

Virtual Facilitation Skills: The Art of Online Facilitation

Reference Guide

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Virtual Facilitator Skills

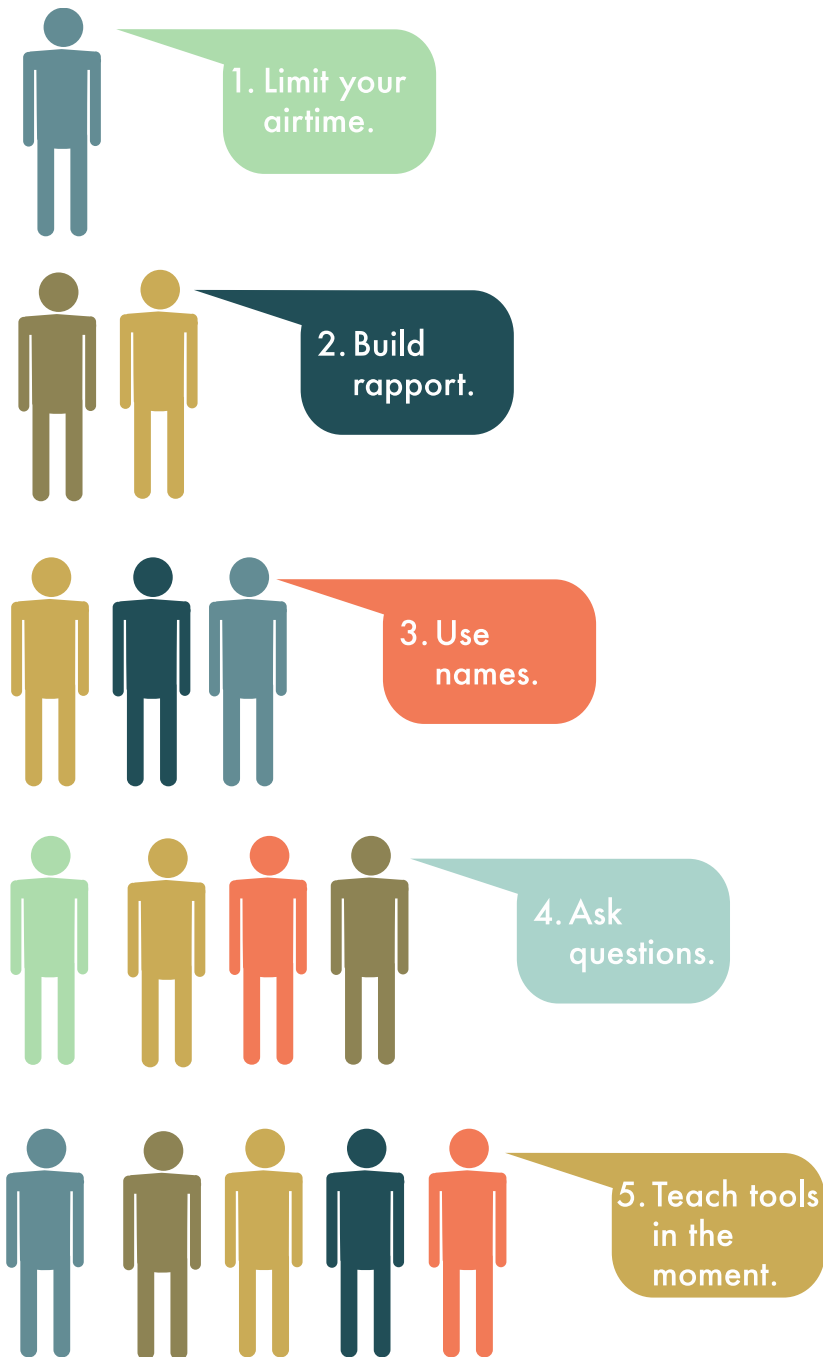
There are five key skills that effective virtual facilitators must master in order to be successful in the online classroom:

Effective Virtual Facilitators are..

Technology-Savvy	Comfort with technology comes from expertly learning the virtual platform and every one of its features. If this skill doesn't come naturally, a willingness to learn, explore, and experiment is essential to success.
Able to engage an unseen audience	Virtual learners join online from remote locations. Even though they are alone, they need to feel connected to the content and to their fellow classmates. It's the facilitator who enables these connections.
Make learners feel comfortable with the technology and the virtual classroom	Learners will be able to focus on the content and practicing new skills when they are comfortable with the technology. Make it simple and easy for everyone to join in, follow along, and participate.
Able to multi-task with ease	Practice switching from one task to another with speed and agility. Keep your eyes on the participant list and communication tools, with just quick glances to other parts of the screen. Just like driving, it gets easier over time.
Apply adult learning principles in the virtual classroom	Remember everything you already know about adult learners, and apply that information to the online classroom. Adults want to be involved, engaged, and in control. They bring their wealth of experience, and need to know 'what's in it for me?'

Facilitator Engagement Techniques

There are five key techniques for engaging participants as a virtual facilitator:



Questioning Techniques

Asking questions in the virtual classroom requires different techniques than asking them in the traditional classroom. There are two keys:

Be Precise

- Ask specific questions
- Use one question at a time
- Choose simple, straightforward words
- Plan questions in advance
- Ask follow-on questions to encourage dialogue
- Consider the following technique:
Lead with a yes/no question, then ask follow on questions to expand and elaborate

Be Prescriptive

- Consider the many ways to respond in the virtual classroom
- Let participants know how to respond – which tool to use
- Provide instructions for responding
- Set expectations for responses (quantity & time)
- Offer variety or choice in response method (when appropriate)

Examples

Who's joining from the West Region today? Please raise your hand.

