



## Facilitators' Guide



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## **Intro**

Thanks for considering facilitating a permablitz! In starting to writing these guidelines down now, after over 90 permablitzes had already happened in Melbourne, we realised how organic and informal the process has been and yet it usually works really well – fuelled often by a sense of fun and passion. There are also a lot of basic things we could do more consistently well too. So once you have these fundamentals covered, feel free to mix it up, improve on these suggestions, give us your feedback, and enjoy yourself doing it.

We assume that you're fairly familiar with the permablitz concept and that you've been on some permablitzes in the past. If not check out the other resources on [www.permablitz.net](http://www.permablitz.net)

It's probable that you were also a designer of the permablitz property, and possible that you are also the host of the blitz. We have separate guides for these roles (email [permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com) if you need a copy). This booklet is about what happens after the design has been done, and what happens before the day, on the day and after the day.

## **Your role as facilitator**

Your role as facilitator takes place primarily on the day of the permablitz, where you will be doing your best to make sure that:

- work gets done according to a plan,
- people are learning as they go,
- no one gets hurt,
- and everyone feels useful and has a good time.

Often times, but not always, you're also one of the designers of the blitz. If not, you need to have a clear understanding of the design and what your role is before the day with regards to organising materials, which is usually a job shared between the designers (providing information) and the hosts (doing the leg work).

On the day you shouldn't be doing lots of manual work yourself. You'll be facilitating an intro circle, walking around and making sure people feel useful, that they understand the design and principles of what they are doing, that work is going according to plan, and you'll likely be running workshops, announcing lunch, and helping thank everyone at the end.

Our experience from the permablitzes so far is that the best facilitators are not micromanagers, but rather give people the understanding and a certain amount of freedom to figure things out and problem solve. You'll likely be working with a bunch of strangers, but generally intelligent and interesting ones, and it's amazing how well it all holds together and works.

That said, you do need to be good at delegating. You might be doing small bits and pieces of work though out the day, but your main role is not as a worker. People are there to work so don't be afraid to give it to them. There will be times in the day when some clear leadership and direction is needed. You do need to be sensitive to where things can go wrong too.

## ***Working with other facilitators***

On anything other than an unusually simple permablitz you will likely be co-facilitating or have people picked out before the day to oversee particular areas of the day (project leaders). On some blitzes where there have been lots of people, several independent projects happening simultaneously, and lot of workshops running, we've had up to six or

seven facilitators working at different levels.

### ***Types of facilitators:***

You can think about the different types of facilitators in this way:

- **Main blitz facilitator**  
Has the overview of everything that is going to go on during the day. Usually this person facilitates the intro circle. They keep track of time and big picture issues.
- **Vibes watcher**  
This might be the same person as the overall blitz facilitator. The role is to make sure everyone feels useful, is in a workshop, or otherwise happy. They may be the person that meets and greets everyone that arrives.
- **Project facilitators / aka Team leaders**  
The project facilitators may be taking care of one aspect of the blitz, such as co-ordinating the building of a chicken coop, or digging a swale.
- **Workshop facilitators**  
These may also be any of the above people, or people that aren't facilitating anything else at all. This is about running short educational workshops.

Most of this document is written for the main blitz facilitator, but it's good to have a feel for the process whatever role you're in.

## **Logistics**

Before the day you need to think about logistics. Some of the things to consider are:

- Where are the bottlenecks for the movement of soil and other materials? If, for instance, you have to be going down a long narrow pathway perhaps only two wheelbarrows can be operating efficiently at once, or can you co-ordinate them to work as a 'train' in order that the path gets used more efficiently?
- Can you avoid double handling (or worse) of materials by having a plan where things are stored temporarily?
- What jobs depend on other jobs being completed first? (Laying of irrigation lines might need to precede path building for instance). What jobs can happen independent of all others? Aim to get anything that could hold up other jobs out of the way quickly.
- The order that materials are put on a truck, and therefore come off the truck, can make a significant difference.
- Is there anything, like a ramp, that could make a major difference to speed and safety?
- If it's possible that not all soil gets moved, or tasks get finished, is the host prepared for that? What's most important to them?

