

Study Guide



Workshop for Facilitator Skills

JBSA Randolph AFB, TX

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Introduction

CONGRATULATIONS! And welcome to the Profession of Arms Center of Excellence Facilitator Skills Workshop. We are confident that you will acquire the knowledge, skill, and ability to complete facilitation tasks at your duty station with ease and enthusiasm!

You are here to spend some time focusing on the skills that are required to help guide Air Force personnel through various courseware offered by the Profession of Arms Center of Excellence. It is up to you to plan and execute a learning event at your home station; your job is to draw out opinions and ideas from your Participants. You need to know how to shape and run a learning event. Being a good Leader consists of learning certain techniques and improving your ability to use those techniques by practicing them.

Ground Rules

One person speaks at a time

Listen to what other people have to say

No mocking or attacking other people's ideas

Return from breaks on time

Treat others with respect

Core Values Connection

Excellence In All We Do > Mission: Mission focus encompasses operations, product and resources excellence. The complex undertaking of the Air Force mission requires us to harness the ingenuity, expertise, and elbow grease of all Airmen. We approach it with the mindset of stewardship, initiative, improvement, pride, and a continued commitment to anticipate and embrace change. Our work areas, our processes, and our interpersonal interactions must be undeniably professional and positive. Our people are the platform for delivering innovative ideas, strategies, and technologies to the fight.

Workshop Objective

Practice skills needed to lead a guided discussion by presenting a lesson from

Leader/Facilitator Responsibilities

To be effective, you must be neutral to the discussion, not partial to any members, and acceptable to everyone involved. Passion is a MUST. You have to want to bring out a better version of yourself as well as those around you. As the leader of a guided discussion, it is imperative that you are familiar with the content. Adequate preparation is key to a successful lesson. It is your responsibility to watch the videos and go over all lesson aspects prior to presenting the content; you must master the content for maximum benefit of your participants

Additionally, as the facilitator, it is your responsibility to:

- arrange the furniture in a “U” to emphasize equality among all participants,
- ensure that you are in a relaxed frame of mind,
- establish an atmosphere conducive for learning and change,
- use effective communication and presentation skills,
- inspire meaningful guided discussions,
- ensure concepts are understood, and
- deliver the lessons as intended.

Lead a Guided Discussion

As a facilitator, it is important to know and to distinguish between a group discussion and a guided discussion. A group discussion consists of a group of people assembled in a face-to-face situation attempting, through oral interaction, to reach a decision on shared problems. A guided discussion, on the other hand, is a planned and guided learning experience in which the sharing of information by a group leads to the achievement of a learning objective. Uses of guided discussion include the stimulation of thought and interest and to determine the understanding of concepts.

Stimulate thought and interest. A guided discussion is an active learning technique in which participants interact in a controlled process of sharing information and experience related to achieving an instructional objective. Listening to the points of view and testimonial shared by others in the group can spur alternative ways of thinking because they have experienced situations that, up until this point, have been foreign to you. Broadening the information base about a given topic can help to connect to a topic. With this added information from which to draw conclusions, you will have improved analytical skills.

Determine understanding of concepts. Guided discussions promote interaction because they are set in a social context allowing participants to observe information provided by others and then make decisions about that information. If you agree, you may wish to speak up and share your similar point of view. If you disagree, you may also wish to speak up which could sway others to your point of view or cause you to think about changing your point of view. Because

of this interaction, a deeper comprehension of the topic is achieved resulting in greater comprehension.

Use of guided questions. The use of guided questions requires a highly skilled facilitator that can bring the creation of content together rather than being a lecturer. Questioning techniques will be discussed in detail in another section.

Now that you know what a guided discussion is, let's move on to the pieces and parts that make up a lesson.

Use Lesson Elements

There are numerous available models for lessons. Generally speaking, the products from PACE will use the introduction, body, and conclusion parts although they may not be necessarily labeled as such in our guides. However, there are important elements that are essential for effective lessons such as the objective, anticipatory set, transitions, and summaries.

Anticipatory Set. Just as stating the objective(s) at the start of a lesson, anticipatory sets are a part of the lesson cycle and are used to gain attention, focus on the objective, and to link prior learning to new.

