Guidelines for Technical Support Assistants

Depending on the venue, various items of equipment are available to assist in running a course, including laptop computers, data projectors, wall mounted TVs, in-built Wi-Fi or portable Wi-Fi "dongles" and sound systems, some owned by the venue, and some owned by U3A Southern Highlands.

Commonly, a course leader wishes to deliver a PowerPoint presentation. This works best if the PowerPoint file is brought by the course leader on a USB flash drive which can be inserted into a U3A laptop. These laptops are set up to work at the various venues we use.

In large venues, use of a microphone is recommended as many of our members experience hearing difficulties.

To provide help for course leaders, U3A has a group of specialists who provide computer and audio-visual technical support to the course leader. These technical (tech) support assistants work under the direction of the Equipment and Technology Coordinator (a member of the Management Committee).

The skills and experience a tech support assistant needs

Broadly, a tech support assistant will be proficient at:
- Using a Windows based computer to:
    * copy files from a USB flash drive
    * set up a PowerPoint presentation via a data projector or TV connection
    * use either the venue's Wi-Fi or one of our Wi-Fi dongles to establish a wireless connection for web browsing.
- Using the other audio-visual equipment at the venue(s) the assistant supports.

It helps if the person has been or is a U3A Southern Highlands course leader and has made presentations at one or more of the venues we use frequently.

In addition, a person new to the role is coached in the use of the equipment.

Tech support assistants work in a small team

- Courses needing technical assistance are identified by the Course Coordinators in our U-MAS membership administration system by adding the word "Tech" in the Admin Notes box in the course description.
- To meet these needs, the Equipment and Technology Coordinator has a small team.
- By negotiation with team members, a roster of tech support assistants responsible for the courses needing technical help is maintained as a tracking spreadsheet.

Before the first class session

- The tech support assistant will make direct contact with the Course Leader to discuss the specific needs of the course.

- Usually, in conjunction with the Venues Coordinator, the tech support assistant will visit the venue with the course leader to view the relevant facilities and equipment to become familiar with the specific features of the venue. This includes Wi-Fi passwords and the location of any stored equipment.

During each class session

On the day(s) of course presentation, the tech support assistant will arrive at the venue at least 30 minutes before the start of the course. This timing allows for setting up the equipment and resolving any teething problems, so the course leader can begin the course calmly.

The tech support assistant needs to:
- obtain the right pieces of equipment from their storage places – on site or from offsite U3A storage – before the start of a session
- check that everything is connected and working well before the start
- help resolve problems during the session
- return everything to its proper place at the end.