

The Accidental Educator's Guide to Adapting Facilitation Skills from In-Person to Virtual



For those of us who are not professional educators but who have come to education as part of our professional positions or passions.

Facilitator's Role: To support everyone to do their best thinking!

When it comes to supporting participants' "best thinking," virtual education sessions are:



Pros

- More efficient concerning time and cost
- Greater opportunities for accessibility
- Allows participants to engage with material more deeply
- Potential for a larger and broader audience



Cons

- Difficult to ensure or gauge participation
- Potentially isolating and/or overwhelming
- Requires understanding of and access to technology
- No in-person interaction, engagement, or networking

Facilitation Tasks



In-Person



Virtual

1. Free Thinking or Idea Generation to:

Elicit a list of ideas or suggestions that reflect the complexity and nuance of a topic and surface the diverse perspectives and experiences of a group of participants.

- Consider using a virtual whiteboard/collaboration tool (E.g., Jamboard or Miro board; some also allow for anonymous shares)
- To ensure that all voices (loud and quiet) are heard during the exercise, utilize break-outs and a round-robin style. Make a list of all names in the group and track whether each has been called on.
- Encourage use of chat function to maximize participation.
- Consider accessibility needs when using any collaboration tools.

2. Assignment of large-group or small-group exercise to:

Establish a comfort level, facilitate rapport, and build trust between and among participants to support success in their independent work.

- Staff facilitators in each breakout session.
- Provide instructions for the breakouts in advance.
- If available, "broadcast" the exercise instructions or questions to each break-out.
- If necessary, ask participants to take a screen shot or picture of instructions or discussion questions.
- Provide clear start and end times, and time warnings before the break-out concludes.
- Advise whether you are expecting a formal report out from each group and for participants to select a reporter if applicable.
- Permit groups to use white boards/share docs in their groups.



In-Person



Virtual

3. Report back from small groups or teams to:

Enable participants to demonstrate their work and give others the benefit of their thoughts.

- Advise whether all groups or just some will report out.
- Give each breakout a distinctive name or number for ease in managing reports.
- Use chat feature.
- If asking for volunteers, utilize “raise hand” feature or, if you have a small enough group, suggest volunteers take themselves off mute and share verbally.
- Invite use of white board for each group, if desired.
- Ask groups to record reports on a shared document and provide time for all groups to review it, rather than having oral report-outs.

4. Large-group discussion of an issue or activity, including the solicitation of various, diverse viewpoints and the reasons behind them to:

Promote peer learning, expand thinking, and utilize adults' own experience to teach others.

- Use hand-raise feature
- Use chat to elicit multiple responses and then call on individuals selectively to expound on their written input.
- Use a “round robin” style if you have a small enough audience and sufficient time. If using, advise participants they can pass their turn if desired.

Facilitation: Engagement Strategies



In-Person



Virtual

1. Facilitate as a co-faculty team to:

Manage participation, allow mini-breaks for speakers, reflect diversity, and support each other when challenged.

- Co-facilitators are necessary for virtual learning; also consider additional tech support/host staffing.
- Co-facilitators can share the duty of facilitating and monitoring the chat.
- In advance, generate methods to coordinate with co-facilitators through private chat messages, slack messages, or text messages.

2. Move among participants to:

Engage participants more personally and energize audience.

- Use breakout rooms and visit each one.
- Address individuals by name and ask direct questions.
- Arrive before hand to chat with participants who arrive early/invite early entry.
- Play music .

3. Consider how to involve participants who have not commented at all to:

Ensure opportunity for all participants to share their knowledge as a fundamental precursor to assimilating new information. It's important to ensure the opportunity while not forcing the engagement.

- Check in with co-facilitators to diagnose any group, tech, or content issues.
- Discuss in group agreements any expectation for full participation and use of cameras.
- State "I have noticed some people have been very quiet..."
- Call on people verbally or through chat.
- Encourage participants to message facilitator directly or utilize Q&A.
- Utilize frequent check-ins to gauge comfort level and assess understanding.
- Encourage "cameras on" since it has been shown to drastically boost engagement, however, do not mandate it.

Facilitation: Engagement Strategies



In-Person



Virtual

4. Before you comment on a participant's point, encourage other participants to comment first to:

Help you obtain and fully understand all views regarding important or difficult issues. If participants do not share their contrary views, it is more difficult to influence or alter their opinions or actions.

- Allow anonymous sharing.
- Practice sitting with silence! A pause may prompt others to speak and "fill the void."
- Use the "raise hand" feature to designate agreement or disagreement.
- Ask participants to use an emoji or some icon in chat to convey thoughts.
- If participation in large group seems low, Adapt on the fly to pair share or breakout.
- Open a Jamboard or similar app and invite feedback via GIF.

Facilitation: Active Listening



In-Person



Virtual

1. Listen carefully to comments instead of thinking about your response.

Remember, education is about the learner. If you are not listening, your response will reveal that you were not paying attention or are focused on your own agenda.

- Utilize the chat and question/answer feature to receive, monitor, and vet questions and responses.
- Employ a co-facilitator to monitor the chat and acknowledge input.
- If possible, incorporate additional staff to manage tech related needs, in addition to a co-facilitator.

2. Ask for clarification if you do not really understand a point being made to:

Avoid misunderstanding, which is a huge impediment to learning that can also create unnecessary disagreement, distrust and confusion. If you don't understand a person's point, it is likely others do not either.

- Consider technical challenges and how that may impact how the speaker engages, is understood and/or feels.
- If the comment was via chat feature, ask the individual to unmute and expound verbally or contact them privately to seek clarification before asking them to clarify publicly.

3. Acknowledge the participants' feelings, struggles, and truths expressed in their comments to:

Build an atmosphere of safety and trust. You can empathize with a participant who recounts a painful or difficult situation (e.g., "it sounds like you had to struggle with a difficult issue," etc.) without necessarily agreeing with the content of the comment.

See also "The Accidental Educator's Guide to Participant Challenges Online."

- Always attend to chat entries.
- Let registrants and participants know if the session will be recorded, in case people share sensitive information.
- Have follow-up resources ready to share and inform participants of the availability at the beginning and throughout the presentation.
- Reach out with individuals after to check-in.