

Simple Blockading Techniques

Why use this exercise?

- As with passive resistance, these techniques aren't the sort of thing you experience in your everyday life, so it can be incredibly useful for people to feel what it can be like both physically and emotionally to lock on or to form a human blockade.
- Again it's an interactive physical exercise that can be contrasted with more 'thinking' sessions to form a workshop that suits all tastes and learning styles.

Issues to explore

- *Effectiveness* – is the technique useful? In what situations?
- *Health and Safety* – what are the possible risks involved? What can you do to mitigate them?
- *Empowerment* – how does it feel to work with others to hold a space or create a blockade? Who has the power in the relationship with the police/ security?
- *Communication & decision making*– unlike passive resistance, in blockading situations you're almost always working as part of a group – how can you communicate successfully in potentially stressful, changing and even noisy situations?
- *'Fashion Tips'* – what practical issues are there about the way you're dressed? What accessories are useful and what are potentially dangerous? Anything that's not already been covered in the passive resistance exercise?
- *Support* – any blockade requires support; people prepared to bring food and drink, help with communication and decision making, liaise with police, speak to the media, or just keep spirits up. What level of support are people comfortable with?

How to run the exercise:

As with the passive resistance practice, issue a warning at the beginning that this isn't an exercise suitable for people with back problems / injuries. Make sure the group

know it's optional and that there's always value in having observers.

There are 2 basic ways to run the exercise

1. Work with the group's *own* ideas
2. Ask them to try techniques that *you* suggest

The former is more empowering and involving, but you will get some impractical suggestions from time to time, and it may take more time to explore the topic. The latter is more directive. If you choose this approach, try and leave some of the thinking to the group, and ask questions rather than only input information.



photos: Leeds University People & Planet

Working with the group's own ideas

1. Set out the context – you want to practice ways of taking and holding a space creatively and effectively. It can help to give a concrete scenario that ties into the group's own campaigning work, for example occupying the forecourt of a petrol station, or a highstreet bank
2. Using a clear space in the room, ask people to suggest ways in which they could effectively hold the space. Once you have 3 or 4 ideas, ask for volunteers to demonstrate them.
3. For each idea ask a few questions to help the group assess it's effectiveness, eg: - "how strong do you feel?... how easy is it

for you to communicate, for example if you needed to make a decision in an emergency? ..how does that compare to the last idea?"

4. If some of the 'classic' blockading techniques haven't emerged, ask the group if they'd like you to show them (see below for more on this) and respond accordingly.

Using techniques that you suggest

1. Ask for at least 3 volunteers. Get your volunteers to sit on the floor in a line, facing the same way. You could ask them to get close together and link arms at the elbows, taking hold of their own wrists. It can be more empowering to let the volunteers think for themselves – just ask them to imagine they need to block the space – how are they going to do it. They'll normally find their own way to linking arms, and with a little help can refine their technique.
2. Explain that this is one technique for creating a temporary human blockade.
3. Ask for feedback –
 - How does it feel?
 - Do they feel stronger? Bring out that the people on the end are more vulnerable because they're only attached to the line by one arm. You can tell them this, but if you ask "How safe do you feel", the end people will often say they feel less secure.
 - Are there any safety or comfort issues? What if the group were sitting on concrete? In a muddy field? What support would the group like if this were a real blockade? You could mention that they can't use their hands, so can't light cigarettes, open a drink, make a phone call...
 - You could also ask if anyone has any experience of other ways of blockading with their bodies, and make time to demonstrate/ practice their suggestions.
4. Ask for more volunteers until you have at least 6 people and invite them to form a circle, sitting on the ground, with

everyone facing inwards, and linked together as before.

5. Ask for feedback –
 - How does it feel? Usually there will be a comment that it feels more sociable, easier to communicate, or stronger. Remind people (if they don't make the comment themselves) that they need to act as each others eyes, since they are all facing inwards and can't see behind them. Mention that they now have the option of entangling their legs as well.
6. Explore what might happen if one person was being removed from the circle by force. What are the important issues? How can the group communicate to avoid holding on to someone that wants to leave the group (they could be being pressure pointed by the police and be in a good deal of pain)?
7. If you have time, the group may want to practice other possibilities, such as circles facing outwards.



photos: Leeds University People & Planet

What to take and not to take on the action:

In addition to the 'fashion tips' mentioned in the *Passive Resistance* guide you might like to draw out the following relevant points:

- Taking essentials with you like
 - *water* (plastic bottle not glass – glass could break and cause injury)
 - *snacks* to keep your blood sugar up
 - A *rucksack* to protect your neck,

spine & kidneys – make sure that backpack doesn't contain items that will cause you discomfort (hardback books, glass bottles etc)

- any *medication* that you need to take on a regular basis – taking enough to last you for the action and for a stay in police custody
- Not taking anything that could *injure* you or anyone else, could add to the chances of you being arrested, or might *incriminate* someone:
- *maps, briefing sheets, lists of names and phone numbers* that aren't absolutely essential
- *illegal drugs*
- anything that could be construed as an *offensive weapon* unless it's necessary for the action – knives, scissors, glass bottles etc.
- *jewellery* that might catch in clothing, or injure anyone in any way
- *anything valuable* that you don't mind getting lost or broken

Timing:

You can expect to cover the information above in 15-20 minutes as an absolute minimum, if you choose a more directive approach.

Notes:

- It's easy to create a hierarchy of the more experienced, or more 'up for it', and leave people feeling inadequate because they have never locked on, or don't feel that they want to. To avoid this emphasise:
 - the need for, and the value of, *support roles* on actions.
 - The validity of *all types of blockading* – whether lock-ons or using only people. It's matter of personal choice
- It's equally important not to make light of the risks and safety issues

Variations:

Fluency - depending on time you can practice variations on the circle or line that

the group come up with. You could give the participants the chance to get fluent with having to form a circle or line quickly.

Blockading equipment - also depending on time you might introduce other simple blockading tools such as D-locks, handcuffs or arm tubes. This can be as simple as a quick visual demonstration. You can then leave the tools out for people to play with in breaks. Obviously it's possible to extend this and run an 1 ½ to 2 hour blockading session. When using the tools cover how they can be used, safety issues specific to the tool etc (a few ideas follow):

D-locks

- locking on under pressure – why not use a buddy?
- what to do with the key? - do you hide it on your body or have a buddy take it away with them? If a buddy takes it away it's important they don't get arrested and you can communicate with them to ask to be unlocked
- where to lock on to – avoiding moving parts on vehicles or easily removable items

Handcuffs

- removing or damaging the quick release catch, if there is one
- possible injuries to the wrist – do you make it clear to the police that you're handcuffed so they don't try to pull your arm (it's easy not to notice a pair of handcuffs)?

Armtubes

- what support do you need if you can't use your arms?
- what position is most comfortable for a long blockade?
- if you're blocking a road, how do you deal with irate drivers who might not realise you're locked on?

Resources:

- [Delia's Guide to Blockading](http://www.geneticsaction.org.uk/resources/delia.pdf)
<www.geneticsaction.org.uk/resources/delia.pdf.>