



**Instructor Handbook
January 2026**

Welcome OLLI Mason Instructors!

Welcome to OLLI Mason's community of instructors! Thank you for your willingness to volunteer your knowledge and expertise to the inquisitive members who make up OLLI. We hope you find it as rewarding and exciting as past instructors have. The generosity of volunteers like you is a unique attribute of the OLLI program and a major factor in its success; instructors are a critical part of OLLI, and your impact is immeasurable!

Instructors:

- Provide creative, well-planned learning experiences
- Help to create a positive learning experience – and help retain happy members
- Inform the OLLI staff about successes and concerns

Our Way of Saying Thank You

OLLI Mason does not financially compensate instructors. In addition to our gratitude for your wonderful contribution, each instructor is invited to:

- Attend two courses in appreciation for each course that you teach, if you are not an OLLI member. This benefit is for a year from the term in which you teach, on a space-available basis, for a maximum of eight free courses per year.
- Volunteer appreciation events
- Annual teacher appreciation breakfast



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Background

About OLLI Mason

OLLI Mason is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization affiliated with George Mason University and the national Osher Lifelong Learning network that provides classes, lectures, trips, clubs, social and other activities for over 1000 active members age 50+. Over 500 college-level courses covering a broad range of subjects are offered each year. Programs are presented in-person at the Fairfax campus, at satellite sites throughout Fairfax County, and online.

While OLLI Mason offers a holistic program of educational, social, and wellness activities, classes are the core of the program and generally fall into the following categories:

- Art and Music
- Economics and Finance
- History
- Literature, Theater & Writing
- Languages
- Philosophy & Religious Studies
- Humanities and Social Sciences
- Current Events
- Science, Technology, & Health
- Other Topics

About OLLI Mason Members

OLLI membership is made up of intellectually curious people who are vitally interested in the world around them. Members enjoy the opportunity to delve deeper into ideas, including those which they may not previously have had a chance to learn about.

- Members expect to have a *clear sense of what will be covered in a course* and for classes to begin and end on time.
- OLLI members are attentive in class, add their own observations to discussions, and raise challenging issues and questions.
- OLLI members have years of life experience – many explore a course as a new area and some enroll with expertise on the topic.
- While OLLI members bring many strengths to the classroom, they may also arrive with some challenges, such as difficulties with hearing, vision, or mobility. Please use a microphone even if you have a loud voice and ask the staff if you have other accessibility questions.
- Because they are involved in many activities (including travel) in addition to OLLI, members often miss some classes. It is helpful for instructors to look upon varying class attendance not as implied dissatisfaction but expressed freedom.

Course Proposals

OLLI routinely solicits and encourages members, experts from the community, and GMU professors to present courses. It is not necessary to be a member of OLLI to lead a course. Also, although some instructors are former teachers, many instructors teach based on life experiences and personal interests. OLLI members and instructors are encouraged to initiate ideas for new courses and suggestions for current courses. To submit a proposal, please use the online form: oli.gmu.edu/oli-course-proposal-form/. For questions about course proposals, contact us by e-mail at program@gmu.edu. Note: please review our [catalog description tips](#) before filling out your proposal form.

Instructor Basics

General Tips

OLLI Mason strives to make it as convenient as possible for instructors to teach their courses. Support is available from the program associates; the OLLI office, 703-503-3384; the executive director at ollied@gmu.edu; and our website page for [instructors](#). Each instructor is assigned a site assistant (SA) who helps coordinate technology and manages Zoom for online or hybrid courses. Here are some tips for you as an instructor:

- **Make your course as engaging as possible.** Prepare lectures and/or interactive learning experiences.
- **Be inclusive.** Think about how you will create a positive learning atmosphere where questions are welcomed. Use inclusive (i.e. not sexist) language and model/encourage respect for diverse perspectives.
- **Offer structure.** Create a brief syllabus or plan for your course. Include suggested resources for any further readings, films, internet links, etc. Use the OLLI member portal to email your students.
- **Build connections.** Encourage members to interact with each other.
- **Utilize your site assistant (SA).** You will be assigned an OLLI Mason SA to assist with classroom needs, in-person or virtual. As a paid OLLI staff member, your SA is familiar with OLLI classroom technology and the online platform. Your SA can help you test your audiovisual materials before your presentation and manage questions during or after your presentation, along with other specific needs.
- **Test your systems.** If meeting in person, arrive at least 20 minutes early to test your audio video equipment and to get help if needed. If teaching online, follow the recommendations in this guide.
- **Have a great class!**
- **Inform the OLLI main office about any wonderful moments or concerns.**

