

Facilitator Tips and Best Practices



While each educational experience has different needs and may be facilitated a little differently, there are consistent tips and best practices that can help you ensure a successful educational experience.

Keeping it Relevant and Cultivating a Comfortable Environment

Participants need to know they are spending their time wisely in the classroom. They will learn faster and remember it longer when the information is relevant to them. That's why it's important as a facilitator to create a comfortable learning environment, and to connect the information to the participants to increase relevance.

- Give examples as much as possible.
- Draw connections between content and local news, community events, or trends.
- Create trust. This is an opportunity to share and get to know the participants.
- Share your own experiences and challenges positively!



Facilitation Skills



Facilitation doesn't always come easy to everyone. You've already made great steps in organizing and planning your program. Below are some tips you can use when you're leading an educational experience. The suggestions offered here are meant to increase engagement, retention, and ensure a positive experience for your participants.

Move to engage

- Plant yourself, move, plant yourself. Walk in front *and* throughout the room.
- Move towards participants when they are speaking.
- You don't need to stay at the front of the room! Stand to the side of the screen or behind participants (but not so much that it makes them self-conscious).
- Be aware of your stance. Keep feet shoulder-width apart, hands to your side, use moderate hand gestures.
- **AVOID:** Rocking, standing in one place, hands in pockets, and turning your back to participants.

Eyes and facial expression

- Scan the room, hold eye contact for 3 seconds with individual participants.
- Smile, hold a pleasant expression.
- **AVOID:** Looking down or over the top of the group, and stern facial expressions.



Vocal techniques and method

- Speak **SLOWLY** and **CLEARLY**, with conviction and enthusiasm.
- Use vocal variety: change volume, speed, tempo. Pauses can be powerful.
- **AVOID:** Filling every second with talking, filler words "um, so, uh," and acronyms.



Relatability

- Use “We” Language: “When we’re cooking with our families and friends...”
- Own mistakes in moderation and be yourself.
- Validate answers/positive reinforcement: “Exactly.” “I agree.”
- Check for understanding frequently, and ask if anyone has questions.
- Share personal experiences, examples, analogies.

Attention Span Extenders

- Call on participants by name to read slides or instructions. This increases engagement in the room, and lets other prepare to participate.
- Call on participants to answer questions or share personal experiences:
 - Ask a question to the general audience.*
 - Repeat it (gives the brain time to process).*
 - Call on someone by name to answer OR “Anyone at Table 7 have a thought?”*
- Give instruction and debrief the use of multimedia and activities.



Time Management

- Have in mind your time milestones, and check time often.
- Start on time, even if only a few are in the room.
- Give time warnings during activities and breaks.

Managing Group Dynamics

Sometimes when facilitating, you may encounter difficult situations. The key to managing group dynamics and to minimizing challenging situations is to remain calm and to follow some simple suggestions, outlined below.

Distractors: those who continue to talk to others or out loud unprompted, or have their phones out.

- Quick and Easy Solutions:
 - i. Ask the group: *“Ok everyone, let’s listen up / put away our phones.”*
 - ii. Move towards the distractor, have a co-facilitator stand near them.
 - iii. Call on to read a slide or answer a question.
- More Direct Solutions for Repeat Offenders:
 - i. Pull aside during break / seek privacy.
 - ii. Use “I” statements: *“I feel concerned your table mates might be distracted...”*



Questioners: those who interrupt the program to ask questions, or are persistent and derail the group. Questions aren’t bad! But we do want to be able to handle questioners effectively.

- Relay the Question to the Group:
 - i. Acknowledge: *“Great question.”*
 - ii. Peer ask: *“I’d love to hear from the group on this to get some different perspectives. John just asked (repeat question). Who has a thought on answering this for John?” (gather 2 responses; add summarizing thoughts).*
 - iii. Circle back: *“John does that help?”*

Lack of Buy-In: those who disagree with or lose trust in the facilitator, putting a wall up and no longer able to learn. Using the other members of the group may help, as a resistor may be more likely to engage with a peer than the facilitator.

- Relay to the Group:
 - i. Acknowledge: *“Thank you for sharing that; you’re probably not the only one with that concern.”*
 - ii. Peer ask: *“I’d love to hear from the group on this to get some different perspectives on why we are asking you to follow this particular best practice. John just shared (repeat). Who has a thought on why we are asking you to follow this particular best practice?” (gather 2 responses; add summarizing thoughts).*
 - iii. Circle back: *“John does that help?”*

