do?' many will answer: 'to give a nice 60-minute presentation to an admiring audience.' Asking them very concrete questions about their aims, expected outcomes, the reason for the chosen presentation format and the nature and degree of audience participation will create much greater awareness about what is appropriate and attractive.

The effect of this type of questioning tends to be increased by announcing that the presenters' answers will be published in full detail in the programme book, so that participants can make a justified and informed decision. It will make it easier for the presenters to answer your concrete questions if some of the information discussed in this handbook is added to the questionnaire.

Questionnaires that serve this purpose can be rather general or very specific. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Here are two respective examples.

Example of a general questionnaire form for contributions

1.   The topics of your contribution (in order of preference)

    a.   _____

    b.   _____

    c.   _____

2.   What do you want to achieve through your presentation?

    a.   disseminate ideas, results, products

    b.   help participants to improve their skills

    c.   other _____

3.   Which organisational forms would you choose to use for your presentation?

    a.   plenary lecture

    b.   presentation with discussion

    c.   workshop

    d.   debate

    e.   other _____

4.   Please state the length of time needed for your presentation minimum

5.   The number of participants that you would like to attend your presentation

    _____ minimum

6.   Remarks you would like to make

    _____

    _____

Example of a specific questionnaire form for contributions

Will a commercial product be presented? ❏ yes ❏ no

Features of the event:	Anticipated participants' interests:
❏ Proposal of ideas	❏ Receiving information
❏ Presentation of results	❏ Forming an opinion / gaining critical insight
❏ Presentation of products	❏ Gathering ideas
❏ Presentation of procedures	❏ Exchanging ideas
❏ Improving participants' skills	❏ Improving skills
❏ Informing colleagues	❏ Presenting a finished product
❏ Demonstrating how didactic insights can be implemented in concrete teaching materials	❏ Knowing how to implement didactic insights in teaching materials
❏ Discussion of a problem (letting it be solved)	
❏ Gathering ideas	
❏ Receiving feedback	
❏ Finding partners for a project	

Desired product:		Audio-visual support:	
❏	More knowledge (transfer of knowledge)	❏	Board
❏	Forming opinions	❏	Flip-chart
❏	Teaching ideas	❏	Overhead projector
❏	Teaching materials	❏	Audio set
		❏	Video set
❏	Plans for the participants' own practice / field		
❏	Improvement of participants' skills	❏	Other, namely
❏	Conclusions		
❏	Article / text for publication		
❏	Opinion regarding presented programme		
❏	Agreements concerning a project		
❏	Agreements on co-operation		

	Desired form[1]	Activity ratio[2] in % of available time for speakers – participants	Length of time	Number of appropriate time slots[3]
❑	Plenary lecture	100: 0	15'-slots	
❑	Lecture and discussion	70: 30	15'-slots	
❑	Symposium	90: 10	1,5 hour	
❑	Panel discussion (Expert panel)	80: 20	45'	
❑	Video presentation	-	15'-slots	
❑	Show & Tell	-	15'-slots	
❑	Poster presentation (in poster market)	50: 50	(Market)	
❑	Participants' discussion (Round table)	20: 80	30'	
	Workshop with:			
❑	Individual activity of participant	-	45'-slots	
❑	Working in pairs	-	45'-slots	
❑	Working in small groups	-	45'-slots	
❑	Group discussion	-	30'	

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[1] Please fill in where appropriate.

[2] Please indicate the estimated activity ratio between speakers and presenters.

[3] If requested, appropriate, or necessary two or more slots may be grouped resulting in longer sessions.

Chapter 7:
Tools for quality control

It is very important for the success of your event, in order to have a grip on it, to have control over its quality. In this chapter we discuss ways that can help towards that goal. We look at quality control in the most essential areas concerning the content, design and methodology of seminars and such events, i.e. the presenters, the participants, the formats, the people chairing them, the conditions, such as rooms and equipment, evaluation and certain further aspects. Some of these ideas may or may not be applicable in your case but they are all tried and tested tools for successful seminars.

Presenters

Provide the presenters with a clear framework of the event and clear guidelines. Ask them to state the aim of their presentation, point out the keywords send an abstract and, possibly, sample transparencies. Sometimes a presenter's Curriculum Vitae and published work are not enough to guarantee his/her credibility. Especially in the case of formats with large audiences it might be worthwhile trying to get more information through other channels, such as friends and colleagues. Have a telephone interview, e-mail contact, and, possibly, a video sample. If applicable, possible and desirable, the ultimate screening is the "dry run". You ask for a trial presentation to check presentation, technical and language skills.

Make sure the presenters are prepared on their topic, clear about their role, and committed to the task in hand. Offer to publish their presentation under conditions. Let them know that their presentation will be evaluated by the participants. It might even be videotaped or recorded. This will make them more committed.

Send the presenters a list of the participants with their interests, needs, expectations and current position. Aim at interaction between the audience and the presenter. Facilitate the presenters' possible wish to meet with state officials, publishers or other professionals. Cater for people with special needs, such as, the handicapped, vegetarians, and smokers.

