

VRMA Education Strategies: Session Formats Beyond a Lecture

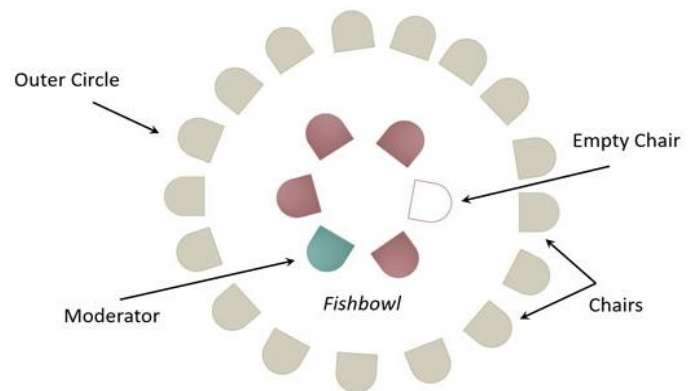
Version: April 2, 2025

Session Formats

Research shows that attention is at its highest when something unexpected is introduced into a learning activity — for example, humor, polling, an activity, a visual aid or group discussion. Changing the way you deliver your content is a way to keep attendees alert and focused on your content.

Below are different session formats to consider:

- **Panel Discussion:** A discussion about a specific topic featuring a number of expert panelists with different perspectives, each of whom can engage and spark an audience. The panel is facilitated by a moderator who will draw out key points, questions and a summary.
- **Interactive Workshop:** A session for attendees to actively participate in sharing an experience, demonstrating a new technology or technique, by learning together. The session is facilitated by an expert who can help participants make progress, try out new ideas and share feedback.
- **Dialogue Den/Networking Roundtable:** Tech-free boutique sessions that offer participants a chance to engage in intimate, small group conversations about important topics in the industry. Dialogue Den's create the space needed to learn from our peers in an open, facilitated format. These will be tech-free and delivered in a "fireside chat" format.
- **Fishbowl:** Many variations exist; one example is 4-5 chairs are arranged in an inner circle. This is the fishbowl. The remaining chairs are arranged in concentric circles outside the fishbowl. A few participants are selected to fill the fishbowl, while the rest of the group sit on the chairs outside the fishbowl. One chair is left empty. The moderator introduces the topic and the participants start the discussion. The audience outside the fishbowl listens. Any member of the audience can, at any time, occupy the empty chair. When this happens, an existing member of the fishbowl must voluntarily leave the fishbowl and free a chair.
- **Expert Debate:** A debate takes place between two or more opponents who are experts in their fields as well as entertaining presenters. The debate topic is clearly defined in terms of a question, with one side presenting the affirmative case and the other the negative case.



Audience Engagement

Audience engagement is key to making any session a success.

For the best results, pick a few interactive elements to incorporate into your presentation:

- **BYOD (Bring Your Own Device):** Mobile apps can feature polling, surveys and question collection to increase the level of attendee engagement. Tools like [Slido](#) help crowd-source questions to get audience insights on important questions.
- **Game Show:** Two teams go head-to-head to answer the questions asked by a moderator. This style session can ignite enthusiasm and competition amongst the participants.
- **Case Studies via Attendees:** Attendees provide presentation material on their own challenges and outcomes for presenters/other attendees to provide feedback and guidance on.
- **Case Studies via Panelists:** Panelists/presenters provide presentation material on their own challenges, outcomes and how they achieved their goals.
- **Storytelling:** Share a story within your session that will capture the audience's attention.
- **Session Handouts:** Whether it's a fill-in-the-blank worksheet, article to read or videos to watch – provide attendees an opportunity to continue their learning on this topic with materials they can review post-session.



Additional Tips

If you're a tenured pro or this is your first time speaking, review the resources below to make this the best session yet!

- **Enhancing Your Panel Session:** [Creating Powerful Panels That Engage Your Audience](#)
- **Be A Storyteller:** [Want To Be A More Confident Speaker? Tell A Story](#)
- **Being A Great Presenter:** [A TED Speaker Coach Shares 11 Tips For Right Before You Go On Stage](#)