

Facilitation Skills

When teaching using discussion methods, you are often **facilitating**. The goal is to help students learn by guiding them in productive directions, setting up conditions to inspire them to think, ask questions, and meet course learning outcomes.

Before class, and as students first arrive, you start facilitating by creating an atmosphere that will support learning. This is often achieved by preparing in advance, getting to know the students, and setting up the physical space to encourage effective discussion.

Once the discussion starts a facilitator will use a number of skills to support the discussion. These might include:

1. Listening
2. Orienting
3. Reflecting Back
4. Summarizing
5. Relating Information
6. Interpreting
7. Clarifying (through note-taking)
8. Questioning
9. Gatekeeping
10. Responding to Feelings
11. Providing and Receiving Feedback

Facilitation Skills Summary Sheet

Adapted from Bligh (2000a)

1. Listening Elements of good, active listening <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Hearing: influenced by physical factors Attending: focused attention with an effort to understand Understanding: interpreting what is heard Remembering: ability to retain understanding 		Elements of poor listening habits <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Pseudo-listening: not giving full attention Insensitive listening: failing to interpret non-verbal cues Interrupting: stopping the speaker inappropriately Selective listening: listening only to what you want to hear Ambushing: listening only in order to attack Mistaken self-concept: seeing your job as giving content 	
2. Orienting Helping a group to focus on a topic or skill set and build upon concepts, knowledge and skills they already have. Methods: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Redirecting Inviting to consider Focusing Asking open questions 		3. Reflecting back Mirroring feelings, experiences, and points of view to show you are accurately hearing, understanding, and recalling. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Perception checking: Provides a chance for the student to correct or refine their thoughts. "If I understand you correctly, you are saying..." Paraphrasing: Restating content of a speaker by expressing it in different words that clarify or broaden the discussion. 	
4. Summarizing Helping students understand the main ideas. It can be used at a variety of times: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning: to initiate a discussion Midway: to take stock, to refocus, to check understanding, to give assurance or Ending: to close discussion 		5. Relating Information Most information <i>giving</i> involves facts, suggestions, or advice. When someone does not understand, try to <i>relate</i> the information to something the person already knows, or try to encourage participant to develop the practice of relating ideas and information.	
6. Interpreting Relating a speaker's framework or ideas to your own. Encouraging others to interpret, or provide their own interpretation of a discussion. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify unexpressed assumptions, which may lead to a misunderstanding. Encourage students to recognize and explore mismatches to help each other. 		7. Clarifying through Note-Taking Because discussions have a spontaneous aspect, their content is not usually linear and students can become confused. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> In notes clarify the issues or questions being discussed. Relate these issues to the larger context of the discussion. Connect ideas. These points can be recorded on a board to help monitor and manage the discussion, or used personally to help summarize.	
8. Questioning Questions draw upon the experience of group members to orient and motivate. Questions may encourage students to change habitual patterns of thought. Some types of questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Probing: encourages students to go deeper Prompting: encourages supplementary information, or lead students to give specific kinds of responses 		9. Gatekeeping Moderating who speaks, usually to widen participation. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Norming: Setting group norms about participation Scanning: Looking for cues that someone wishes to speak Inviting: Using nonverbal cues (eye-contact, motion of hand, leaning forward) to invite contributions Seating: Seating quiet people across from talkative ones, since people tend to speak across a group Structure: Using activities that build from small to large groups (e.g. Think-Pair-Share) 	
10. Responding to Feelings Feelings can impact the tone and success of a discussion. Some possible facilitator responses to students' emotions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> No overt response Acknowledging others' feelings Identifying and discussing own feelings with group 		11. Providing and Receiving Feedback Feedback includes obtaining information about your performance, providing information to students about theirs, or creating opportunities for students to provide feedback to each other. Options include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Verbal or written Anonymous or open Peer or instructor-student 	