12 Tips for Virtual Classroom Facilitation

What makes learning in the virtual classroom meaningful? Transitioning from the traditional classroom to virtual learning is not as simple as delivering your content via Adobe, Webex, Zoom, etc. Taking your face-to-face BHP Training online in a way that engages learners requires some planning and a different skill set as a facilitator. When done well, teaching and learning in the virtual classroom does not have to be second best. Employ these best practices for online facilitation to create a collaborative virtual classroom.

Tip	Motivation
1. Prepare your learners.	What you do before your virtual training is just as important as what you do during class. Send confirmation emails to your participants that provide clear instructions for accessing the virtual classroom, tools and materials needed (such as a reliable high-speed internet access, a headset, the BHP Learning Journal, etc.), as well as the expectations for attendance and participation. When scheduling your virtual training, build in some additional time at the beginning of the session to teach learners how to use the software tools to participate (whiteboard, chat, reaction emojis, etc.). Include virtual classroom etiquette when developing the ground rules for your session.
2. Call on participants by name.	In a virtual class, everyone sits in the front row. When you are establishing the ground rules, let learners know that you value their participation. If learners expect to be called on frequently, they will be more likely to remain focused and less tempted to multi-task.
3. Learn to read the "body language in the bandwidth."	Most virtual platforms offer feedback tools (raising hand, yes/no, check/x buttons, polls, chat, etc.) Take notice of who is responding first and who is lagging behind. • Are any participants not responding at all? If so, they may be experiencing a technology issue, or tuning you out. • To facilitate participation, you may need to provide more assistance with technology or switch things up in the classroom. If learners are not responding, call on them or reach out privately to find out what the issue is. In addition, you may find that some groups are more comfortable using chat, while other groups seem to prefer speaking over audio. Take note of how your participants are responding, and be prepared to modify your activities based on learner preferences and comfort level.
4. Ask yourself, "could someone else be doing this?"	Any time you find yourself reading a quote, summarizing chat responses, or lecturing at length, ask yourself, "could a learner do this instead?" If the answer is yes, call on learners to read, summarize information, or share their expertise. This actively involves learners, and allows participants to hear different voices.
5. Don't read slides verbatim.	Avoid crowding your slides with too much text. Instead, use key words or graphics on your slides, and fill the space with spoken content and opportunities to interact. When possible, allow participants to collaborate directly on your slides using whiteboard features.

6.	Try not to over-emphasize the technology.	Focus on your learners and the content you are teaching, rather than the technical aspect. Avoid using too many references to the technology tools. Remember, when teaching in the traditional classroom, you would not say something like, "I'm now going to write on the whiteboard."
7.	Try to collaborate rather than lecture.	In a virtual class, learners should be given something to do about every 3 - 5 minutes. Create frequent opportunities for participants to type in chat, draw on the whiteboard, answer a poll question, etc. If you find yourself lecturing, you are not inviting engagement and your training becomes more of webinar than an interactive class.
8.	Learn new ways to ask questions.	When asking a question, let participants know where and how to respond, e.g. "type your answers into chat," "give a green check if you agree with this statement," etc. Don't ask questions just for the sake of asking questions; use them as a way to promote engagement and gather more information. For example, if you say "give a green check if you agree with this statement," instead of simply moving on, use this as an opportunity to gather more information from participants. Call on one or two students. You might say, "Joe, I noticed you gave a green check. Can you share with us why this statement resonates with you?" Asking "are there any questions?" may not get you the participation you are hoping for. Instead, encourage learners to raise their hands or type their questions in chat. Give participants 7 - 10 seconds to respond. If there are no responses, then ask participants to let you know that they are ready to move on by using a green check, thumbs-up, or the tool of your choice.
9.	Use multimedia when it makes sense, not just because you can.	Using webcams can be a great way of seeing each other, but can easily become a distraction and takes up a lot of bandwidth. If using your webcam and having the participants use theirs isn't creating meaningful engagement, it may not be necessary. Videos also require a great deal of bandwidth and may cause learners to have problems with their technology. Use sparingly.
10.	Limit the class size.	The more participants you have, the less opportunities they will have to interact. While webinars can have hundreds of participants, there are not many opportunities for participation. We recommend keeping your class size to between 10 - 15 learners in order to have greater collaboration and interactions that are more meaningful.
11.	Keep sessions short and take breaks.	Sitting in front of a screen can become tiresome for you and your participants. Schedule your sessions for shorter periods of time, take a break about every hour, and encourage participants to get up and stretch during breaks, rather than remaining in front of the screen. As the facilitator, you will benefit from this, too!
12.	When possible, have a "producer."	The producer's job is to manage the technology while the facilitator teaches the material. The producer works behind the scenes to help you manage the classroom and help learners with the technology without disrupting the flow of the entire class.

There are several great options for virtual classroom platforms. Woodfords utilizes Adobe Connect and our team has been trained in virtual classroom facilitation by InSync Training, LLC and Kassie Laborie Consulting, LLC. Content in this document was adapted from their courses and from our professional experience in the virtual classroom. Please contact us at bhp@woodfords.org for more information.