

# Permaculture Course Convenors' Guide

Excerpt taken from the *Permaculture Teachers Guide* published by the Permaculture Association (Britain), WWF-UK and [Permanent Publications](#).

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## Introduction

### Acknowledgements

#### 1. Well in Advance of the Course

#### 2. Pre-course Admin.

#### 3. Immediately Before the Course

#### 4. During and After the Course

## **Introduction**

This outline represents work in progress.

- \* Each course will be specific to its territory.
- \* Each course adds to our knowledge about convening successful courses.
- \* Each course is a design - apply permaculture [Ethics and Principles](#).
- \* Let your course model the Ethics and Principles.

## **Acknowledgements**

This overview of course convening is the product of work we have done over the last nine years with various course convening teams.

Particular acknowledgments are due to Liz Roberts and Andy Langford, George's first co-convenors on the Design Course in Dartington in 1989; to Lea Harrison for her Permaculture Teacher Training Course at Middle Wood in 1990; to Simon Pratt, Patsy's first co-teacher at Redfield in 1991; and to Karol, Anna and Patricia Koncko, who have worked with us since 1994 developing courses in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

## **1. Well in Advance of the Course.**

### 1.1 Who Convenes?

#### \* An Individual:

- who wants to attend a course
- who wants to apprentice as a teacher or convenor

#### \* A Group:

- geographical community
- intentional community

#### \* An Organisation:

- with shared aims and ethics

#### \* A Further and Adult Education Provider as part of a programme of courses:

- Workers' Educational Associations
- Colleges of Further Education
- Community Colleges

## 1.2 Course Format

Here are some possible formats for the Design Course:

- \* Introductory Weekend - can be free standing or first part of a Design Course.
- \* A series of weekends.
- \* A two-week residential.
- \* An evening class over two terms with a practical weekend each term.
- \* A correspondence course/distance learning - an opportunity for development.
- \* As part of another, longer course.
- \* As a combination of weekends and evening classes.

The following PMI on course formats (Plus, Minus and Interesting points) was generated by Simon Pratt, with a few points added by us:

### *Two week residential:*

<b>Plus:</b>	<b>Minus:</b>	<b>Interesting:</b>
immersion in permaculture stable group live and breathe permaculture removed from day to day life eating together (very important)	intensive little time for reflection information overload cost	group dynamic relationship with site

### *Series of weekends:*

<b>Plus:</b>	<b>Minus:</b>	<b>Interesting:</b>
time for reflection, relate to own situation inexpensive can fit around other commitments eating together	outside distractions lack of social time group may change extra travel (time/cost/energy) loading/unloading materials	homework, reading seed for local group/project

### *Weekends plus one week:*

<b>Plus:</b>	<b>Minus:</b>	<b>Interesting:</b>
variation in experience immersion and reflection flexible can fit around other commitments eating together	cost difficult to maintain intensity of residential week	homework, reading

### *Evenings:*

<b>Plus:</b>	<b>Minus:</b>	<b>Interesting:</b>
new audiences can fit around other commitments time for reflection, relate to own situation inexpensive (or free)	restricted access to sites limited time each session group may change people tired after a days work extra travel (time/cost/energy) loading/unloading materials	homework, reading seed for local group/project

### **1.3 Venue**

Evening classes are usually run using existing Further and Adult Education venues:

<b>Plus:</b>	<b>Minus:</b>	<b>Interesting:</b>
AVA (Audio Visual Aids) often available 'Edge' with other courses/the community	People tired (end of day/travel effort) Inflexible rooms (furniture to move/strip lights)	Develop mobile reference library Go to pub afterwards for social time

The following applies to venues for weekend and residential courses:

Courses are often run at venues that do not normally run or host courses. Even if they do, it is important to visit before going ahead with the planning of the course. Don't forget that all comers should feel comfortable and at home on a course.

\* Visit with as many of the course convening team as possible (see 2.1).

\* Check the following:

- Teaching room

- + needs of the teachers and the participants
- + enough room for 20-24 people
- + variety of seating options from chairs and tables to floor cushions
- + warm in winter, cool in summer
- + power supply for audio visual aids (AVAs)
- + can it be blacked out for slide shows?
- + other rooms for small group work

- Kitchen and a room to share meals:

- + is it equipped to cater for a large group?