## **Permablitz numbers**

Most blitzes, particularly in the inner city quickly fill up. We recommend that the host handles RSVPs in order to limit numbers and give them a sense of catering requirements. You might help them choose a limit for these numbers.

The number of people you can handle depends on:

- 1) size of the block
- 2) amount of work to do
- 3) whether there are extra facilitators who can run workshops through out the day to soak up all the spare energy and make sure people have a good time.

Two things can happen if the blitz is 'oversubscribed' relative to the amount of work to do:

- If there are enough facilitators it can be a fantastic blitz as everyone gets a good mix of working and workshops
- If there aren't enough workshops or facilitators it can be frustrating for attendees

It's rare that more than 20 people can be 100% utilised for a whole day on a suburban site, but nevertheless blitzes of 50 or more can be great successes if there are simultaneous projects, and enough facilitators and workshops.

## Promoting the Blitz

Between you and the host, assuming you want members of the public to attend, we need a short blurb to promote the blitz.

We like at least a month's notice, that way we aren't rushing to write a newsletter to promote the blitz. You can post a blurb to the website calendar yourself:

<http://www.permablitz.net/calendar/add-an-event> or just send us an email [permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com)

## Typical running order of a blitz

Here's a typical running sheet for a blitz. We'll go into more detail about some aspects below.

### **9am or earlier**

All facilitators meet with host on site to finalise plan for day, and get last minute things prepared, and get in the mood for a great day.

### **10am**

Welcoming, and getting started with simple jobs. See details below.

### **11am**

Now most people have arrived, form a meet-and-greet circle. See details below .

### **11:30am**

Back to work, this time with more purpose. Possibly breaking up into teams. May be small workshops to explain processes of what's going on.

### **1pm**

Lunch

### **1:45**

Back to work!

### **4pm**

Gather in a circle to celebrate what has been achieved and thank everyone before they start to drift off.

If there's anything left to do some people might choose to hang around and help.

Music, dancing? People may feel sweaty and dirty and want to go home but sometimes the blitzes turn into small parties.

***Throughout the day, and before any new process that requires some knowledge:***

Workshops!

## Welcoming

As people arrive in the morning do your best to introduce yourself and the attendees to each other. Have some DIY name tags ready to go (texta and masking tape suffice) for both people and their tools, and ideally a hot cup of tea will be provided by the host. Explain that we'll be gathering soon to explain the design and the outline of the day, and before that the day may seem a bit chaotic.

It's usual to have a simple preparatory job ready that people can get stuck into with minimal instruction, such as weeding or moving materials to a skip bin etc.

Let everyone know that the next hour might seem a bit chaotic but we will come together and explain things when a few more people have arrived.

Suggest people warm up a bit and don't do any dangerous stuff until we do our health and safety stuff at 11.

## Gathering circle

At around one hour into the official starting time of the blitz or when most people have arrived, ask people to stop working and come together for an introduction.

The things to cover are:

- Group welcome
- Names and introductions
- Explaining the design
- Housekeeping
- Health and Safety
- Timetable for the rest of the day
- Explaining the tasks for the day and breaking into groups



## Group Welcome

Welcome everyone and introduce yourself and the host briefly by name. Explain that we're going to go through the design. Ask who hasn't been to a permablitz before, and explain or ask someone to explain the basic idea in an exciting way.

## Introductions

Ask people to say their name, their suburb, how many blitzes they've been to. Sometimes we explain that anyone can run a 10 minute workshop on something and if you have any special skill you'd like to share you are welcome, and people can nominate something at this point too (works at only 1 in 5 blitzes but great when it does).

If anyone is on their 3rd blitz they should get a round of applause since they now qualify to have one of their own if they want it!

Introduce any other facilitators or team leaders.

## Housekeeping

Mention where the toilets are, water, and any site specific things people should need to know.

You should also mention that there may be photos taken for the website and if anyone doesn't want to be in them they should come and see you.