Transitions. Transitions should be used to move from point to point within a lesson or from one lesson to another. They should be simple and relevant to the topic. Effective transitions:

- mention the point just discussed,
- relate that point to the lesson objective, and
- introduce the next point or lesson.

Summaries. These are *brief* accounts of the main points. Reiterating the key take-aways aid in comprehension.

All of these lesson elements serve a purpose and are necessary to help guide you through leading many different topics with confidence. We are now going to move on to what could be the most important skill for leading a guided discussion: questioning techniques.

Use a Variety of Questioning Techniques

Leading an effective guided discussion takes practice and the use of honed questioning techniques. Leaders of a guided discussion don't need all of the answers, but they most certainly need to be able to ask the right questions.

Here are a couple of tips. Ask open-ended questions that will prompt the sharing of thoughts and feelings. Open-ended questions are the best way to avoid the responder giving a yes/no

answer. Another tip is to ask follow-up questions. This will help to expand on surface level responses. Examples can include:

- What makes you say that?
- How do you feel about that?
- How do you think that would have affected you if?
- How would you explain your answer to ?

Types of questions. There can be many types of questions, but the Air Force usually describes the following four types in its instructor courses: rhetorical, direct, overhead, and relay.

Rhetorical - A rhetorical question is generally asked to evoke thought or to make a point rather than to elicit a response. For example, “How could I have been so stupid?”

Direct - This type of question is used to elicit information. Pose the question to the entire group as if it were an overhead question, wait at least three seconds to allow folks to think, then call on someone. Try to remember this sequence as ask, pause, call. Example: “What is the purpose of a voltmeter?(pause). . . . John?”

Overhead - These are questions posed to the entire group to stimulate discussion. Anyone can answer and no one is put on the spot. Example: “What is some noise that you have in your life?”

Relay - This technique is used in response to a direct question to the facilitator or leader. The leader relays the question back to the participants in general or to someone in particular. It’s a great way to get participants to share their thoughts.

Increasing Participant Engagement.

Acknowledge responses - Show that you have heard and understood a contribution. You can do this in non-verbal and verbal ways. Non-verbal ways include eye contact, nodding, and leaning forward towards the speaker. Verbal can include praising “I’m glad you brought that up,” or “That’s a good point.”

Build on responses - A good way to encourage participation is to integrate each participant’s response with that of other participants or with the whole group. Similarities and differences are surfaced, and the way each point relates to another is verbalized. This way, the discussion is moving and the individual contributions are seen as relevant to the whole.

Linking – Making verbal connections to what individual participants say and feel. “Michael believes that the group should outsource all customer communication.

Jonathan, on the other hand, feels that an in-house customer care staff will serve the company better. It seems we have two different but equally valid approaches to this problem.”

Redirecting – Promote the involvement of all in a discussion. For example, “What do you think about that?” or “What do you think about Mark’s idea?”

Thank the Group - Affirm the group for their participation, and each member for their contribution, to encourage greater involvement.

Asking the right questions at the right time to keep a discussion going is truly a skill and one that takes practice. Participant engagement is essential. Just like good questioning techniques, active listening is perhaps just as important.

Actively Listen

Listening is crucial to an effective guided discussion. Actively listening to someone is a skill that has impact on your effectiveness as the leader of the discussion. Paying attention to a participant speaking to you is a must. Focus on them and what they are saying; the last thing you want is for the participant to feel like you don’t care or have zoned out.

Pay Attention. Give the participant your undivided attention and look at them directly. Don’t make any mental arguments and avoid distractions such as side conversations. Their body language will let you know if they are tense, frustrated, happy, etc.

Show That You are Listening. Appropriate body language includes nodding from time to time, having an open and inviting posture, and give verbal clues that you are with them by saying yes or uh-huh.

Provide Feedback. Make certain you understand what a participant is saying by paraphrasing what has been said using phrases like “What I hear you saying is, or “Sounds like what you are saying is” Another way to make sure you understand what is being said is to summarize what has been said.

Avoid Interrupting. Cutting someone off is poor communication and can frustrate the participant. Allow them to express their point of view and avoid using counter arguments.

Respond. You are gaining information and understanding and should therefore be candid, open, and honest in your response. Be respectful and treat the other person in a way that you think they would like to be treated.

You now have the knowledge needed to be able to lead a group of people in an effective guided discussion. But before you put that knowledge into gear and get ready to practice, you need to get your lesson prepared.