- A quiet room for library, quiet space and sickbay, separate if possible

- Accommodation for teachers and, if offered, for participants:

- + bedrooms, camping and local B&B options

- Loos and washing:

- + are there enough loos?
- + will the water supply cope with a large group for two weeks?
- + will the sewage system cope with a large group for two weeks?

- Health and Safety, Public Liability
- Disabled access
- Parking and public transport options
- Childcare - needs a room or area specifically for this plus qualified people to run it
- Opportunity for practical sessions on the site
- Opportunity for walks and observation exercises
- Is this a venue where a design will be adopted?
- You can now agree dates

#### **1.4 Costings**

May include the following:

- \* Accommodation.
- \* Catering. (On weekend courses it works exceptionally well to ask people to bring food to share. It results in feasts of enormous variety!)
- \* Childcare.
- \* Contribution to a bursary fund.
- \* Convenors' Fees and Expenses - photocopying, postage, phonecalls, etc.
- \* Permaculture Association membership for one year.
- \* Publicity.
- \* Tutors' Fees and Expenses (including visiting tutors).
- \* Venue Costs.
- \* Visits and transport.

Do you have a strategy for bursaries or sliding scale of course fees?

An upward, as well as downward sliding scale of course fees gives participants in well-paid occupations the opportunity to help those on low or no incomes.

#### **1.5 Publicity**

You are now ready to put out your course publicity. This will include:

- \* Venue.
- \* Dates.
- \* Convenor's name, contact address, phone number, fax and email details.
- \* Brief "what is permaculture".
- \* Course outline - content, practicals, participatory, etc.
- \* Tutors' names and backgrounds.
- \* Availability of apprenticeships for trainee teachers.
- \* A booking form to include:
  - participant's name, address and phone number/fax/email
  - say "Please print or type" and allow plenty of space so that it comes back clear and legible
  - fee options
  - deposit/full fee
  - policy on refunds if participant cannot attend or if the course does not run
  - closing date for bookings

- special needs - dietary/health/access
- childcare
- can they offer a lift?
- do they need a lift?
- contact in case of illness

NB do not print the booking form on the back of essential information you want participants to keep!

To publicise the course you can use:

- \* Editorials in local papers and magazines.
- \* If you are working with a Further and Adult Education provider, listing in their prospectus.
- \* Free Listings in permaculture publications and web pages and, if there is one, your local Green Events.
- \* Posters and fliers - it's easier to place A5 posters on notice boards than bigger ones!
- \* Selected mailing to previous enquiries, past participants on your courses and allied organisations.
- \* Word of Mouth - use your allies.
- \* Selective advertising.

## **2. Pre-course Admin**

### **2.1 Course Team**

Don't try to do it all on your own!

Identify your course convening team. Individuals may have more than one role but ensure back-ups for each role. These will include:

#### \* Apprentices:

- act as back-up for the other team members

#### \* Caterers:

- probably the most important role on a residential course
- vegetarian food - easier for storing and washing up, and saves catering separately for veggies and carnivores (organic meat option if demand once course has started)
- local, organic produce where possible
- agree a budget

#### \* Convenors:

- putting it all together
- responding to bookings and enquiries (see 2.2)
- finances

#### \* Tutors:

- timetable
- handouts
- practicals in consultation with Site Crew
- visits to local sites of interest
- guest speakers
- teacher training for apprentices

\* Site Crew (to include somebody from the host venue):

- materials and tools for practical sessions
- needs identified during visit to venue

Clarify roles and mutual and personal expectations (including financial) - write them down!

## **2.2 Paperwork**

\* Response to bookings:

- receipt
- "thank you for booking" letter

\* Along with this you will send:

- joining Instructions
- map
- public transport options
- arrivals/start time
- day off (on residential)
- finish time/departures
- what to bring:
  - + food to share (on weekend courses)
  - + mug, bowl, plate, cutlery
  - + notetaking and drawing materials
  - + clipboard/drawing board
  - + compass
  - + pocket calculator
  - + boots and fine/foul weather gear for practical sessions
  - + indoor shoes or slippers
  - + books and magazines for library
  - + seeds and plant material to share
  - + musical instruments
  - + info on own site or project

\* Provisional timetable.

\* Course Information (see Appendix for example.)

## **2.3 Apprentices**

\* Actively encourage apprentices to participate on weekend and residential courses.