Handouts and Course Materials

As the instructor, you compile materials for your course (e.g., syllabi, bibliographies). If you have materials to share with participants, it must meet the guidelines established by the [copyrighted materials guideline](#) provided by George Mason University. In general, we encourage distribution of course materials via electronic means. It is more environmentally friendly and allows members to choose if they access materials via their computer or a hard copy that they print themselves. That said, if you need hard copy handouts, contact the OLLI office for pre-approval and to help prepare these for your course.

Please include any known fees in your original course proposal where applicable and keep cost in mind when selecting resource materials, and that most of our members do not expect reading requirements. For courses centered on books and films, it is best if they are available from libraries or other free or low-cost sources.

- Book titles must be listed in the course description for members to purchase or borrow on their own before the session begins.
- Other materials to be purchased by class members, such as art supplies, must be added to the course description.

Technology and Audio-Visual Needs

Each OLLI classroom is equipped with a Windows based computer, large display screen, digital projector, and DVD/CD player. All locations have MS Office 2019. Easels and white boards are available in most classrooms by request.

- You can download your presentation from any file share service (ex: Google Drive) or bring your presentation to OLLI on a USB flash drive. Use of personal devices is discouraged due to potential compatibility issues.
- Most classrooms utilize wired internet. All OLLI classrooms have Wi-Fi. You are strongly encouraged to download and save ahead of time any materials from the Internet.
- Email your assigned site assistant if you would like to schedule a site visit to test your audiovisual materials.
- Classroom set-up is theater style facing the display. Some classrooms can be rearranged. Please notify your site assistant in advance if you would like to request an alternative arrangement.
- USE THE MICROPHONE –Many participants have hearing issues. In compliance with ADA federal regulations, please use the head-worn wireless or handheld microphone provided in each classroom so all can fully hear. Wear clothing with a belt or pocket for attaching the wireless microphone transmitter. It is good practice to repeat a question using the microphone and then answer the question. Ask the SA to deliver a portable microphone to people who want to ask a question.

Class Recordings

On the course proposal form, you selected whether or not OLLI Mason may record your course. If you selected yes, your recorded course will be displayed on the OLLI Mason website, accessible to OLLI Mason members only. All material appearing on the website is the property of OLLI Mason. Recordings are accessible to members only. You may not reproduce, distribute, publish, transmit, or in any way exploit any such content, nor may you distribute any part of this content over any network, sell or offer it for sale, or use such content to construct any kind of database. Copying or storing any content is expressly prohibited without the prior written permission of OLLI Mason. For permission to use any content on the website, or to request removal of a recording, please contact olli@gmu.edu.

Mason Libraries

Contact program@gmu.edu for more information about using the George Mason libraries, if you would like to supplement your course materials. All OLLI instructors are authorized two months before and during term to: 1) check out up to ten books at once (for a three-week period with one renewal); 2) request books from other Mason campuses (except the Arlington Law Library); 3) borrow audiovisual materials (videos, DVDs) from the Johnson Center Media library for one week.

Code of Conduct

OLLI Mason endeavors to create a positive and affirming environment that fosters learning and social connection. Members, instructors, and staff are expected to demonstrate mutual respect, personal and academic integrity, kindness, and a commitment to civil discourse. Ensuring OLLI Mason is a welcoming, inclusive and affirming learning community is a responsibility shared by all members, instructors, and staff.

Many of our programs offer a forum for the lively and even passionate exchange of views. To

that end, our learning community follows principles of courtesy and mutual respect that promote reasoned discourse and intellectual honesty. Contrasting viewpoints are honored and appreciated. These principles apply to all OLLI courses, in-person and via Zoom, as well as all meetings, special events, and other activities.

Members, instructors, and staff are encouraged to contact the director (ollied@gmu.edu) if they observe behavior that is a breach of this code of conduct. Transgressions may include denigrating other's views or opinions, threatening or bullying behaviors, offensive or abusive language, disruptive classroom conduct, sexual harassment or discrimination, and monopolizing classroom discussions. Personal attacks are especially unacceptable. The director shall investigate and, if a problem is confirmed, address it directly with the alleged violator(s), and determine the appropriate consequences and board involvement, up to, and including, exclusion from OLLI Mason facilities, classes and activities.

