

Getting Started: Tips for Judges and Lawyers

A Few Notes about Visiting a Classroom...

These ideas come from a variety of sources and are meant to help a presenter feel more comfortable when heading into a classroom.

Everyone knows the “Three R’s.” The civic learning presenter needs to know the “Five W’s: Who? What? Where? When? and Why?”

Who?

Who refers to your audience. Are you visiting an elementary, middle or high school class? Is the school public, private or parochial? How many students are in the class? Are you presenting before more than one class? Is there anything special about the students, teacher or school that you should know before making your presentation? It would be helpful for you to talk with the classroom teacher prior to the presentation to answer these questions. Most teachers will appreciate your efforts to work with them on your program.

What?

What refers to the content of your civic learning presentation. Are you focusing on a specific topic, or are you giving a general overview of the law? If you have been asked to cover a specific content area, please feel free to use the lessons provided in this guide or to contact any of the civic learning providers listed in this guide for additional lessons (see Civic Learning Support Organizations). If you are going to develop your own materials, please see the lesson planning suggestions provided in this guide (see Lesson Planning Ideas).

Where?

Where refers to directions within the school to the classroom. The often overlooked part of knowing where you are going is determining what the school’s rules are for visitors. Do you have to report to the main office? Must you have a pass to walk in the building? Even if you have visited the same school for many years, the problems with school violence have led many schools to tighten visitor controls. You also will need directions for moving both yourself and the students around in the classroom. When working with students, try not to get yourself locked into one place. There are

many different ways to direct students around the classroom and some of the best ways are detailed in the included lesson plans. The easiest and best way to involve students more completely in a lesson is by dividing the large group into smaller groups of four to six students. Ask the teacher if the students already have cooperative learning groups established. You can utilize those groupings for any small group work you wish to do during your presentation.

When?

When refers to the time of your session — both beginning and ending times. Schools run the gamut with regard to scheduling: some schools have 42-minute periods, while others have 90-minute periods. Make every effort to follow the schedule the school sets up for you. In addition, try to get to your class a few minutes early to observe the students entering the classroom. This will give you some hints about the class and also will create anticipation among the students. End the class on time, too. The students will need to move on to their next class. A good way to make sure you end on time is to ask someone (a student, the teacher) to give you a five-minute warning that the class is close to ending.

Why?

Why refers to the purpose of your presentation. Why are you making this presentation? Why is this class having you visit? Knowing these answers will help you to plan your presentation effectively. You may be making a one-time Law Day presentation that is not connected to anything else. On the other hand, you may be expected to provide the background on a project that the class is undertaking. Whatever the reason, recognize and respect the opportunity you have to make a difference in that school.

The following are some useful content and delivery tips to help you get started:

- Be prepared and have a plan that covers the time allotted. Build into your plan the capacity to deviate from it if circumstances, or questions from students, dictate that a change is needed.
- Whatever you cover, be prepared for wide-ranging questions from the students. Answer the questions as best you can and be cautious — some students will try to draw you into making a judgment about an action of a parent, teacher, school administrator or local law/justice official.
- Always try to present both sides of an issue and use the teacher's old trick of turning the question back on the student who asked it.
- Be prepared for students to share their personal experiences (or their parents' experiences) with the law. Always try to respect their points of view while encouraging them to expand on those perspectives.
- Try to focus your presentation on the students by actively involving them. Remember ... lecturing is the least effective means of teaching. Think back to times when you were excited about learning and model your lessons on those memories.
- Finally, try not to promise the students anything that you will be unable to deliver in the future. If you say you will get back to the class with the answer to a question, make sure you do. If you promise to visit later in the year, make sure that visit takes place.