In Chat, please tell us one word you would use to describe the XYZ system.

You'll see a poll question on screen. Choose as many options that apply.

In your handout on page 8, you'll see the conversation between Emma and Adam. After reading it, what do you think should Adam say next? Type it in Chat.

Use the marker (3rd button from the left in the drawing tools) to place a dot next to the phrase that resonates most with you.

After asking each of the above questions, and pausing long enough for participants to respond, ask follow-on questions to generate robust discussion and dialogue.

Skill: Harnessing Your Voice

Tips for Creating Your Best Voice

Extend the headset microphone above your mouth	Check your audio connection to ensure the right volume – not too loud and not too soft – and avoid heavy breathing into the microphone.
Exercise your best posture by sitting or standing tall	Use your posture to help create a rich sounding vocal quality.
Exude enthusiasm and energy	Pour energy and enthusiasm into your voice. Sound like you are completely enjoying the online experience!
Exaggerate your voice	Avoid sounding monotone. Add vocal variety to emphasize key words and phrases.
End sentences strong	Keep your voice from trailing off at the end of sentences. Also be aware if your voice rises at the end of a sentence, to avoid sounding unsure of yourself.

Virtual Facilitator Phrases to use:

Hi (name), welcome to the session! Let's test your audio...

Who's willing to volunteer to read the first item? Please raise your hand.

Let's type in chat. There are 12 of you, so I'm looking for at least 12 responses.

I'll be silent while you type on the whiteboard. Raise hand when finished typing.

The video will play at different speeds for everyone, raise hand when it's done.

You'll have 5 minutes in breakouts. {Name1}, {Name 2}, {Name 3}, will be team leaders, which means you'll each help lead the discussion in your groups.

Skill: Creating Smooth Video

Tips for Presenting Yourself on Webcam

Place camera at eye level	Move your webcam to a spot that centers your face on screen instead of looking down to it.
Place lighting in front	Have a light source in front of you instead of to the side or behind you.
Place appropriate items in the background	Be aware of what's in view of the camera. Have appropriate items of interest that do not distract.
Place palm above head to measure your distance from the camera	Sit far enough away from the camera so that your shoulders are visible. A good guideline is to use your palm to measure from the top of your head to the top of the screen capture.

Tips for Speaking when on Camera

Arrange your workspace so that you can easily look into the camera lens while speaking. This may mean getting an external webcam, or rearranging your desk.

Look into the camera lens when a participant is talking, so that you can focus on hearing them. If you look elsewhere, it will appear that you are not listening.

Avoid reading directly from a script. If you have notes, practice them enough so that it sounds conversational.

Emphasize your facial expressions, to match the content of your message. For example do you want to convey warmth? Excitement?

Remember, it's not about you, it's about them. Relax and have fun!

Skill: Multitasking

Multitasking is a combination of preparation and speed. Here are some tips to help you be a better multitasker:

- ☐ Be prepared
- ☐ Know your software
- ☐ Use a producer
- ☐ Be a proficient typist
- ☐ Practice, practice, practice
- ☐ Resist temptation to do too much

Use this worksheet to rate yourself on 10 steps for multitasking success.

Multitasking Checklist					
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
I set myself up for success before the virtual training event.	1	2	3	4	5
I am completely prepared to deliver my training content.	1	2	3	4	5
I fully know the virtual classroom software that I will be using.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a producer or co-facilitator who will assist me during the event.	1	2	3	4	5
I can type quickly and accurately.	1	2	3	4	5
I have predefined "trainer pauses" identified (places in the outline where I can catch my breath).	1	2	3	4	5
I practice multitasking.	1	2	3	4	5
I am comfortable with my virtual training delivery skills.	1	2	3	4	5
I have eliminated all distractions from my workspace in order to focus on the virtual training experience.	1	2	3	4	5
I am comfortable with letting unimportant things "slide" without comment in the virtual classroom.	1	2	3	4	5

Troubleshooting Situations

Technology (and other) challenges are sure to arise during your virtual classes. To handle them with grace, do the following:

- Expect technology challenges
- Stay calm, take a deep breath
- Use a 'producer', allow them space to handle it
- Spent a moment or two troubleshooting
- Move onto your backup plans, or move to the next activity

Situation	Ideas to Resolve
<i>You have a poor quality connection (either audio or video)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a headset to connect. Avoid using speaker phones.• Check to see that enough internet bandwidth is available for your platform• Use telephone connection instead of VOIP• Close out of all other applications before joining event
<i>Your computer crashes in the middle of a session</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Switch to your backup device (assuming it's already logged into the event or ready to log in)• Use telephone connection instead of VOIP, so that you don't lose audio• Have the producer continue running the class until you are able to reboot and re-join the session• Ensure you have rebooted your computer prior to any session that you facilitate
<i>Participants don't engage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a great opening activity that involves every participant• Engage participants from the moment they log into the event• Set proper expectations with participants before the session, letting them know it will be interactive• Teach them the tools as they are used. Provide instructions on how to engage.
<i>Participants don't complete their pre-work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't call it pre-work. Call it something that indicates weighty importance, such as "action assignment"• Make it as easy as possible for them to complete. Let them know exactly how long it should take, give them all the necessary resources they need, and make the instructions easy to find.



Personal Reflection

Use these questions as a guide to reflect on lessons learned from your practice delivery. Use these responses to update your individual action plan.

1. What went well during your virtual delivery? What do you want to keep doing?

2. What would you change about your virtual delivery? What do you want to stop doing?

3. What specific feedback did you receive from your peers that's worth noting?