\* Apprentices can be invited via the course publicity or by direct invitation of previous course participants.

\* During this pre-course stage the tutors can 'take bids' from apprentices - what sessions would they like to teach? Alternatively, where the tutors know apprentices from a previous course, they can suggest sessions for the apprentices to prepare.

Three ways of deciding what to teach:

*Teach your passion.*

*Teach what you have direct experience of*

*Teach what you need to learn*

\* Send copies of own session notes as guidance to apprentices if appropriate.

\* Joining instructions for apprentices. Send same as for participants but additional notes to include:

- proposed sessions
- notes on session preparation and presentation
- arrivals and departures
  
- + day before on weekend courses
- + several days before residential courses to give time for practice sessions with feedback as well as helping in the setting up of the course.

### **3. Immediately before the course**

#### **3.1 Whole Course Team**

\* Meet up immediately before the course - the day before a weekend and three to four days before a full residential course. Establish format for meetings.

- Check in - how's everyone feeling, eg 3 minutes each
- Set timing for the meeting
- Agenda items - what do we need to discuss?
- Allocate available time
- Everybody heard
- Check out

\* Course Team:

- review roles, needs and mutual expectations
- identify a 'flack-catcher' or 'switchboard operator' for the course - their role is to take comments or suggestions from the course participants relating to the course, venue, catering, etc. and relay them to the appropriate course team
- address any anxieties
- what still needs to be done?

#### **3.2 Finalise arrangements**

\* Venue:

- Reception area (on full residential and first weekend of series of weekends)  
This is the first impression that participants get when they arrive
- Map of the site and good signing so participants can find their way around  
You may need to put up signs in the surrounding area if the site is particularly hidden!
- Place for wet clothes and muddy boots
- Teaching space  
Decorate with rugs, cushions, fabrics, plants - it will be your home for the next two weeks

- Kitchen and eating room

Food hygiene - space for storage of prepared food brought to weekend courses, dog and cat free

Waste separation system - compost bins, recycling bins, etc

- Quiet room, library, sickbay and first aid kit

- Loos and hand washing

- Accommodation

- Practicals - tools and materials

- Visits - transport and timing

- \* Finalise arrangements for the day off (on residential courses):

- Arrange an optional, purely recreational trip to the seaside, the woods or some other local attraction

- This is also a day off for the catering team

- \* Agree daily pattern for the course

### **3.3 Apprentice Support**

- \* Teaching team meets.

- \* Use same meeting model as for convening team (3.1).

- \* Apprentices shadow key course convening team roles to get experience of running courses.

- \* Timetable practice teaching sessions before the start of the course.

- \* Update timetable, finalise practicals and visits.

- \* Make sure all members of the teaching team have all the support they need for preparing and delivering sessions.

## **4. During and After the Course**

### **4.1 First Day**

Most of the first morning or the first evening of a residential course is taken up by introductions:

- \* Registration as participants arrive.

- \* Collect any outstanding fees.

- \* Welcome to participants.

- \* Introduction to the course team.

- \* Introduction to the venue:

- House rules, eg no smoking, no shoes, etc

- Domestic arrangements

- + Catering and clearing up teams on weekends

- + Housekeeping teams on residential

- \* Introduction to the course:

- The course as a qualification - national and international context

- Participants expected to take notes (session on Mindmapping at start of course) to produce personal learning and evaluative journal. Of value to participants in the future and as evidence of course completion



- Participants working in groups on a design project at the end of the course
- Expect attendance - if you have to miss a session find an ally to help you catch up
- If you do not understand then ask
- Time for questions and discussion during each session

\* Course culture:

- Sessions will start and finish on time (volunteer timekeeper/sheepdog?)
- Rest if you are tired - quiet room
- Library and books for sale
- Can you offer photocopying?
- Offers and Requests posters for everyone to use during the course
- 'Cheating' encouraged - co-operation not competition
- Opportunity for feedback from participants half-way through the course as well as at the end - course convening team responsive to needs and comments of participants - student centred learning
- Day off half way through residential course
- Cabaret on last night of the course

\* Brief introduction to the participants (more detailed introductions next day):

- Name
- Where do you come from, where is home?
- What are your expectations of the course?

\* If people arrive late, make sure they have an opportunity to introduce themselves.