Logistics

Emergencies

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, CALL 911

- Then contact staff members for assistance.
- As soon as you are able, inform the OLLI Office at 703-503-3384.

Course Cancellation Policy

- If you are sick or otherwise unable to teach your class, notify OLLI Mason staff immediately by calling 703-503-3384 and also by emailing olli@gmu.edu.
- Generally, OLLI Mason reserves the week after term ends to schedule any needed make-up classes.
- Any time or date changes to your class schedule must first be confirmed with the OLLI Mason administrator at olli@gmu.edu or 703-503-3384. The administrator will subsequently notify your class of approved changes or cancellations.

Attendance and Registration

Registration for each course ends the day prior to the beginning of the course (unless your max enrollment has been reached)

- Course rosters can change daily before the first day of your course.
- On occasion, members may come to a class without registering. Regardless of whether there is a chair available or not, the instructor or SA should ask non-registered participants to step out and call the office to see if they can be added to the course. (FYI: If the course has a wait list, the office follows that list for fairness. Sometimes enrollment is limited even if there is physical space available). For safety reasons, we need to know who is attending each course.

Off-Campus Sites

OLLI Mason courses are offered at a variety of sites, as well as virtually. We maintain relationships with organizations in the community, including community centers, senior living communities, churches, and libraries. Please know that these sites differ in the kinds of amenities and equipment they provide, as well as the level of support (technical and

otherwise) they can offer.

Some of our off-campus sites are partnerships. Participants in your course will include OLLI members as well as other attendees. Usually, staff from the site have the attendance list, but not always. These guests should be welcomed and encouraged to participate fully in the course. Encourage them to join OLLI!

Sending a Notice to Your Participants

Instructors are strongly encouraged to email course materials to their classes. Visit the member portal (olligmu.augusoft.net) and sign in using your instructor username and password. If you need your password or username, please email program@gmu.edu. On the left-hand toolbar, click “future classes” to see a list of your upcoming classes; they will be listed under “current classes” once class starts. To email your class, choose “email roster” from the drop-down menu found to the left of the class name. 20MB is the biggest attachment that can be sent through the OLLI Mason member portal. Please send all attachments in PDF format, as PDF files are easier for most to open.

Non-Solicitation

OLLI Mason courses are meant to be intellectual and skill enrichment opportunities for the participants. OLLI does NOT allow instructors to teach OLLI classes for the purpose of contacting new customers or generally using the course as a business opportunity. You may provide purchasing information about books, CDs, and DVDs you hope to sell to our members.

Teaching Virtually

OLLI Mason offers a significant percentage of courses online. Virtual courses remain popular with our members. Zoom is the online conferencing software used by OLLI Mason. Zoom may be used on laptops, desktops, tablets, and smartphones, giving members many ways to access online offerings.

Equipment Requirements

- **Laptop or desktop computer—Windows or Mac**
 - If your computer is over 4 years old, check the [Zoom system requirements](#) to make sure that it can run a Zoom meeting.
- **Internet connection**
 - If possible, use a wired internet connection to your home router to ensure stable internet connection and help reduce lag and other issues with video while you are teaching.
 - If using wireless, be sure to quit other applications and close browser tabs that are not in use, as well as other devices in your house that may interfere with your connection (e.g., someone else watching movies on Netflix or downloading files, etc.)
- **Camera and microphone**
 - Most computers today have built in cameras and microphones. If yours does not, contact OLLI staff, and we can make suggestions about what

- equipment additions you will need.
- You may consider purchasing a headset or earbuds to maximize audio quality. Again, let OLLI staff know if you need suggestions.

Getting Started with Zoom

- Before each term, the OLLI Mason administrator will email you detailed information about how to use Zoom.
- OLLI Mason will provide a Zoom link for your course.
- Make a habit of checking for Zoom software updates regularly to ensure you are always using the most current version.
- Test your [audio](#) and [video](#)
- [Join a test meeting](#) and [familiarize yourself with Zoom](#)
- Review our [tips](#) for teaching online classes.

Zoom Features

Here are some features that can enrich your course:

- [Share your screen](#) to show slides, video clips, research, or other illustrative materials.
- [Use breakout rooms](#) to split your class into small groups for discussions or projects.
- [Use in-meeting chat](#) to answer questions, share learning resources, or communicate privately with an individual participant or the entire class.
- [Use polling](#) to ask questions to engage participants and/or determine personal relevance or understanding of the topic.

