Chapter 3: Skills and Techniques

Overview

Introduction This chapter provides trainers with an introduction to key training techniques and strategies that will help ensure that the workshop is interactive and effective.

Contents This chapter contains the following topics:

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Key Training Techniques

In order to maintain interest and motivation in your workshop sessions, there are a variety of training strategies available to you. The following are those most commonly used with specific emphasis on the role that practice and hands on experience has in the literacy tutor context.

<u>Practice and Hands on Experience</u>

People learn best by “doing”. Practice in the workshop is essential to build confidence in tutoring skills. Try to include practice wherever possible. Practice should be used for the Skill Book charts, the Alternative Method, Lesson Planning, and any techniques, such as Language Experience or Writing for Your Student. The participants may practice in unison with the full group or they may practice in small groups, in “Each One Teach One” pairs, in groups of three, or individually.

Guidelines

- Give clear, complete, and concise directions. For more complex tasks, instructions should be written out for the participants with an opportunity to ask any questions about the instructions. Once the practice has begun, do not change or add to the directions.
- Refer participants to specific parts of the Teacher’s Manual or handout for help if needed.
- Circulate during the practice session (all trainers). Although it is important to correct errors observed and make constructive suggestions, trainers should be supportive and encouraging during practice sessions.
- Ensure that all workshop participants have an opportunity to practice the skill.
- After the practice, share any observations, problems, or questions with the full group.

<u>Demonstration</u> (general context)

A demonstration, usually provided by the trainer, or sometimes by a subject matter expert, shows participants the procedure to perform for a particular skill or skill set. Showing participants how it is done can help to convince participants that the new procedure has merit. This demonstration is often followed by the performance of the procedure by the participants – known as a return demonstration – under the guidance of the trainer.

Advantages

- ✓ Some participants are more inclined to believe what they see rather than what they read or hear.
- ✓ Real-world materials and procedures are used.
- ✓ The pace is flexible, and the trainer can move at the pace desired by the workshop participants and repeat as necessary.

Procedure

Step	**Action**
	Initial Demonstration
1	Make sure all participants can see and hear.
2	Name the supplies, equipment and/or tools and indicate their importance for the task.
3	Explain the procedure and demonstrate it once in real time. Explain what you are doing as you proceed.
4	Repeat the demonstration slowly, and emphasize the important steps; work from a prepared checklist. ***Note:*** Provide all the information that is necessary for the participants to perform correctly, safely and easily.
5	Encourage and invite questions.
6	Repeat the demonstration as many times as necessary.
	Return Demonstration
7	Have the participants imitate what has been demonstrated and correct errors as participants perform. Refer repeatedly to the specifics of your demonstration. ***Note:*** If inadequate materials are available, some members of the full group may be disengaged while one participant is performing a return demonstration.
8	Once the return demonstration has been performed correctly, ask participants to repeat the steps again (and again, as required). ***Note:*** You may want to request that participants who have mastered the task assist others.

Demonstrations (literacy tutor training context)

A demonstration is an actual physical example of a pattern of teaching with someone playing the role of the student. It is important to ensure that the demonstration includes the hand movements. Usually, a demonstration is used the first time a new skill is introduced. New skills include the following:

- ✓ Teaching Charts
- ✓ Teaching Stories
- Skills Practice Exercises, and
- ✓ Writing Lessons.

Guidelines and considerations

- ✓ It is important for the trainer to set a perfect pattern during the demonstration. Participants will remember what they see and hear first. Confusion can be avoided when the participants later read the Teacher's Manual.
- ✓ It is not advisable to use the participants as "students" for demonstrations for the following reasons:
  - Their attention is focused on the response they are to give, rather than on the patterns being demonstrated.
  - Changing roles from tutor to student and back again creates confusion.
  - They are never required to give student responses.
- Another member of the training team or a member from the local Council should be asked to role-play the student. If this is not possible, ask one participant to play the student role, but alternate participants for each demonstration.
- The person playing the role of the student should be prepared prior to the demonstration.
- The "student" and "tutor" must be positioned not to block the view of the chart. The "student" should stand well back on the left side. The trainer must practice working from the right side, keeping the shoulders square to the participants and using one hand to isolate words and letters. When pointing to chart words or letters, be sure the fingers are not spread, pointing to other letters. When underlining a word, try not to put your hand so close to the target word that participants cannot read it above your hand. Instead, cover up the word or letter below the target word.
- Maintain eye contact with the participants throughout the demonstration. Never turn your back to the workshop participants. Always discuss their observations afterwards.
- Trainer demonstration tip: To avoid switching back and forth from the teacher's manual to the trainer manual to your notes, notes may be written directly in the teacher's manual or written lightly in pencil on the trainer chart.

