

Teaching at Scale

There is something energizing about teaching a large group. The room feels alive with curiosity, conversation, and shared enthusiasm for mah jongg. Players feed off one another's excitement, instructors build momentum together, and the experience often feels more like a community gathering than a lesson. When it works well, large learning events create a sense of connection and possibility that smaller sessions simply cannot replicate.

At the same time, scale introduces complexity. More people mean more movement, more noise, more questions, and more variables to manage. Without structure, even the best content can get lost in the logistics. What feels dynamic at twenty participants can quickly feel chaotic at forty or fifty. Large-group instruction isn't simply a bigger lesson — it's a different kind of learning experience that requires thoughtful design.

The good news is that large learning experiences can be both smooth and meaningful when they are built intentionally. Sound planning, strong instructional support, and precise execution allow instructors to maintain focus while still preserving the warmth and energy that make these gatherings memorable. When roles are clear, transitions are predictable, and activities are well matched to the environment, the group's size becomes an asset rather than an obstacle. This is where preparation matters most.

Before choosing a format or designing activities, it helps to establish a few best practices that support large-group instruction. These foundational habits — planning the space, coordinating instructors, managing sound and movement, and structuring transitions — create the conditions that enable comfortable learning in a shared environment.

Space and Layout

Before the event, decide how the room will support the learning format. Plan where instructors will stand, where participants will sit, and how movement will happen if rotations are involved. Leave walking space between tables so instructors can move easily. Avoid clustering all activity in the center of the room when the perimeter can help disperse sound.

Instructor Coordination

Confirm instructor roles, topics, and timing ahead of the event. Make sure activities are compatible rather than sequential so participants can move between groups without confusion. Agree on rotation timing, transition signals, and how instructors will support one another during the session.



Sound Strategy

Large rooms quickly amplify background noise, especially when tiles are in motion. Consider whether a microphone and portable speaker would help with opening remarks and transitions. Plan to give instructions when tiles are still and voices are quiet. Table-level teaching voices are usually more effective than projecting across the room.

Visibility and Materials

Ensure participants can clearly see demonstration tiles, printed materials, and any visual aids being used. Large visuals, tabletop examples, or a flip chart can help anchor instruction. Check lighting in advance so cards and tiles are easy to read from every seat.

Participant Flow

Plan how participants will move or remain seated during the session. Clear instructions at the beginning prevent confusion later. If rotations are part of the design, keep them predictable and consistent. When transitions feel smooth, the entire room stays calmer.

Energy Management

Plan a balance between listening, discussion, and hands-on activity. Providing participants with something to do with their hands helps maintain attention and reduces ambient noise. Short, structured activities tend to be more effective than lengthy explanations in large-group settings.

Once these foundations are in place, instructors can choose a format that fits the space, the group, and the event goals. The following formats offer two ways to structure large-group workshops so participants remain engaged, instructors feel supported, and the learning experience stays organized, interactive, and fun.



LABS

The Lab format keeps participants seated in small table groups while instructors rotate between them. Each instructor delivers a short, focused skill builder that participants immediately practice with tiles in hand. Instead of presenting to the whole room, instructors function more like coaches, moving from table to table. The experience feels hands-on, supportive, and contained, which helps maintain focus in larger groups.

Preparation

Instructors agree in advance on the specific skill builder each person will bring. Activities should be short, repeatable, and independent from one another so participants can join at any point without missing context. Timing should be consistent across rotations, and a simple signal for rotation should be established. Tables should be arranged with enough space for instructors to move easily between groups.

How It Works

Participants are divided into table groups at the start of the session. Instructors rotate from table to table at set intervals, guiding participants through a short exercise at each stop. Because participants remain seated, transitions are quick, and the room stays organized. Each table experiences all skill builders by the end of the session.

Pros

This format keeps noise levels manageable because instruction happens at the table level rather than across the room. Participants receive more individualized attention, and the repeated practice builds confidence quickly. Movement is limited, which makes the format easier to manage in tight spaces or when mobility is a concern.

Cons

Instructor timing must be coordinated carefully to keep rotations aligned. The format limits the number of distinct topics that can be covered, since activities must be short and repeatable. It also requires instructors to be comfortable facilitating small-group coaching rather than presenting to a large audience.

Summary

Labs create a coaching-focused learning environment where repetition and guided practice are the priority. This format works best when the goal is skill development and confidence building in a large-group setting.



STATIONS

The Stations format places instructors at designated learning areas around the room, with participant groups rotating among them. Each station focuses on a compatible topic related to a shared theme, but sessions are not sequential or interdependent. Stations are intentionally designed with varied noise levels and activity types to keep the room balanced and manageable.

Preparation

Instructors coordinate topics under a shared theme and design short sessions that can stand alone. The room layout should be planned in advance, placing stations around the perimeter or with space between them to help disperse sound. Clear signage and a visible rotation plan help participants move confidently between stations.

How It Works

Participants are divided into small groups and rotate through stations at timed intervals. Some stations may involve quiet tile analysis or written exercises, while others may involve discussion or demonstration. Because not every station requires the same speaking volume, the room maintains a steady energy without becoming overwhelming.

Pros

Stations allow multiple topics to be explored in a single event while keeping participants active and engaged. The format creates variety in both instruction style and movement, which helps sustain attention in longer workshops. It also allows instructors to teach within their strengths by focusing on one topic repeatedly.

Cons

Movement between stations requires coordination and clear time management. Noise levels can rise if stations are placed too close together or if all activities require simultaneous speaking. The format also requires more room layout planning than other approaches.

Summary

Stations create a dynamic, conference-style learning experience within a single room. This format works best when the goal is exposure to ideas, shared energy, and a variety of instructors rather than extended practice on a single skill.