Preparing for Your Zoom Course

- [Learn about screen sharing a PowerPoint presentation](#) and [practice sharing your screen](#)
- Launch your PowerPoint file, documents, videos, etc. prior to class so you have easy access while you are actively teaching.
- Tip: Quit other applications and close browsers and tabs that are not in use.
- Tip: [How to hide “gray” boxes from your shared screen](#)
- Keep your device charged to ensure uninterrupted teaching
- Make sure you can be seen and heard
 - Locate a quiet space in your home to avoid household noise; keep your background clear of distractions.
 - Check lighting in your space: it should come from in front of or the side of you, not behind.
 - Set your camera at eye level or higher; adjust chair height and distance from the camera.
 - Look at the camera, not at the screen, in order to make eye contact with your participants.

The Process

Three Weeks Before Class Starts

Your assigned SA will contact you to exchange contact information, discuss course logistics,

and offer you a practice session.

First Day

Twenty minutes prior to the start of your class, log in to your course using the OLLI Mason provided Zoom link. Use this time to:

- Adjust your settings, test your [audio](#) and [video](#), and resolve any potential technical issues
- Check in with your assigned SA to re-confirm logistics; for example, how you want to handle questions. Your SA will admit participants from the waiting room at the class start time.

During Class

Just as in an in-person class, it is important to have procedures for getting started, setting expectations, and establishing ground rules for the class.

- Welcome admitted participants, and check to ensure everyone can hear and see you
- Remind participants of online etiquette and ask that they:
 - Mute their mics when they are not speaking
 - “Show their face” via video to ensure an optimal learning experience for the class. Note: Recognize that some may be unable to do so due to their specific Internet set up and capacity.
 - Look at the camera in order to make eye contact when they are speaking
 - Ensure their Zoom Display/Screen Name includes their First and Last Name
 - Stop their video and mute their mic if they need to step away or take a break
- Share your syllabus/schedule for the course and your expectations of participants. For example, would you prefer to have people ask questions during and throughout the class and/or your presentation? Or would you prefer that they save their questions for the end of your presentation? Should participants use the raised-hand tool and ask questions verbally, or should they type questions into the chat?
- Pace and Tone
 - Be dynamic—use gestures and mannerisms that you would typically use in person
 - Keep a steady pace, casual tone, and always know what’s coming next
 - Don’t be afraid of silence when asking participants questions
- Encourage Participation
 - Check in with participants
 - Feel free to call on participants by name
 - Provide multiple opportunities for people to ask questions
 - In large classes, you may prefer to have participants type questions into the chat. The SA can then read the questions to you.

Dealing With Disruptive Behavior

Review the Code of Conduct. In a virtual class, you and your SA can:

- [Mute all](#) participants
- Mute specific participants
- Turn off a participants’ webcam

- Remove a participant from the classroom
 - Review [Controls for managing participants](#)

Troubleshooting Issues

Here are some common problems encountered using Zoom and how to resolve them:

- I can't hear: [Test Your Audio](#)
- I can't see: [Test Your Video](#)
- Background noise or feedback: "[Solutions for Audio Echo](#)"
- I accidentally left the class: click on the link in the reminder email to rejoin
- I misplaced the email with the Zoom link: email olli@gmu.edu and your SA no later than 8:00 a.m. on the day of class, and they will resend the link.
- Share your slides with your SA ahead of time so that he/she can show them in case of any problems. If you are using YouTube videos, it is also a good idea to share the links with your SA ahead of time.

Contact Us

- For classroom assistance or to report issues, contact OLLI at 703-503-3384 or email olli@gmu.edu.
- For Zoom or computer-related technical support, contact the OLLI Help Desk at ollizoomhelp@olligmu.org or your SA.

Best Practices in Teaching and Learning

Instructors and participants are enthusiastic about learning together and bringing their lifetime of knowledge and experience to classroom discussions. Unlike students in many typical schools or college classrooms, OLLI participants have opinions and ideas which they exuberantly share. These tips are offered as a contribution to a successful course experience for the participants and for you as an instructor.