Full Group Discussion

Full group discussions are very challenging to lead, but they yield significant results when conducted well. In an effective full group discussion, participants are engaged in an orderly discussion with both the trainer and their peers. The ability to ask a variety of questions – and to manage the resulting discussion traffic – is the key to the trainer's success in leading productive full group discussions.

Full group discussions help to surface thoughts and feelings concerning a topic, prompt participants to make sound conclusions regarding the subject, and challenge participants to solve a problem or think about their approach.

Advantages

- ✓ The full group context of the discussion invites participation.
- ✓ The discussion may establish consensus (if required).
- ✓ The interaction pools the knowledge, abilities and experiences of the learners.

Guidelines

- Watch your time. It can be time-consuming, particularly if the full group includes participants with markedly different opinions.
- Try to avoid having certain participants dominate the discussion.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Ask questions to generate discussion.
2	Ensure that participation is balanced (not just one participant commenting, and not everyone commenting at once).
3	Summarize the results of the discussion at its conclusion and illustrate how the results of the discussion fit into the present topic (or next segment of the session).

<u>Small Group Discussion</u>

A group of workshop participants (4-6 approximately) meets to discuss a topic of mutual concern or a topic assigned by the trainer. This is done in order to identify, explore, and seek solutions for problems and/or develop a plan of action, and to influence attitudes or explore new concepts through the discussion of information.

Advantages

- ✓ The size of the small group (no more than six to eight participants) permits full participation.
- ✓ The discussion can establish consensus quickly.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Assign or have the group select a recorder who will take notes and report back to the full group.
2	Assign the topic for discussion and ensure that participants are aware of the time (typically 5-10 minutes) allowed to discuss the issue, as well as the result they are expected to produce (usually a verbal report). ***Note:*** Each workshop participant must know clearly: ✓ Their task ✓ What, if any, materials they need to take with them ✓ The time allowed for the task. ✓ Who the group recorder is.
3	Circulate to verify that the groups are on the right track or to answer questions that may arise.
4	Inform the participants when time is nearly up so they can wrap up the discussion.
5	Have each group provide a summary of their discussion or conclusions.

Creating small groups

To maximize your time, plan ahead how you will divide participants into the small groups. Possible methods include the following:

- ✓ Grouping participants according to their seating arrangement. Front row participants can turn their chairs around and form a group with the others behind them; or a group of participants at one table could form a group.
- ✓ Counting off (for a larger group). If there are to be five small groups, participants count themselves off from one to five. All ones form a group and all twos form a group etc. and proceed to a predetermined area. This method is a little more time-consuming, but it promotes intermingling of the workshop participants.
- ✓ Marking name tags randomly with numbers or colours. All persons with similar numbers or colours form a small group and proceed to a predetermined area. ***Note:*** You can place flip chart paper at the area with either the number or colour for each group.

Level of supervision for small groups

The amount of trainer supervision required will vary with the assignment. For example: practice sessions necessitate having a trainer in each small group to ensure that errors are corrected, to provide support to each participant, and to answer questions.

Other group activities can proceed with a minimum of trainer involvement. It is always a good idea, however, to check in with each group to ensure that the participants are on the "right track" and to answer any questions.

Small group feedback/reporting

When obtaining feedback from small-group work, vary the order of the groups reporting. Ask for one or two points only from each group so that the first group does not exhaust everyone else's ideas. Encourage brief reports, listen carefully, and respond positively to the contributions made. Be sure to bring up any questions or information discussed in the small groups which would be of general interest to the full group.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a technique in which creative thinking takes precedence over the practical. The brainstorm extracts all possible ideas from the group, with no concern as to the practicality of the ideas. The participants are urged to be free-thinking.

Advantages

- ✓ Many welcome the brainstorm's freedom of expression.
- ✓ All may participate.
- ✓ Solutions to problems can be discovered.

Guidelines

- ✓ Encourage participants to think freely as some may have difficulty ignoring the known or the practical.
- ✓ Let the participants know that it is normal that some of the ideas generated may not be relevant, but that they should try to minimize this.
- ✓ Make sure that the participants understand that this is not the point where the ideas are evaluated – just generated. Discourage criticism of ideas by peers.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Explain the procedure to be used and select a recorder (often the trainer) to record the ideas.
2	Record ideas on a flipchart as they are generated (or have the designated recorder do this).
3	Ask for explanation for any unfamiliar terminology. ***Note:*** During the brainstorm, very little clarification of ideas should occur.
4	After the brainstorm session, facilitate a discussion to identify any practical solutions brought out by the session.