\* Introduction to permaculture!

## 4.2 During the Course

### Daily Routine:

\* Course Convening Team meets early in the morning:

- Check in - how's everyone feeling, eg 3 minutes each
- Set timing for the meeting
- Agenda items - includes items for the opening session
- Allocate available time
- Everybody heard
- Check out

\* Opening Session:

- Three minutes each way to help participants 'land'. One person introduces themselves and then speaks while the other listens. After 3 minutes they change over. This also helps develop listening skills
- Whole group in a circle so that everyone can see everybody else's face
- If it seems appropriate, a minute of silence
- Round of names - name and... eg nearest river, nearest hill or mountain, favourite tree, word to describe how you are feeling this morning, etc. Helps the group learn

each other's names

- Some sort of physical exercise to get the blood oxygenated. Short yoga sequence or a quick game - whatever a member of the convening group or course participants can lead
- Domestic announcements
- Course announcements
- Participants announcements
- Run through the day's timetable/any adjustments

\* Teaching Sessions:

- 45 minutes maximum or double session with break
- Time for questions, discussion, groupwork, etc
- Practicals or visits in the 'graveyard slot' after lunch

\* Visits:

- Visits to local sites that demonstrate permaculture in practice or techniques described in the course (usually one afternoon per week on a residential course)

\* Breaks:

- Long breaks - half an hour morning and afternoon, one and a half to two hours for lunch and supper. The breaks are the rich 'edges' of a course where productive contacts and connections are made (not to mention a 15-minute siesta after lunch). Also depends on size of site. Camping needs the extra time for 'housekeeping'

\* Course Convening Team Meets at the end of the afternoon sessions:

- Check in - how's everyone feeling (eg 3 minutes each)
- Set timing for the meeting
- Agenda items - including feedback on the day
- Allocate available time
- Everybody heard
- Check out

\* Evenings:

- Optional programme - cover design course material during the day
- Courses are very intensive - allow time for rest and recreation
- Give participants opportunity to give presentations
- Videos and slide shows of associated interest
- Teachers meet with apprentices - can use same format as course convening team meeting. Feedback on the day's teaching. Timetable adjustments and session planning for the next day. Try not to disappear for too long

Halfway through the course:

\* Halfway evaluation of the course so far. Start with 5 minutes 'think and listen'. Same as three minutes each way of the opening but participants use the time as 'thinking aloud' time. Allows for concise reporting back on:

- One thing I particularly liked
- One thing I would have done differently
- One thing I am looking forward to

Divide available time equally between everybody, including the course convening team, for feedback.

Stress the I-factor for the 'done-differently'. The aim is to get constructive suggestions rather than negative 'I didn't like...' comments.

\* Day Off:

- Optional day out for the group (on residential courses) - purely recreational
- Others stay on site or go off separately

The day off is very important on residential courses. Don't forget you are asking people to assimilate a lot of information and some challenging ideas in a short period of time. A break is essential. Tests have shown that 'wobblies' happen at the end of the first week!

### 4.3 Endings

\* Cabaret and Party:

- last evening of the course
- Encourage all participants to prepare a turn, including the course convening team!  
You can judge the success of a course by the cabaret night
- Cabaret compares, volunteered from among the participants, plan the evening and present the show
- Participants can invite friends and family, where local

\* Last Day

- Where Do We Go From Here? - exit strategies
- Make sure everyone has an address list of all participants
- Collect in Permaculture Association Membership Forms where this is included in the cost of the course. (This is strongly encouraged.)
- Paperwork (if working with educational organisation such as WEA)
- Verbal evaluation of the course

+ Start with 5 minutes each way 'think and listen' (see halfway feedback)

- + One thing I particularly liked
- + One thing I would have done differently
- + My long term goal
- + My next achievable step
- + One thing I am looking forward to

- Presentation of course completion certificates

Arrange something special to mark the end of the course. By the end of a course there is a closely knit group and folk are sorry to be parting.

- Farewells
- Clear up
- Lifts to railway and bus stations

#### **4.4 After the Course**

\* Course convening team meets after the course:

- Evaluation of the course in general

\* Teaching team meets:

- Evaluation of the teaching

\* Convenor:

- Send list of participants to the Association office along with membership forms and subscriptions, where applicable
- Update own database

\* *Course convening team take a well-deserved rest!*