Getting Ready to Present

Prepare Your Lesson. Solid presentations require thorough preparation. This doesn't mean that glancing over the material the night before or running through the slide set the morning of your class is adequate. It will be obvious to your audience that you didn't care enough about them giving you their time and attention to have put forth the effort to make their learning experience the best it could be if that is the all of the time you've set aside. To avoid falling flat and boring your audience, there are things that you can do.

Annotate questions, personal stories - print your lesson plan/guide to allow you the maximum amount of space to get yourself organized. There is no way you can remember everything you'll want to say so writing notes to yourself is the only way to go. Put a question mark or Q as a quick visual cue for planned questions. When you want to use a story to help make a point or to reinforce a point or concept, just write down a few words to jog your memory instead of writing out details. This will be quite useful especially if there are long periods of time between your course offerings.

Research – You may need to do some of your own research to feel like you have adequate background information to do a good job presenting topics that aren't as familiar to you as others. We all like using the internet because it is easy, but asking/talking to others who may be more of a subject matter expert can be helpful.

Practice Presenting – It's not enough to envision in your mind what you think you want to say or how you will say it. You must practice out loud and in front of someone you trust to give you the feedback you'll need to improve. Even after doing so, when you get in front of an audience with a bunch of eyes watching everything you do, it will all sound different to you until you've done it a couple of times. Practice may not make you perfect but it will help you be more comfortable. Ideally, practice in the room where the course will be held if at all possible.

Prepare Your Classroom

Arrange the furniture – Because you want to promote discussion class size is critical. Any more than 8-10 people will stifle conversation. With this small number of folks, take time to arrange the furniture in a configuration such that everyone can see

everyone else's face such as a U or O. These layouts also make it easy for you to walk around the room.

Gather materials - Whatever your course calls for in the way of learning aids, get them ready ahead of time. Gather up easels, chart paper, markers, extra paper or whatever the case may be prior to start of the course and lay them out or arrange them somewhere in the room in the order you will need them. Doing so will help you manage your time better and make the learning experience more pleasant. Make sure you have participant guides printed, stapled and ready for use; lay them out on the desks before participants arrive or have them at a check-in table. If your course includes participant feedback get those printed and available.

Conduct a computer operation check – More than likely you will not have a dedicated room at your disposal making it necessary to get in there and make sure 1) the computer/system that is in there works, 2) it has any software you may need loaded, 3) has internet capability if required, 4) has sound capability, and 5) a technician close by should you need them. Troubleshooting IT issues can be time consuming so don't wait until the last minute to conduct an ops check.

You have your lesson plan in great shape, you know what to do prior to your course start. It's now time to think about things to give serious consideration to: what you will look and sound like in front of other people.

Presenting

It will be up to you to choose what works best for you when it comes to the lesson plan. You may wish to put it in a binder and have it close at hand at the front of the room. Or, you may wish to leave it loose so that you can carry a page or two with you as you move about the room. Either way, having it available will help you lead your participants with confidence. Here are some other considerations.

Nervousness. Even seasoned presenters can experience queasiness. The key to getting this feeling under control is to practice, like has already been mentioned. Some suggestions for dealing with nervousness are to deliver your message with enthusiasm. There aren't dull subjects but rather dull presenters. If you like the subject matter, so will your audience. Focus on the material and not the audience. Don't rush as you begin. Take your time, consult your lesson plan, take a deep breath, and begin to speak.

Physical Behavior. Communication experts say that over half of our message is conveyed nonverbally through our physical behaviors of eye contact, body movement, and gestures.

Eye contact - This is an important factor in non-verbal communication. It lets your audience know that you are interested in them and it gives you non-verbal feedback. You can gauge by the audience's facial expressions if they understand or if they are losing interest. Effective eye contact enhances credibility and will therefore make your audience feel like you are competent.

Body Movement – All of your movements need to be purposeful and used to help hold the attention of your audience. Slower movement is better than faster and can help you work off excess energy helping you to relax. Avoid turning your back to the audience.

Gestures – Just like body movement, gestures need to be purposeful. Avoid pulling on your clothing, adjusting your glasses, tugging on your ear, etc. as they distract from your verbal message. Descriptive gestures help to make your words more clear. Emphatic gestures underscore what you are saying like using a clinched fist. Suggestive gestures can help convey ideas or emotions such as shrugging your shoulders. Lastly, prompting gestures can be something like raising your hand to show your audience that's what you want them to do.

