

# Overcoming Impostor Syndrome

## Facilitator's Guide

### Introduction

The Overcoming Impostor Syndrome class was created by the Ada Initiative to teach women in open technology and culture how to overcome [Impostor Syndrome](#), the feeling that you are not qualified for the work you are doing and may be revealed as a fraud at any moment. While this class is designed for women in open technology and culture, it can be adapted for any group that is the target of oppression. This guide is released under the [Creative Commons Attribution Sharealike 4.0 license](#), meaning you are free to reuse, modify, and share this or any derivative work as long as you also give other people the right to do the same.

### Materials and room setup

To teach the class, you will need these materials:

- A/V: projector and screen, plus microphone and speakers for classes of more than ~30 people
- Slides
- Printouts of the Overcoming Impostor Syndrome handout (one per participant)
- Sticky notes (about 5 per participant, multiple colors is nice)
- Pens (1 per participant)

The slides, handouts, and this guide can be downloaded from:

<http://adainitiative.org/continue-our-work/impostor-syndrome-training/>

The classroom should be organized so that participants can work in groups of 3-5 people and have a comfortable writing surface. Participants must also be able to see the presenter's slides. For classes more than 20-30 people in size, we recommend two hand-held microphones (use both for report-out sessions). We recommend small tables seating 3-5 people, with chairs only on the sides where people can see the slides.

We suggest putting the sticky notes and pens on the tables before people arrive. Depending on the number of people, it might make more sense to hand people the handout as they check-in, or put the handouts on the tables before they arrive.

Optional: Find a wall where people can easily add and remove sticky notes left over from the "Take a compliment" exercise. It should be a wall where about 10 people can stand in front and

look at the sticky notes and should have good traffic flow so that people can get to it and leave again easily.

## Schedule

The class can take anywhere from 1 hour to 2 hours with small changes in how long the group work and report-out sessions are allowed to run. Sample schedule for a 50 minute class:

- 15 minutes: Introduction
- 5 minutes: Split into groups
- 10 minutes: Take a compliment exercise
- 10 minutes: Values exercise
- 10 minutes: Combating negative thoughts exercise
- 5 minutes: Wrap-up

You can easily double the time spent on each exercise, bringing the class to 80 minutes long:

- 15 minutes: Introduction
- 5 minutes: Split into groups
- 20 minutes: Take a compliment exercise
- 20 minutes: Values exercise
- 20 minutes: Combating negative thoughts exercise
- 5 minutes: Wrap-up

## Choosing the instructor

The instructor should have fairly extensive education and experience in the various ways that the participants have experienced oppression. They should be ready to reframe statements that reinforce oppression to prevent victim-blaming or reinforcing oppressive dynamics. For example, if someone asks, "Why are women so emotional at work?" the instructor should reframe this by saying, "Actually, men are very emotional at work too, but usually the emotion they express is anger due to the way we socialize men. However, because of sexism, acceptable male emotions like anger and lust are defined out of the concept of 'emotional' and it becomes a word to describe emotions that women have that make men uncomfortable. What we should be asking instead is, why is it so much more acceptable for men to shout or show anger at work than it is for women to cry or show vulnerability at work?"

It is best if the instructor is a member of the same group as the people attending the class for several reasons:

- The instructor will be more likely to have experienced the specific problems facing members of this group.
- The instructor can better serve as a role model if they are part of the same group.

- The position of instructor is a position of power and leadership and giving it to a person in the same group helps raise the status of people in that group.

Some considerations for the presenter to keep in mind at a higher level:

- Never pressure anyone to share or take part in the exercises.
- The more willing you are to share your personal struggles and to be vulnerable in front of the class, the more valuable the experience for the attendees.
- While we have a lot of instructions for how to reduce the likelihood of someone becoming emotionally overwhelmed in the workshop, sometimes it is impossible to avoid. Be prepared for people to cry or become emotional in some other way, and be ready to comfort them and move them into a private place.

That's it! Go forth and teach people how to overcome Impostor Syndrome!