



Framing your session

When we use the term ‘framing’, really we mean giving the group a sense of place, time and expectation, so that everyone can relax, settle and get ready to begin the session. It’s useful to think about *why* people may feel the need to ask questions, so that can reassure them with the right answers. It’s also helpful to start and end your sessions with the same prompts, a bit like a ritual. It’s an effective way to use our unconscious memory, building familiarity.

Below I have given examples of questions people may ask and some helpful responses. You could make brief notes for each session on what you’ll be doing and the aim, to give yourself confidence and also to ensure you’re giving the same, clear response to everyone.

<p>Time</p> <p>Are we starting soon?</p>	<p>People often arrive one by one in quick succession. Sometimes there is a bit of a wait to get started. To reassure people they won’t be sat waiting, be very clear, eg. “We’ll just give it five more minutes for everyone to arrive, then I’ll begin at half past.” This is your chance to chat to people and welcome them as they arrive.</p>
<p>Expectation</p> <p>What are we doing?</p>	<p>This is particularly relevant when you have lots of materials out ready to go; often people see paint and start to worry about what they’ll be expected to do. Saying no to it may be self preservation. You want to reassure, explaining, “We’re going to be looking at how this artist used paint today, then I’ve got a fun way to experiment with his style”.</p>
<p>Familiarity</p> <p>Have I done this before?</p>	<p>Try not to assume that people remember a previous session. Memory loss can affect anyone, any time and doesn’t necessarily reflect enjoyment of a previous session - you don’t want anyone to feel bad. You might say; “We spoke last week about a totally different painting, so I’m interested to see how you feel today”. Focus on the present.</p>
<p>Commitment</p> <p>How long do I stay?</p>	<p>This is your chance to reassure participants that you are in control of the session. For example “The session will end at 4 o’clock and then we’ll all head back upstairs for tea”. This also makes clear that they are making a commitment to stay for the duration of the session.</p>
<p>Ability</p> <p>I’m no good at / know nothing about art!</p>	<p>If I had a pound for every time someone says to me ‘oh I can’t do art’ or ‘I don’t know anything about art!’ We learn to think this, often via bad experiences. You must reassure people and prove with each session that this is an equal, safe, creative place; no wrong answers and no judgment. Celebrate effort and people will learn to trust you.</p>
<p>Autonomy / free will</p> <p>I don’t want to stay</p>	<p>Everyone has the right to say no to participating in a session - it’s not school or work! They might be having an off day, so you can try again next week. Or perhaps it’s just not their thing! The point is to invite people personally and to <i>try</i> to engage them. If nothing else, it can be really validating to say no. So don’t take it personally!</p>