Framework for Facilitation  
(Checklist for facilitators - making things easier)

This checklist provides a framework for the facilitation process. It is intended as a guide and some aspects may be more relevant than others depending on each unique situation. It will be useful for facilitating group meetings and small or large group learning experiences.

Environmental management

- **Make sure you are on time.** Give yourself time to become familiar with the surroundings and focus on what you are there to do. This is also a tangible message to the group that the facilitator values what is happening.

- **Ensure resources are in place.** OHPs, whiteboard, previous plans, etc, are in place before the interview/discussion/group convenes. This is so the facilitator can pay attention to the group dynamics and individual group members.

- **Create a clear space by removing barriers.** Shift tables and chairs so everyone can see each other and make sure the space allows people to “connect” with one another.

- **Check heat, light, fresh air and external noise.** Maximise comfort.

- **Remember that from the first moment you interact with the group they will look to you to lead, you need to model the behaviour you expect.** If you want to facilitate a hierarchical, conflict-filled and fearful group, then tell them from the start you are the expert, talk over early contributors, have a rigid programme set in place and make sure not to connect with the group.

  If you want a relaxed discussion/group you need to be relaxed (even if it is an illusion!). To ensure there is open discussion the facilitator needs to listen. If you want partnership, the facilitator needs to assist the group to work together by identifying the skills, talents, and connections of individual group members (everyone has something to contribute).

Basic communication and listening protocols

- **Listen more than you talk.** Eat a peppermint, remind yourself that you do not need to respond to every comment. Listen to what is being said (as opposed to interrupting or waiting to have your say).
Do not take comments personally, if someone states an opinion you think is inaccurate or untrue, think about how you will respond so that trust and respect is maintained.

- **Introduce the unspeakable comments.** If we guess that someone is not contributing because they have different opinions from what has been expressed, then a facilitator can drop a few different perspectives into the discussion. It is important not to own the comment as your personal point of view or make a judgement in the way you state it.

- **Ensure equitable discussions.** As a facilitator your role is to ensure everyone’s perspective is heard, at times there can be a dominate person or opinion and your role will be to ensure there is equitable discussion.

  *Formal strategy.* You can have a group “round” where you ask for everyone’s opinion or assertively direct a comment to the individual/s dominating the discussion, e.g., “Thanks, we appreciate your thoughts, but I would like to hear from some of the others in the group for a moment.”

  *Informal strategy.* Do not make eye contact with the dominant person when they are talking – instead look at those who have yet to contribute. If a ‘new’ talker makes the slightest noise turn to them and pay full attention.

- **Introduce humour to a discussion.** Tell a brief and relevant humorous story that relates to the situation being discussed, or a joke (if there is one that is appropriate).

- **Check that the topic being discussed is relevant.** Be direct. Ask them – “I am wondering, is it worth continuing this discussion?”

- **Be directive in groups.** Give people a specific format in which to contribute to a discussion. If people are unsure of where they stand on an issue, you can use a group mind mapping exercise (see the Planning & Monitoring Resource).

  If you are facilitating a learning/teaching session then you need to be directive with how the group will discuss a given subject, for example:

  “Break into groups of four to discuss this, then I want each group to feedback three thoughts about this topic.”

  or

  “We are going to hear one advantage and one disadvantage for this view/practice/situation from each person.”

Group members should never be pressured or humiliated to deliver this. Get to know your group and what strategies will work to engage people in the discussion.
• **Give space and time.** Some people are cautious and need time before they contribute. Silence is OK – for a while. Give people the space to reflect and respond.

• **Use communication/language appropriate to the group.**

**Ensuring safety**

• **Explain the purpose, limits and “rules” of the discussion/group.** A brief explanation of confidentiality, the learning environment that you are wanting to create, as well as ensuring the individual/group has control of how the group discussion will proceed will go a long way in putting people at ease. Unease is typically created when there is no control and where there is a lack of clarity about how things will proceed and what the rules of the group are.

• **Demonstrate you will keep a group safe.** Rapidly intervene if an individual in the group becomes disparaging of someone else’s opinion.

• **Request feedback early.** Ask if there is anything that could be done to make the discussion more useful.

• **Ensure personal judgements are hidden.** Make a point of monitoring your own comments and body language so as not to give a message that you agree or disagree with the perspectives expressed.

**Enhancing learning**

• **Remember that effective learning happens with involvement, experience and relevance.** When introducing a topic check its relevance/usefulness. Better still, give the individual/group the lead and respond to where their interest lies.

Try to link what you want to say to the experiences of the individual/group. Find out about previous experiences people have had regarding a topic, and give people a chance to express their thoughts *before* introducing “new” ideas.

• **Give people a chance to make comment on a regular basis, e.g., “What do you think of this approach?”*, “Can you see this as useful in your situation?”.

Introduce ways to practise/test/experience the idea being taught. It is sometimes better to have less content and more time to play with an idea or skill. Often new ideas/techniques are only ‘learned’ when a person has made them part of how they live.
Giving people the opportunity to ‘practise’ something in a safe environment can increase the chances of this. This requires the facilitator to manage the time allocated, so that group members have time to practise as well as discuss what they got out of the experience.

Keeping focus

- **Stay focused ourselves!**
- **Ask naïve questions**, e.g., “So how does this relates to X?”
- **Paraphrase comments made so far**, e.g., “In this discussion we have looked at A, B and C – what other thoughts do people have?”.
- **Gently confront**, e.g., “That is an interesting thought, but I would prefer us to stay looking at A for a bit longer”.
- **Offer a contribution that refocuses** e.g. “considering that we are looking at ‘x’ one thought I have is …”

Developing partnerships

- **Be clear about our intention for a partnership approach and how we see this happening.** Explain how you like to work with an individual/group and the processes that are in place for shared decision-making.
- **State what we want, then ask the group/individuals what they want.** Model clear, direct and assertive communication and invite the group to do the same. Be aware that some individuals, in this environment, will challenge. This is healthy – providing the facilitator does not take it personally.
- **Let go of control. Ensure there are clear areas of control given to the individual/group.** These may be small things to start like: “When do you want to break for morning tea?” or “In what priority will we look at these areas?”.