

Systems Activity 2: Night School

There used to be night-schools all across the country – regular colleges and schools that taught young students by day would then open their doors and teach adults at night.

Night school classes didn't last long – an hour, sometimes 90 minutes – but teaching there always felt very different to day school. Some differences were obvious: no uniform of course; no assemblies and tutorials, non-one using 'Sir' or 'Miss'. Other differences were more subtle. The students who turned up really wanted to be there. They were keen, asked lots of questions, went over their notes in detail and enjoyed the learning process. There was no sitting slumped in a corner, no whispering or checking phones while the teacher looked away; night-school students were organised and focused.

For this activity, consider *what a night school would look like if you designed it yourself*.

There's one student – you. And there's one teacher – you. You get to decide which days of the week it runs on, and when the classes start and finish. You decide where night school takes place. You're in charge of the curriculum, so each session is designed by you. Most of all, you're in charge of the culture and behaviour; you get to be focused, engaged and interested, and do things that fascinate you, or turn dull topics into interesting quizzes and activities.

It's a lot to think about and will take some planning, so grab a pen and scribble some impressions...

1. Activities and resources

What would attending your night school feel like? What kind of activities would be happening?

Night school should be active and interesting. Are there are videos to watch, new ways of taking notes, colourful summaries, pictures and displays? Are there big sheets of paper and felt-tip pens? Mini-whiteboards and quizzes? Is there sometimes a homework club? A 'hard-questions' section of the class? A time when you have to give a mini-lecture, out loud, summarising a topic?

2. Rituals and Rewards

What are the traditions that always happen?

You're the boss, so you could have a night school where you have a blast of music that starts the session, or the radio on quietly in the background. You could have biscuits, fancy drinks. You could take a break at a certain point or end each session a certain way. There could be scoreboards, calendars and charts to record progress.

3. Timetable

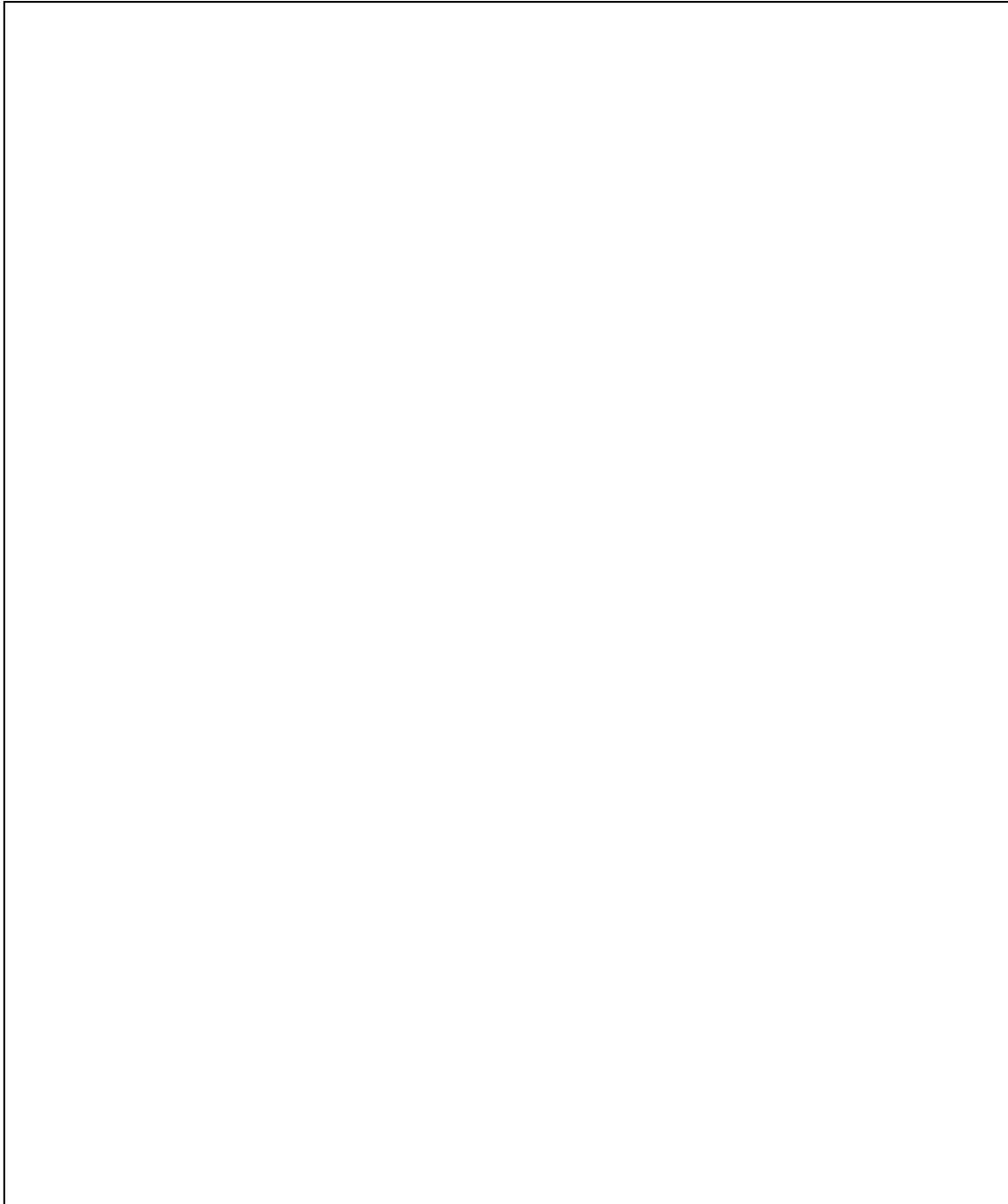
When would your night school run?

90 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays? Once a week but for two hours? Straight after school/college in that fallow period between 4:00 and 5:30pm? Or does it start later after you've had a chance to recharge, running from 7:00 until 8:30? How might you break down the time? Three 30 minute sessions? One full hour then a short blast of admin?

4. Campus

What does your classroom look like?

Are you in a branch of a coffee shop or an ice-cream place? Is there a library that you use? Is there a room or space on your school/college campus that acts as your HQ? Or is it your bedroom at home? Wherever it is – can you design the environment a little? Organise your desk a certain way to indicate night school is in session; close some curtains, move furniture, switch off phones?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a student to draw or write their ideas for a night school environment.

Now that you've got some ideas – run night school for a couple of weeks. Start as soon as possible, get into it and see what it feels like. Plan some simple sessions reviewing notes or recapping day-school topics. It won't be long before you're getting ahead on your work. You'll understand things more in class; stress and anxiety will melt away. Your grades might improve, your teachers might seem surprised and delighted.

You might even consider combining schools for a session a week with a friend.