Preparation

- Prepare a course outline/syllabus and list any references on the topic for those who wish to read more.
- Think about how you will create a positive learning atmosphere where questions are welcomed. Please encourage everyone to participate as it increases learning (but participants should always be given the option of passing).
- Use inclusive language and model respect for diverse perspectives.
- Ask yourself, "Am I excluding anyone in the way I am teaching this course, and if so, what can I do to be more inclusive?"
- If teaching in person, visit the site. In this way you will know its location when you arrive on the first day and you will have checked on audio-visual connections or other things that you may need.

The First Class: Expectations and Introductions

Your first class is an important one for setting the tone and connecting with the participants. Here are some ideas:

Beginning:

To start the class off, it's a good idea to tell the participants something about you, your background, and your interest in the topic. If you have a syllabus (and it's a great idea to have one!) you can email it to participants ahead of time. Share what the course is about, your approach to the topic, and your expectations. If the topic is controversial, acknowledge that and possible bias and that everyone in the class needs to respect one another's views. If you are nervous and haven't taught for OLLI before, explain your concerns and ask participants for their patience and helpful suggestions.

Expectations Might Include:

- Asking that hands be raised to ask a question or make a comment (and be sure to follow through because OLLI students are eager members and often interrupt to clarify a point).
- Telling them when you will take questions (during a lecture/session or at the end).
- Explaining that you expect participation, if you do. If so, what do you mean by participation?
- Providing an overview.

Handling Questions

Try these tips to handle questions effectively:

- After the question is asked, give a positive response: thank you, good question, etc.
- Restate the question so the questioner knows you have heard it correctly and so that the other class participants can hear it too (and so that you know you understand it as well).
- Answer it as best you can. Or, say you don't know and will follow up and bring a response next week.
- Utilize your SA to help manage questions.

Teaching Strategies

- If you are lecturing to provide information/facts, stop for quick discussion/Q & A about every 20 minutes (that is what works for the brain!).
- Employ a multi-sensory approach. Provide handouts and other visual material to supplement an auditory presentation. Give an oral summary of visual material you present.
- Use short slide presentations as appropriate. Good [PowerPoint presentations](#) avoid long sentences, include pictures and graphics, and have large, high-contrast fonts.
- Consider breaking up videos into segments that can be followed with discussion to stimulate class participation.
- Explain technical and scientific vocabulary and acronyms. Lists with a definition of terms are helpful.
- Avoid speaking with your back to the class.
- Ask participants to summarize what happened in class that day. At the next class session, ask them what they remember. This trains the brain to hold onto things!
- Set expectations about what you will and won't cover in the class.
- Help rambler/dominators participate while setting boundaries for them.

Classroom Management and Challenging Members

Ramblers (people who expand too much, who ask questions that don't relate to the topic, for example) are found in many courses and in meetings. Here are a few ideas to help rein in comments that go too long:

- State, "this time let's hear from someone who has not yet contributed."
- Say "thank you" and move on. Sometimes you may need to say "thank you and I'm going to move on now" a few times. Yes, you may need to interrupt their comments mid-sentence at times.
- Say "Please talk to me about that after class, I want to keep moving with X topic."
- If someone is raising their hand but you want to move on -- "I see you, but am going to wait until later for questions and comments."
- Talk to the person after class, and tell them that you appreciate their keen interest in the class, and ask if they would limit their in-class questions to two—to give other people the chance to speak up.

Course Feedback - So Useful to You

Feedback from class participants can be invaluable to you as you prepare to teach another class. There are two main ways that you can get feedback: the OLLI Course Feedback Form and your own that you prepare.

- Upon request, the OLLI office will provide you with a feedback form to distribute and collect from your participants at the end of your course. Staff does not collect forms or evaluate instructors.
- Prepare your own comment form. For more information for yourself and to help your own teaching, you can prepare a short comment form yourself and have your students fill it out in the last class. Make it specific to your course and how you were delivering it. You can ask such questions as:
 - What was the most important learning for you in this course?
 - What worked best for you?
 - What didn't work so well? Why?

Summary

Thank you for being an OLLI Mason instructor. We couldn't do the important work we do without the commitment of our talented instructors! Teaching for OLLI is rewarding, and we are committed to helping make this experience a positive one for you. We are here to help troubleshoot, and to help you find what you need.

To this end, we are committed to 1) providing a welcoming environment for you, 2) helping you connect with resources, and 3) answer any questions that come up for you.

Please let us know if you need anything!

OLLI Staff

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