

April 2008

THE THIRD AGE TRUST



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Textile Crafts

Julia Clark

HOW TO START A TEXTILE CRAFTS GROUP

GENERAL ORGANISATION

Membership

Start with 6 to 8 members and don't ever go to more than a dozen or you won't be able to cope with them.

Check they are all U3A members and request their names and telephone numbers so you can contact them if a change is necessary.

Ask members to notify you if they are going to be absent or leave the group.

Introduce new members and don't let them feel like outsiders, especially if some of your group are old friends.

Don't let any one monopolise the conversation OR YOUR TIME. You should try to share your time equally, depending on circumstances.

Venue

Ensure the venue is well lit as a good light is necessary for sewing.

Check there is enough room for everyone to have adequate space.

If using a home, it's better for it to be permanently the leader's home rather than going around to different members in turn.

When your group has got going, you'll find it easier to rent a room:

- Make sure you book it well in advance and for several meetings.
- Check the parking is easy and adequate.
- Know where to get the keys and where the kettle is!
- Arrive ½ hour early to set up; check the premises when you leave.

Times

Consult members on day and times. Remember other U3A activities.

Avoid meeting in the evening – a lot of people don't like to go out at night and, in addition, natural light is better for sewing.

2 - 2½ hours is long enough for a meeting but have a 15 minute refreshment break in the middle. Refreshments should be just a cuppa and biscuit and it's easier if the tutor provides them and they're included in the charge.

Have the refreshments where work won't be ruined by spills.

I think a fortnightly meeting is best though my own group meets monthly because we are all over committed for time.

Publicise by advertising in your local U3A news and have a small exhibition table at the AGM or other meetings to show examples.

Charge for a set of meetings rather than every time. This is necessary if renting a room as you need to cover the rent whether people come or not. I divide the year into halves: April - Sept and Oct – March and charge for the set. I charge visitors who come for a "taster" and refund the charge if they join. Your charge should cover refreshments, postage, photo-copying etc. and you should keep a record of income and outgoings - I expect your U3A will have guidelines on this.

TEXTILE SPECIFIC

These tips are not handed down from on high but are based on my own experience.

Let each member bring her own equipment – don't attempt to provide everything yourself and then charge for it – although this is OK for specific items. However, don't make it necessary for members to incur a lot of expense as this is off-putting. And, I always take along extra embroidery rings and thread, just in case.

Make the first project an easy one. That way, beginners won't be put off and those with more experience will add their own ideas anyway. It can be quite hard to cope with different degrees of skill so something which can be interpreted differently by different members is a good idea. I started my group on making embroidered cards using bought aperture cards with an embroidery insertion done by members. Once you've introduced several projects, you'll find that members tend to specialise and this is very rewarding but harder work for the tutor.

I find that I have to make, myself, whatever project I introduce to the group .It's obviously easier for people to relate to something they can see. They won't copy it and that's not the idea. I find that if I show, for instance, a collage, there will be several completely different collages done by the group but using the same techniques. Sometimes, if it's possible, it can help to show work at different stages. I spend a little time teaching different techniques or perhaps stitches when they are going to be used in a project .I also try to introduce members to "new" or different products I've seen at shows,

Be wary of projects suggested by members – they may be fine but could have hidden pitfalls. Also be wary of people who bring along work they've failed to finish at another class or course and expect you to help with it. Don't worry about saying you don't know – you can't be expected to know everything! Concentrate on your own projects.

Provide a list of where embroidery materials can be bought locally and also publicise local exhibitions and major shows in your area. It's a good idea to liaise with the local Embroiderers' Guild and with a local college which may have students on a City & Guilds Embroidery course as both will have small exhibitions and end-of-year shows.

After a while, have a small exhibition of group work – perhaps at the AGM. BUT – show beginners' work as well as the more skilful or you'll frighten off possible new members!

Best of all, enjoy and communicate your own enthusiasm.

Julie Clark
April 2008