In case of technically inadequate presenters make sure you have contingency plans, such as volunteers to operate microphones, projectors or computers. Stand-by volunteers are a prominent feature of successful events.

Ask the presenters to be in the room 5 to 10 minutes before the starting time. It is always a much-appreciated gesture to offer the presenter a thank you letter and a gift.

Participants

Provide participants with complete, detailed brochures / information on the event. Clearly display instructions, notices, and possible changes in the programme. As previously mentioned, volunteers / assistants should be readily available for help.

The participants should know beforehand what is expected of them according to the format. They should know whether they are going to work in groups, produce materials, perform, simulate, evaluate, etc.

Depending on the nature of the event, the case might be that the presenters will have to write a report on it. This is where the 'log book', as described in Chapter 4, is useful. Provide them with it and explain how to use it. The logbook will also help the participants when they come to evaluate the event at the end. Involve them in the event as actively as possible. Give them some form of homework.

Formats

Make sure that both presenters and participants have prior information on the formats. The presentation, length and number of participants should be appropriate to the format. The formats should accommodate the needs and interests of both the presenters and the participants.

Chairs

If you decide that the sessions of your event will be chaired, the first thing to do is organise a seminar for the people who are going to act as chairs. In the case of experienced chairs, have a chair meeting where the chair role will be concretely defined and decided.

The chair should be familiar with the topic and be in the room 5 to 10 minutes before starting time. An introduction and closing remarks should be prepared. If the agreed procedure is to summarise at the end, keeping notes will help. The chair should facilitate questions and answers, stimulate discussion and be in control of the session throughout.

Conditions

The room should accommodate the size of the audience, the format and the needs of the presenter. Overcrowded or empty rooms can be avoided through pre-registration and monitors at the entrance to the room. Giving the relevant information to those interested could also be of great help.

The equipment should be properly functioning and tested. Clear instructions should be given to those who are going to operate it and there should always be back-up equipment and technical assistance.

Evaluation

A thorough evaluation can serve a triple goal. Firstly, of course, it provides organisers with information in the form of feedback from which they can learn a lot about how to do things better the next time. The more clearly this feedback is elicited, the more useful the information will be. Ask a vague question and you will receive a vague answer. A great deal can be done simply by thinking very concretely about what you want to know. Asking questions is an art in itself. In order to be sure that your questions will be understood as they are meant, it is useful to pre-test them by asking a colleague to try and answer the evaluation questions in ways they are definitely not meant to.

Secondly, the evaluation outcomes can be very useful for the presenters too. In general they are interested in the same things as the organisers, for the same reasons, but the emphasis will probably lie more specifically on aspects of performance. It is good to have this in mind when designing evaluation sheets.

Thirdly, the use of evaluation sheets can have a preventive effect. The fact that presenters know that their events will, however simply, be evaluated will have a foreshadowing, positive affect on the exertions of their preparations. So if you plan an evaluation procedure it is not only decent, but also useful to tell your presenters in advance.

Other

In some events, especially international, you will have people coming from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Care should be taken to satisfy their needs. Cultural differences can often lead to offence and misunderstandings. When you are aware of the problem you are prepared to tackle it.

A bad seminar in a run-down venue with poor input from incompetent presenters might be forgiven and forgotten, but uncomfortable accommodation, unacceptable food and lack of social and cultural activities will never be erased from active memory.

A seminar is a costly business. Finding sponsors, such as publishers, could cover all or most of the cost. Publicise your event well in advance and through means that are sure to reach the presenters and participants that you want to attract.

Be prepared for last minute cancellations. Have substitute presenters, alternative activities or flexibility in your programme. The better organised you are the more

flexibility you have. You should also consider the case of health emergencies. It might be advisable, for your event, to contact an insurance company.

If interpretation is necessary, make sure it is professional. Volunteers and assistants are never enough, so do not turn down any offers and it should always be kept in mind that a committed, well-organised Organising Committee is a basic ingredient of a successful event.

Conclusion

For a workshop, conference or any such event to achieve its highest impact, it would be advisable, first of all, to make sure that the meaning of the terms used is clear to all who are involved. A workshop is not the same as a conference, as far as general organisational frameworks are concerned, and, at the micro level of formats for specific events, a panel discussion is not to be confused with a round table discussion.

Secondly the presenters' aims and the participants' needs or interests should be made absolutely transparent. It is a terrible waste of time, money and effort to have a workshop on classroom management for a group of senior administrators and policy-makers. After the aims and interests have been successfully matched, a format should be carefully chosen, which, given its characteristics, will best serve these aims and interests. In a case of skill improvement, for example, a workshop would be an excellent choice, whereas a plenary lecture would probably be the best format choice for disseminating ideas and updating knowledge. Furthermore, the available context, facilities, etc. should be considered thoroughly, and it should be ensured that they are in accordance with the characteristics and constraints of the chosen formats.

In addition, it is important to steer the planning of your presenters with carefully structured questionnaires. It is so much easier to steer beforehand than to intervene after the presenters have already made up their minds.

Finally, if you wish to have a grip on your event and control over its success, it is highly advisable to design tools for quality control well before the actual event.