

Ball Toss Activity

Because publications courses are so different from any other courses, the following activity is designed to help you acclimate staffers to HOW the publication course will function throughout the year and HOW that is different from other classes they have experienced.

Materials: 3-5 soft, small balls (easy to catch and throw – tennis balls work great)

Time: Game play usually requires about 10-15 minutes. Debriefing can take 15-30 minutes.

Rules:

- You must toss the ball to the same person every time to toss it.
- You may not toss the ball to someone directly beside you.
- You must make eye contact with the intended receiver before tossing the ball.
- You must say the receiver's name while you toss the ball.
- Everyone must receive a toss before anyone receives a second toss.
- A dropped ball can be retrieved by anyone but must be returned to the intended receiver.
- One ball must not pass another ball in the pattern.
- The game may change during play. Follow the adviser's (or editor's) lead.
- No further clarification from the adviser (or editor) is guaranteed.

Procedure:

- The staff and adviser should form a circle in an open area with about 2-3 feet between each person.
- The adviser (or editor) should read the rules but allow students to clarify them for one another – only interject clarification if the students are so grotesquely wrong that the game will be ruined by their misunderstanding.
- The adviser (or editor) begins by tossing a ball to a student who tosses it to another student.
- The process continues until all staff members have had a turn. The last student tosses the ball back to the adviser. If the process is not accomplished correctly the first time, start over again and again until it is.
- Continue the same pattern established in the first round until the ball can be quickly and efficiently circulated throughout the entire pattern several times without any mistakes (ball dropping, rule breaking, etc).
- Once the students have *mastered* the first ball, the adviser (or editor) should add a second ball to the rotation allowing 2 – 3 students between the balls. Don't warn the kids that you're going to do it, and let them adjust/react without stopping the game.
- Once the students have *mastered* the first two balls, the adviser (or editor) should add the third ball to the rotation.
- Once the students have *mastered* the pattern with all three balls, the adviser (or editor) should tell players to stop saying names aloud.
- Once the routine is flowing nicely in silence, the adviser (or editor) should start random conversations with the players and encourage them to do the same with each other. Force them to multitask verbally.
- The game ends once all three balls are flowing nicely in the pattern with free-flowing conversations occurring.

Application:

Helping staffers understand how this game applies to producing school publications is the most important part. Aside from being a fun way to start the year, this game reveals many things about working on staff and how it will be different from participation in other courses. Discuss these things with the staff, and allow them to add as much insight as possible – returning staff members will have the most to say. The adviser should question and clarify (rather than tell) as much as possible. Discuss the game from beginning to end.

-At first it was hard to remember the pattern, and it will be hard to learn the new skills and processes associated with creating a publication. The process of tossing a ball around the room isn't too hard to learn, and neither is journalism.

-At first the game was slow. I didn't have anything to do until the ball got back around to me. The beginning of the year can be much the same – waiting for events to start, waiting for the year to get going, there may not be a ton of work to do all the time.

-Remembering the details like eye contact and saying each other's names was tedious just like remembering the details of creating a spread will be tedious.

-Things got easier as we went. So will producing this publication! I might mess up a lot at first, but I'll get better.

-Once the year gets going, we'll have a workflow much like the pattern in the game with everyone serving a purpose in the grand scheme of things.

-Completing an assignment is like having a pattern in the game – I'll have to come up with a plan and execute that plan in a set order to get my work done on time. For instance, I can't write a story if I haven't conducted interviews first, I can't write captions until I have chosen photos, I can't place photos until I have taken photos, etc. We will learn the pattern, and it will be second nature eventually.

-We all depend on each other doing our individual parts to make this publication successful. One person can't do it alone.

-If someone "drops the ball," it has to be picked up by someone, even someone who didn't drop it. We have to help each other complete the overall project. Unlike other classes, I can't focus only on my assignment. Even if I get my job done, someone else might not and that can stop the whole process – I will have to be willing to help others when they make mistakes.

-Once we established the pattern and the second ball was added, the process was more complicated than before. As we go through the process of producing the publication, things will get progressively more complicated and busy. We'll learn to adjust to more stress as the year goes on.

-With two balls in the game I was tempted to pay attention to what others were doing and might have missed my turn. While we're producing the publication, I'll have to stay relatively focused on my tasks at hand while others do likewise.

-By the time we had three balls in play, the pattern was so established that adding the extra ball didn't really affect the process. By the end of the year, I'll be such a pro at journalism that I'll be able to handle the chaos. My skills will be wicked awesome, but I'll have to work to get to that point.

-When we dropped the names, it was cool to see the balls flowing almost automatically. Our workflow will get to that point if we all do our jobs.

-Toward the end we started talking about random things while we were playing the game. Once I learn what I'm doing in this class, I'll be able to handle completing my work while having fun at the same time.

-While I was having the random conversations about music, movies, and dates, I was still playing the game. I'm a journalism student ALL THE TIME and have to be thinking like a member of this publication always – observing, recording, noticing, etc. all the things that go on in this school. Journalism class doesn't end when the bell rings, and just because I'm on staff doesn't mean I can't have a life. It all fits.

There are several other applications as well that will surface as your experienced students start to draw their own connections. Let the students lead the talk, but emphasize their points. Help them articulate their ideas. Focus on the fact that being in a publications class is NOT like being in an algebra class where everyone is only responsible for his/her own work – journalism is a team sport that can't be played successfully unless EVERY member of the team is playing. Help them understand that it will be hard at first, but it will get easier!!!