Buzz session

The buzz session is a technique for involving a large group of participants in a discussion process. The large group is divided into small groups (of five to seven members) for a limited time (3-5 minutes) for discussion. Typically, buzz sessions are conducted immediately following a portion of a lecture/presentation. Participants are asked to have a quick discussion about what is clear and/or unclear about the information presented.

A buzz session can help to develop questions for a speaker, a panel or the trainer or to discover areas in which the full group would like more information.

Advantages

- ✓ Provides a source of fresh ideas of interest to the participants.
- ✓ Gives all a chance to participate, without having to speak to the full group.

Guidelines

- ✓ Be clear about the time-limit and try to encourage maximum individual participation within that time.
- ✓ Understand that contributions of the buzz groups may be contradictory or difficult to synthesize.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Divide participants into small buzz groups.
2	Assign the question to the buzz groups and let them know the time limit.
3	Ask the buzz groups to identify a spokesperson to report the results of the buzz session.
4	Have each spokesperson report and ask the full group to bring up any questions or concerns that may remain.

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Case Study

The case study is a detailed account of an event (or related events) that may be presented to small groups in written or verbal form. Case studies can help to present issues of concern – and possible solutions – to the participants, as well as to develop abilities to solve work-related issues independently.

Advantages

- ✓ Elicits a detailed response to a relevant case.
- ✓ Helps participants to see alternative solutions to an issue.
- ✓ Assists participants in developing analytical and problem-solving skills.

Guidelines

- ✓ Be sure to select case studies that reflect the realities of the participants and explain this relevance in your introduction to the case study activity.
- ✓ Try to minimize the participation of those who may be stimulated to over-participate, and encourage others who may tend to assume a non-participatory role.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Explain the case and the criteria for selecting strategies. ***Note:*** The case may be given to participants pre-session (for advance reading) or in-session.
2	Have the groups identify the issues and develop strategies for addressing those issues and offer these strategies to the full group.
3	Facilitate a discussion that identifies the strengths and points for consideration of the various approaches selected.

Interview

The interview is a method in which one or more subject matter experts (SME) or the trainer responds to questioning by one or more interviewers (typically the workshop participants).

The purpose of the interview is to explore a topic in situations that do not suit formal presentations.

Advantages

- ✓ The interview process is less formal than a lecture or lecturette.
- ✓ The participants are represented by the interviewer(s).
- ✓ There is some assurance that the discussion will follow the interests of the full group of participants.

Guidelines

- ✓ Be aware that the role of the full group of participants is passive during the interview, so make the interviews fairly brief.
- ✓ Select an interviewer (or several) who knows both the subject and basic techniques of interviewing.
- ✓ A full-group discussion or review of the information gained can be a good way to reinforce the learning for all participants.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Assign workshop participants to generate questions to be posed to the SME or the trainer by the interviewer(s).
2	Have the interviewer(s) pose the generated questions and improvise other questions as the interview progresses.
3	Thank the SME for their participation.

Question and Answer session

The questions and answer session (Q & A) is an organized follow-up to a formal presentation in which members of the full group direct questions to the presenter, SME and/or trainer.

The purpose of the Q & A session is to get the full group of participants involved, to permit clarification of points made in the formal presentation, and to provide participants an opportunity to ask for information of interest to them.

Advantages

- ✓ Provides a feedback link between the presenter and the participants, and solicits participation.
- ✓ Encourages the participants to pay close attention to the remarks of the presenter.

Guidelines

- ✓ Be sure to set aside time for the Q & A session (it is often treated as an incidental part of the overall program) and keep it on track as time may be limited.
- ✓ If the Q & A session is at the close of the day when participants are tired or anxious to adjourn, try to gauge the receptivity of the group and consider other options if the participants are not engaged.
- ✓ Try to encourage a full range of participation to avoid having only a few members dominate the discussion.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Inform the participants prior to the formal presentation that there will be a Q & A session following.
2	At the conclusion of the presentation, have participants ask questions, request clarification or provide comments.

Lecture(tte)

The lecture is a prepared presentation (often with audio-visual supports) by the trainer or SME. The lecturette – the brief version of a lecture (approximately 10 minutes) can be used as a top-up following a demonstration, a role-play or other exercise. In order to maintain interest the lecturette is the preferred method of the two.

The purpose of either form is to present factual material in a direct and logical manner, including accounts of personal experience and to stimulate thinking, promote further study of a situation or problem, or outline an issue for general discussion.

Advantages

- ✓ It is suitable for learning groups of all sizes.
- ✓ Some prefer listening as a method of learning.

