

# The Differences Between a Seminar and a Workshop

By Suzanne Patterson

Many makeup artists often look to take short term training courses, such as seminars and workshops, to advance their skills instead of investing in costly makeup school classes. When looking for educational opportunities to advance your skill set it's important that you understand the structure and instructional differences between a seminar and workshop, and what to expect from each as outlined and explained below.

The first thing you need to keep in mind about people coming together to participate in any kind of instructional situation is that each person possesses a learning dominance towards one of three distinct types of teaching styles, or modalities, that they lean towards the most: visual, auditory, or manipulative. These are the basics of information transfer, and it simply means some people learn better by seeing, some learn better by hearing, and some learn best with a hands-on experience added into the presentation. The good news is everyone has a combination of all three styles, but an individual will always favor one particular style over the others for learning because of inherent brain patterning.

## **Class Structure:**

It is important to know your personal dominant style of learning so that you know how to get the most out of your investment. If you are a person that comprehends easily through hearing and watching others do things, such as a lecture with visual demonstration, then you will always do well with a seminar. If you are a person that not only has to hear about it and see it done, but experiment with hands-on in creating it yourself, then a workshop is always a good option.

A good seminar or workshop will be constructed in such a way to provide the best learning curve to meet a combination of learning styles adequately in a timely fashion. However, you should always inquire beforehand how the class is actually planned out according to the percentage of lecture, demonstrations, and any hands-on work being presented so you can prepare to get the best possible benefit from the experience. This will help you decide if it meets your dominant style of learning.

## **Functions of a Seminar:**

This class structure is based on the lecture and demonstration format. This means the instructor has prepared the concepts and techniques they will present and discuss through a combination of visual materials, interactive tools or equipment, and demonstrations. Note taking is always a good thing to do so that you have a form of review once the class is over.

This format should always include some take home materials for the student that relates to the lecture and demonstration, and that gives them summary points to review along with their notes. A full laboratory phase (direct student hands-on working opportunity) is not a requirement for this kind of class structure, nor is it necessary in order for the seminar to be considered fully and successfully integrated into the student's educational and skill acquisition process. As long as the lectures,

demonstrations, visuals, materials/interactive tools are appropriately networked throughout the seminar content for full educational impact, a seminar is a complete learning experience. Seminars are often larger classes because there is no laboratory phase, and the benefit of student questions brought up for discussion always enhances the collective knowledge of the attendees.

### **Functions of a Workshop:**

This class includes all the elements of the seminar mentioned previously, but with the largest portion being emphasized on student hands-on practice, or "laboratory" work. Workshops are more expensive than seminars to produce because of the time-intensive labor of preparing and teaching the laboratory phase, along with preparing materials apportioned to each student's practice. The lab work is designed to reinforce, imprint, and bring forward an immediate functioning dimension to the student's eyes and hands by implementing and practicing the actual concept or technique that was taught through the lecture and demonstration process.

The laboratory phase is a very important part of the workshop to establish the newly learned method into real skill performance, by patterning the "brain to eye to hand" in the lab exercises or creative techniques. A crucial factor for student success in a workshop is the student to teacher ratio. It should be small enough so that the instructor can closely monitor, provide oversight, and extra help personally to each student without compromising the day's agenda. The laboratory element must be a significant phase of the workshop or it risks being an incomplete integration of the knowledge process and skill in technique to the student.

It is my strong opinion that the laboratory phase should never be less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the entire day's presentation, meaning the student should be spending half of the time in active hands-on work. If the class does contain more lecture and demonstration than lab work then consider that the course might be too restrictive to accomplish satisfactorily for students who do best with hands-on learning.

I also believe that the teacher to student ratio in a workshop should never be greater than 6 – 8 students, and if so, there should be professional assistants that have the same knowledge base and ability to provide oversight as the instructor. This is so that the instructor never loses the ability to keep close and personal oversight with each student during the laboratory phase while fulfilling the day's lesson plan.

In my many years of teaching experience I can honestly say that a workshop that exceeds this student to teacher ratio risks more unhappy and unfulfilled student experiences, and negative "word of mouth" feedback about the instructor and the workshop. More than 8 students in a workshop taught by just one instructor significantly changes the dynamics of the learning curve where the instructor can often lose control over the pace. This resorts to more to lecture and demonstration being done than laboratory work as a fail safe mechanism, which ends up shortchanging the students and the day's agenda.

### **Summary:**

Always ask questions about the qualifications of the instructor and the day's agenda of the seminar or workshop you are considering investing in. Make sure you understand how the material will be presented in the ratio of lecture, demonstration,

interactive tools, and any hands-on work. If you are attending a workshop make sure you know what the limit is on the class size, and how much of the lesson plan centers on actual laboratory work. Less than half of the time apportioned to hand-on work is cause to reconsider if this is more of a “blended” seminar with a laboratory phase tacked on. Consider the track record and word of mouth feedback by talking to others who have had first hand attendance in the class you are considering, as happy customers are generally a good indicator of the success of the course. Workshops and seminars can be a valuable training asset and experience if you know how to choose wisely for your investment.

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