## ***Health and safety issues.***

### *First aid*

Check the location of the Host's first aid kit and mention this during the welcome circle. Also identify any facilitators (or participants) with first aid or medical training. We're hoping to get funding to get more of our regular facilitators first aid trained, and if this is you, get in touch! [permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com)

### *Back care*

There should be a demonstration of good back care at every blitz.

Humans aren't very well evolved when it comes down to it. We haven't been walking upright long enough to really get that robust in some place, and one of those weak spots is the lower back, which we can injure very easily, especially if we spend a lot of time sitting down, and then do physical work without warming up.

The basic principles for good back care on a blitz are:

- not bending as you dig or lift with your back, instead using your legs to lift as much as possible with a relatively straight back. At the end of the day it should be your butt which hurts not your back, which leads to looking good in tight pants, so why wouldn't you?
- and certainly not bending and twisting at the same time which is especially bad and a common thing to do when moving compost from a pile to a wheelbarrow for instance! Take steps where necessary, and moving from the legs, hip and arms rather than twisting the back.
- pulling in your stomach muscles below your navel, back towards your spine, where they support your back more, as you lift or dig.
- using short handled shovels for heavy things like clay or soil, as the greater leverage on long handled implements can cause more problems for you.
- take breaks and rest your back when necessary. Don't overdo it!
- warming up before work.

One thing we've done is to ask everyone in the group to show us one stretch, and by the time we've gone around the circle we'll have done pretty good back stretches.

Here's a link to a video of Thomas doing a health and safety workshop, and the beginnings of a communal stretch:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w543YrS96r4>

And Lex doing a crazy dynamic stretching workshop:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utYo-jNUDjw>

The basic principles are that before you start physical work you want to warm up, get your balance and according to Lex, "excite your proprioceptors, so you're waking up your nervous system, not just stretching your muscles". Don't worry, it doesn't have to be that elaborate, but it sure looks fun!

Facilitators should keep an eye on everyone's digging and lifting style throughout the day and help them improve it. You can work a lot longer when you do it right too. We've gone so far as to 'disqualify' someone once after they kept digging badly even after they'd hurt their back! You can threaten this as a joke anyway.

### *Tools*

Tools can of course be dangerous..

#### *Power Tools*

Powertools with a blade (circular saws, angle grinders, chainsaws etc) pose a particularly high risk and we recommend that:

1. Power tools should not be used on a blitz.

Remember that during a blitz there will be lots of people and possibly kids on the site. Besides the obvious dangers, cables from power tools are a tripping hazard, and the noise of power tools is at best irritating, and at worst, damaging without ear protection. Please try to complete any jobs requiring these tools before the day.

2. Blitzes should use hand tools where possible.

Yes it takes a little longer and more elbow grease, but there are usually plenty of helping hands during a blitz and using hand tools is a much safer alternative. These tools allow more people to participate and also allow us to demonstrate 'small and slow solutions'!

3. If use of power tools during the blitz absolutely cannot be avoided, the following precautions are taken:

- Create a fenced-off exclusion zone to keep people well away from the area
- Nominate someone as a spotter for this area to stop anyone from accidentally wandering into the quarantine zone and putting themselves or the tool user at risk.
- Nominate someone to take primary responsibility for these tools, including making sure they are not left unattended during breaks etc.
- Ensure that only properly trained and competent people use these tools, and at their own risk
- Proper safety equipment (including earplugs and goggles) are used



*Thomas demonstrates the COD*

### *Hand tools*

The mattock was once a medieval weapon of war. When you use an implement like that you have around you a **Circle Of Death** of which you and others should be well aware. Do not enter the Circle Of Death! Practice common sense with all tools,

and only use mattocks, garden forks, shovels etc. if you have appropriate footwear on.

### *Site specific dangers*

Are there trenches, rickety steps, stinging nettle patches, bull-ant nests or any other site specific dangers to point out?

### *Sun care*

It's good to have some sunscreen on hand. Let people know where it is.

### *First aid kit*

Make sure the host has a good first aid kit before the day. Ask who in the group has first aid training.

## ***Explaining the design***

A large print out of the design is useful, while also referring to places in the actual yard.