Use of Voice. A good voice is reasonably pleasant, easily understood, and expresses differences in meaning. Perhaps these could be called the properties of the use of voice or quality, intelligibility, and variety.

Quality – This refers to the overall impression a voice makes on others. Your voice is your voice, but others can tell from your voice if you are happy, sad, fearful, or confident. Don't forget about the effect your voice can have on attitude and emotion.

Intelligibility – The understandability of your voice depends on the following factors:

Articulation – This refers to the precision and clarity with which speech sounds are uttered. You may know this as enunciation and is things like sounding the "s" at the end of words or actually saying planning rather than plannin. Over-articulating is better than under-articulating. You want your words to come out crisp and understandable.

Pronunciation – Standard pronunciations differ. However, you can get tips on pronunciation by watching/listening to television announcers. They have spent years working to ensure they don't speak with a dialect or with speech patterns that are only acceptable in informal settings.

Vocalized pauses – We all do this – beginning sentences with uh, um, ah. Too many of these pauses impede communication. By listening to yourself speak, you can make a conscious effort to try and correct as much of this as possible.

Stock Expressions - So, like, you know, this can um, well, you know, be annoying.

Variety – Vary the rate of which you speak. Changing the rate to be a little faster can emphasize enthusiasm while slower may be more appropriate to present main points. Try using a variety of volume levels as well but always be certain everyone can hear you. Emphasis stems from all forms of variety. Use it wisely. Emphasizing beyond any real value may cause you to lose credibility.

You've toed the line, focused on listening for the start gun to sound, and are approaching turn two. Now is not the time to stumble and fall – you need to know how to manage and execute an activity.

Executing Activities

Purpose. The reason to have an activity is to support the learning objective, the main points of a lesson, and to reinforce learning and to get Participants actively involved.

Managing Activities. Just like thorough planning for a lesson or course execution pays off, planning for smooth activities is critical. Your Leader Guide/lesson plan will provide a list of any materials that will be needed to accomplish a given activity. Activities should be simple to accomplish. If not, you may spend more time setting up/explaining what you want done than participants actually doing something. Providing clear, written instructions is necessary for participants to know what is expected of them.

Before your participants arrive, gather up what is required and have it ready so that you don't use up valuable time walking around the room or having to leave the room to get what is required.

When you have everyone's undivided attention, give clear, specific instructions and/or expectations. Provide as many details as necessary to ensure smooth completions of the activity. If participants aren't sure what to do or how to do it, you will be disappointed in the outcome. Circulate around the room to ensure everyone is on task and to garner information that may be useful during post-activity discussion.

Pay particular attention to time constraints. The Leader Guide/lesson plan will provide estimated times to help keep you on schedule. When you have concluded that everyone is done with their task, go over the results.

Go over the results of the activity and tie it in to the main points of the lesson. Then, transition out of the activity and on to the next topic.

Providing Feedback

The purpose of feedback is to improve the ability to perform a task. In this case, presenting a lesson that focuses on guided discussion.

Here are a few tips to ensure your feedback is on target. Be specific: what went well and what needs improvement. You'll also want to build on existing knowledge. Always concentrate on the behavior and not the person. Ask your Participant to reflect on their performance.

During feedback, both the Participant and Leader have roles.

Participant – self reflecting on their performance will build a capacity for self-assessment. A good way to accomplish thinking through the performance is to use the plus, minus, interesting approach. For starters, find something that was easy – that's the plus. Then, think of something that was difficult or challenging – the minus. Lastly, find something that was interesting or unexpected.

Self reflecting using the plus, minus, interesting approach helps to refine language skills when speaking about oneself and clearly defines the areas that need improvement.

Leader – feedback should be based on observation; point out what went well and the areas that didn't go so well. It is critical to point out the process. Refer back to instruction and show the connection between the performance and the result. For example, "You struggled with generating discussion because many of your questions were dead end." Briefly review the instruction and what needs to be done to achieve a better result in the future.

Keep in mind the purpose of feedback is to improve the ability to perform a task so constructive, friendly opinions is key. Comments are more likely to be embraced when feedback is timely, clear, and specific.