Guide to Effective Facilitation

Goals of Effective Facilitation

- Everyone participates in their own way
- Everyone feels welcomed and encouraged to speak
- Knowledge is created and shared (meaning is made from processing)
- Participants connect previous experiences/content to the activity/discussion
- Participants are engaged in the experience
- At minimum, participants achieve the intended learning outcomes

Creating the Right Environment

- Connection and community within the group
- Proper tone established
- Respect amongst participants
- An inclusive space is opened for participants to talk, actively participate, and be engaged
- Activities/questions are developmentally sequenced and relevant
- Ground rules and expectations are clearly defined

An Effective Facilitator

Interpersonal Qualities
  - Confidence
  - Flexibility
  - Comfort with silence
  - Self-awareness (understands personal strengths, biases, and challenges)
  - Passion and enthusiasm

Actions
  - Use inclusive language and action
  - With co-instructor, have shared goals and expectations, play off of one another, and divide responsibilities showing a united front
  - Keep goals in mind. What do you want participants to know, think, or do afterwards?
  - Focus on participant learning (ask yourself, “where are they?” not “how am I?”)
  - Allow things to unfold (respond and adapt to what participants say, let participants guide the conversation and make meaning their way)
  - Be in the moment, be present, and use what is being said and implied
  - Work with the group, not for the group (the facilitator is an active participant)
  - Understand the group’s needs, interests, and desires, as well as unique dynamics and identities within the group
  - Honor that the group creates knowledge together from past experiences, and that the facilitator is not an expert
Use story-telling, metaphors, and/or symbolism; relate content to the participants’ personal experiences, the “real-world,” and/or current campus, national, or international events

**Framework for Facilitation of an Activity/Discussion**

- **Set goals and learning outcomes for the experience**
  - Have an idea of what you’d like to see happen, but more importantly, what you want students to learn, despite how it happens

- **Prepare space and gather supplies**

- **Introduce activity/topic**
  - Ensure group is on the same page and focused on the task at hand
  - Explain why you are doing what you are doing, connect it to the course content, and make it relevant to course learning outcomes

- **Explain instructions clearly**
  - Practice
  - Set ground rules/expectations
  - Model appropriate behavior
  - Ask who is confused, clarify, and address questions

- **Begin activity/discussion**
  - Pay attention and respond to group dynamics
    - Is it working or not working?
    - Does everyone seem included? Is anyone’s voice being marginalized?
    - Does the group need additional challenge?
  - Be flexible and adapt to group responses, questions, or issues
  - Embrace silence and/or frustration
  - Ask good questions that prompt responses, are open-ended, and encourage reflection

- **Closure/Meaning Making**
  - Process the experience by asking probing questions in the following framework:
    - **What?**
      - What happened?
      - How did participants feel? What were reactions?
      - What did the group accomplish?
      - What was challenging about this activity/experience?
    - **So what?**
      - Why did we do this? What was the point?
      - What is the takeaway? What was learned?
    - **Now what?**
      - What will we do with this knowledge?
      - How will this experience change things?
Language for Effective Facilitation and Processing

- Ask open-ended questions that probe, cause dissonance, and offer a different perspective.
- Provide space for participants to respond to questions, (wait at least 10 seconds) before reframing the question. Do not answer your own questions.
- When asked a question, return it on the group, by asking, “What do you think?” Do not respond to all participant questions.
- Encourage participants to more deeply explain their comments by saying, “I don’t understand” and/or “tell us more”
- Turn the onus of responding directly to the facilitator to engaging with the group, by asking participants to, “Talk to each other, not to me”.
- Use, and encourage students to use, “I” Statements. Share opinions as opinions, things “I” believe, “I” have heard, “I” disagree.
- Often facilitators ask groups if they are ready to move on, and often miss out on the quieter people who are not ready. Give those participants room to speak by asking, “Who is NOT ready to move on?”
- Ask, “What questions do you have?” vs. “Does anyone have any questions?” Phrasing the question this way implies that questions exist.
- “How did this make you feel?” is what facilitators want to know, but is often too broad, consider: “Did anyone feel frustrated?” or “Who felt confused?” and “Why?”
- Use non-value laden encouragement. When participants respond to questions, do not respond with words like “good,” “right,” or “that’s wrong,” these phrases diminish the ability for participants to disagree. Consider, responding with “okay” or “thank you”

Using OARS

- Open-ended questions
  - Engage and evoke
  - “In what ways does this relate to your experience?”
  - “Can you tell me more about that?”
- Affirmations
  - Build confidence
  - “I appreciate that it took a lot of courage for you to share that today”
- Reflective listening
  - Guide conversation and give student space to think about their perspective
  - “You’ve found it difficult to connect with people on your floor, and, as a result, you pushed your comfort zone and joined an organization on campus”
- Summaries
  - Collect, link, transition
  - After pulling together everything stated, you might ask what they have learned or got out of the experience

“Tools of Facilitation” by Dr. Jim Street, Appalachian State University 2009, and “Presentation and Facilitation” by Adrienne Mojzik and Jaime Shook, EDLP 520, University of South Carolina 2010
University of South Carolina University 101 Programs Faculty Resource Manual 2013