This is your chance both to explain the main areas being focused on for the day but also to explain some of the principles of permaculture as they are embodied in the design. This can be really interesting and exciting stuff especially to people hearing it for the first time. You can explain concepts like the value of diversity, multifunctionality, oftenist-nearist principle (zones), relative location, use of slope and microclimates etc, while explaining the functionality of the design. So rather than just the *what*, give people some of the *why*. You should say a little about the hosts and what your design brief was for context and any significant physical features of the site.

## ***Timetable for the rest of the day***

Simply explain when we plan to take lunch and when we might run some workshops and when we're planning to finish.

## ***Explaining the tasks for the day and breaking into groups***

Explain the steps involved in achieving the design. What order do things have to happen in? What are the bottlenecks? (Eg. there might be only two wheelbarrows and lots of soil to move, so they need to be moving all day non stop). If you have co-facilitators handling certain aspects of the day, have them explain what needs to be done in their area. You can let people know that it is your job as a facilitator to make sure they feel useful, have something to do and are well informed, and to approach you if they are feeling under utilised or have any doubts about how to do something.



**Break up into groups and get going!**

(Photo found [here](#), original source uncredited. Used without permission)



## Workshops

Every blitz should have at least one or two significant workshops planned.

The basic workshops are usually directly related to the tasks of the day such as planting fruit trees, making no-dig gardens, building compost piles etc, and happen directly before we start work on that project. Since many people will know how to do it already, you can keep these short and sweet generally.

Secondary workshops can be on anything permaculture or sustainability related, might be kitchen related, might provide some more background and general principles about what we're doing on the day, anything really. Some examples are sourdough bread, local geology, chook health, if the host has a solar system or other features of the house you can do a workshop on those, whatever!

Depending on the number of people and workloads, you may find there are people standing around with little to do.

At other times, rain may be heavy and work stops. (Although even then not always!)

It is great to have some workshops on hand and ready to go at a moment's notice for these events.

If numbers are high and some people are looking underutilised and bored, we can run a workshop for half the people, and when it's over, run it again for the other half.



## Prioritising

Is everything going to get finished? Be aware that lunch time often breaks the day in two but there is **less time after lunch** than before it. Are there things you can prioritise that will help the most?

## Thanks and finishing the day off

Before people drift off individually, it's best to bring people together to have another circle, celebrate what's been achieved, and thank everyone for their effort, thank the host for the meal and sometimes, have a bit of music and cake or something like that. If

there's still work to be done and you and other people are keen to hang around they can. Sometimes a beer for the late stayers from the host doesn't go astray here(!)

## Reflections

We hope it goes fantastically! But if it doesn't (even a mediocre blitz is a good day for most people attending, so don't worry about it) that's a great learning opportunity.

In order to make the most of our experience, we need to share it. We'd really appreciate your help.

There are two audiences:

1. The broader public, usually via the website
2. Other designers and facilitators



For the former, in Melbourne we currently have a Permablitz Documenter in the collective, who's role it is to make sure photos are taken for the website and a brief report or quotes from the designers/facilitators/host/attendees are gathered. They may not necessarily attend themselves. For this side of things we would ideally need a colourful and possibly a bit educational (documenting one of the workshops) report. It's mostly about celebrating and sharing your achievements! If for what ever reason you don't hear from the Permablitz Documenter, we'd love it if you could prepare a report or just send a paragraph or two to [permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com)! THANKS!

For the benefit of other designers and facilitators, we need to know the nitty gritty. If things were tough in places, that's great too. Give us the juicy details as that's how we learn. What we want to know is:

- what you aimed to achieve
- what went right
- what went wrong
- what lessons were learnt which could help future designers/facilitators
- any other reflections about the process

We'll send out a survey that covers this which we'll share with other designer and facilitators. In Melbourne you could also send thoughts that directly to the Designers Guild if you are a member: [melb\\_designers@permablitz.net](mailto:melb_designers@permablitz.net)

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Thanks for spreading the permablitz spirit. We hope this guide helps, and don't hesitate to be in contact [permablitz@gmail.com](mailto:permablitz@gmail.com)

Good luck and enjoy!

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**[www.permablitz.net](http://www.permablitz.net)**

#### **Document Version**

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