



Facilitator 101

Updated November 2025

- Welcome to Facilitation 101.
- This session is designed for both individuals who are new to facilitation, and those who already have experience presenting training.
- If you are new to training this session will give you the basics of facilitation, and if you are returning this session will refresh you on skills and strategies that are essential for keeping your audience engaged as you facilitate.

Objectives & Overview

1. Understand the facilitator role
2. Discuss best practices for facilitation skills
3. Prepare to handle challenges

- Today's session will run one hour, and we'll be with these topics.
 - Understanding the facilitator role, in particular, how it's different from just presenting.
 - Practicing core facilitation skills.
 - Preparing to handle challenges that inevitably come up when facilitating.
- Today's training will include various interactive activities to help you practice the skills you are learning, so make sure you are ready to work with partners and participate in group discussions.
- Any questions?

Share Out:

What is one word you associate with facilitation?

- Before we begin with our content, let's start with a share out. I will read this question, give you a little time to think, then we will each share out our answers.
 - What is one word you associate with facilitation?
- **Allow up to 20 seconds think time. Select a participant or look for a volunteer to start the share out**

Core Skills for Facilitators

Clarity	Engagement
• Project your voice – Use Mics! • Always face the audience • Clarify “When you say.....”	• Use participant names • Encourage participation • Ask open-ended questions
Time Management	Flexibility
• Keep Discussions Focused • Stick to the Schedule • Cover All Content	• Design Tight, Facilitate Loose • Pay Attention to Group Dynamics

- Now let’s dive into core skills for facilitators. As we established in our discussion, facilitators do more than stand at the front of the room and lecture.
- First skill is Clarity:
 - As a facilitator it is key that your audience can hear and understand you. This may sound basic, but when you are in front of a group it’s possible to forget the basics. When you are facilitating, remember to project your voice and always face the audience. For example, if you need to write something on a whiteboard, pause to write then turn back to the audience to address them.
 - Additionally, focus on clarity of message. Be brief and direct when speaking to your participants. Save long opinions or discussions for later.
- Next skill is Engagement:
 - Some strategies that can support engagement are using participant names, encouraging participation and asking open-ended questions.

- Engaged participants always get more out of a training than those who simply sit and receive information.
- Time Management is our next skill:
 - While facilitators do not need to be tied to a minute-by-minute agenda, they do need to be conscious of time in order to be respectful of the participants and cover the content of a training.
 - Strategies that help with this are: keeping discussions focused, sticking to the published schedule (with some wiggle room) and ensuring you are covering all content.
 - This skill is developed over time, and it takes some assessment of the particular group of participants, making decisions about how to adapt if you are running late, etc.
- This brings us to the skill of Flexibility:
 - There will be challenges on the day of any training. You might have a group who is not interested, you might have technology problems, a talkative group could put you 15 minutes behind on your agenda.
 - It's important to always remain calm & positive and pay attention to group dynamics.
 - We will discuss some strategies for how to adjust on the spot, but remember the facilitator sets the tone and being flexible and calm allows participants to have a positive experience.

Core Skills for Facilitators

Large Group Strategies		
Breakouts: • Small Groups • Pairs	Incorporate short, frequent activities	Encourage participation (back pocket questions)
Responding to Participants		
Be prepared to say: "I'm not sure, but I can find out."		Use a "parking lot" to address questions later

- Here are two more core facilitation skills:
- First, strategies for facilitating large groups.
 - When you have a large group, you want to have opportunities for breakouts, either in small groups or pairs, because it's challenging for everyone to participate in group discussion and if we want participants to engage and practice, they need to be in smaller groups throughout the training.
 - Along with this, activities like discussions, pair-share, practice, polls, etc. should be incorporated throughout the training. A good rule of thumb is that presentation, being in front delivering content, should not last more than 15 minutes then you need an interactive activity.
 - Next, facilitators should always be encouraging participation and discussion. Reviewing your presentation before you begin and identifying where you can add pauses to ask for participation is a good strategy. Additionally, paying attention to your audience and pausing when you

notice that they may need more explanation or more discussion on a particular point.

- Another core skill for facilitators being able to effectively respond to participants:
 - You want participants to engage, offer ideas and ask questions, but you might not always have the answer, and you are likely to be pressed for time if a question requires a lengthy discussion.
 - It's important to develop the skill of effectively responding when you don't know, a great answer is "I'm not sure, but I can find out for you."
 - And if a question or topic of discussion comes up that you do not have time for you can set up a "parking lot", either a physical space where participants can write questions on a sticky note and leave them or a digital space where they can add their questions. A best practice is to save time at the end of the day or session to review these questions.
- Putting one of these strategies into practice, I would love to hear from the group: "Does anyone have experience with any of these strategies?"

Challenges & Solutions

Dominant
Voices



Redirect
Politely

Silent
Participants



Invite
Gently

Tech Issues



Have a
Backup Plan

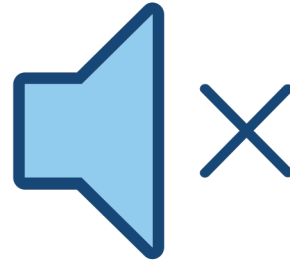
- We're now going to discuss some common challenges faced by facilitators and effective solutions to those challenges.
- The first challenge is dominant voices:
 - It's not uncommon to have 1 or a couple of participants who are very eager to share. While participation is good, when there is one, or a few, dominant voices it can also make other participants feel like they can't get a word in, or maybe they are simply less confident or outspoken and feel uncomfortable speaking up.
 - As solution to this issue is to redirect politely. When the dominant voice offers a response, instead of engaging in discussion with them every time, you can say something like "Yes, that's true, thanks for sharing. Does anyone else have another point to add?". A response like that acknowledges the individual and politely makes it clear that you'd like to hear from more participants.
- On the flip side, another challenge can be silent participants:

- Imagine you ask a discussion question and you just get crickets. If this is happening, a possible solution is to gently invite participants to engage.
- If you know participants' names you could say "Tina, what are your thoughts on that?" or "Doug, I saw you considering the question, can you share your thoughts?". Don't call someone out but invite them into the discussion.
- Now we have one of the most annoying challenges: tech issues.
 - The most important thing to do in this situation is to always have a backup plan. If you were supposed to present slides, can you use your laptop to view the slides as you present, but write discussion questions on a whiteboard? If participants were supposed to do an online activity, can you turn it into a small group discussion? Could you send them the link to the video and have them watch it on their phones?
 - You should always look through your training plan ahead of time and have a backup option for anything that requires technology.

Scenarios:

What would you do if...

Only 1 participant is responding to discussion questions. Everyone else is silent.



We're now going to go through 3 scenarios involving challenges for a facilitator. I will read the scenario, then we will discuss as a group.

Scenario 1 (**refer to slide**):

What would you do if **only 1 participant** is responding to discussion questions, everyone else is silent?

Take a minute to think about what you would do. When you're ready you can raise your hand to share with the group.

Allow 10-20 seconds think time. Select a participant to start the discussion.