Guidelines

- ✓ Be aware that the role of participants is passive, so make it as brief as possible and follow it with an active segment or a break. The lecture(tte) may be broken into segments, so that participants may be invited to ask questions or to participate in a buzz session.
- ✓ Take note of your effect on the participants. Keep attention via your eye contact, movement, facial and body language. If you see that you are losing their attention, try something else, or take a short break to regain their focus.
- ✓ Ensure that your pace and vocabulary are geared to the appropriate level for the group. Know your material thoroughly, but don't memorize it. Use PowerPoint slides or a flipchart as a memory jogger by listing the key points.
- ✓ Pause often to give the participants a chance to reflect.
- ✓ Use concrete examples and anecdotes to give life to "dry" information.
- ✓ If audio-visual aids are used, they should heighten and not distract the participants' attention.
- ✓ Summarize often and thoroughly at the conclusion.
- ✓ Since you are presenting only your side of an issue with little opportunity for challenge or rebuttal, plan to allow some time at the end for questions, comments or challenges.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Prior to the session, prepare all visual aids and materials and speaking notes (if required).
2	Present the topic following the guidelines provided above.
3	Ask questions occasionally to verify that the information has been understood and clarify as necessary.

Listening Team

A listening team takes notes and poses questions or makes summaries at the end of a presentation by the trainer or SME. The listening team represents the full group of workshop participants. The listening team's role is to foster interaction between the trainer or SME and the full group.

Advantages

- ✓ The listening team identifies the issues, questions, opinions or problems developed by the group.
- ✓ The summary assists recall of the key points presented.

Guidelines

- ✓ Select participants for the listening team who are knowledgeable of the subject being discussed.
- ✓ Verify that the listening team represents accurately the views of the full group by encouraging appropriate feedback during the summary.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Select the listening team and give instructions as to its role.
2	Tell the large group what the listening team's role and functions are.
3	Have the listening team members take notes during the presentation and report their summaries to the full group.

Panel Discussion

A panel discussion consists of two or more SMEs (usually representative of different perspectives). Time is equally divided between or among panel members.

The purpose of the panel discussion is to explore a problem or issue, to provide an understanding of the parts of a situation, problem or issue, or to weigh the advantages and/or disadvantages of a course of action.

Advantages

- ✓ Establishes informal contact with the learners.
- ✓ Panel members and their viewpoints are of interest to the group and a lively discussion usually ensues.

Guidelines

- ✓ The panel may not address all aspects of the issue or the panel may over-emphasize one aspect so you may need to follow up with further discussion.
- ✓ Try to select panel members who will not let extreme differences of opinion block progress toward a solution.
- ✓ Keep the discussion on-track (this may require assistance from a more experienced trainer).

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Brief the panel participants on their responsibilities.
2	Introduce the panel and outline the process.
3	Have each panel member present their views.
4	Have participants ask questions at the conclusion of each panel member's presentation.
5	If time permits, facilitate a Q & A session to achieve closure.

Role Play

In role playing, selected workshop participants act out a real-world situation in front of the full group or within a small group. Generally there is no script, no set dialogue, and role players make up their parts as they proceed.

The full or small groups (or previously appointed observers within the group) then discusses the behaviours/consequences exhibited in the role play.

The purpose of the role play is to examine a problem that mirrors a real-world situation, explore solutions to a problem, and to provide insights into the dynamics of a people-centred process or procedure.

Advantages

- ✓ It is a dramatic means of presenting a problem and stimulating discussion.
- ✓ It can provide clues to possible solutions.

Guidelines

- ✓ Invite any members of the full group to participate but be sensitive to the fact that some may be too self-conscious to perform successfully in the role play.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Define the problem or situation clearly for the group before the role play begins and set the scene with the assistance of the workshop
2	Select the role players and explain their roles – before the role play begins. ***Note:*** A warm-up period may be necessary for the role players to eliminate self-consciousness.
3	Appoint peers to play observer roles, if desired.
4	Allow the action to proceed only as long as it is productive (usually 5 minutes or less).
5	Facilitate a discussion of the role play.
6	Select a second set of players and replay (or alter) the scene, if desired.

Simulation

Workshop participants are placed in a situation – either strictly procedural or free-form - that resembles a real-world environment. The full group or small groups then discuss the implications of the performance.

The purpose of a simulation is to allow practice and feedback under real-world conditions, to encourage self-instruction, and to illustrate real-world circumstances.

Advantages

- ✓ Promotes hands-on learning.
- ✓ May be used in all stages of learning.

Guidelines

- ✓ Simulations can be costly to develop, so you will need to verify if the funds are available and whether a less costly activity would work as well.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Select the participants for the simulation (if required).
2	Set the scene, clarify the responsibilities and explain the procedures and/or equipment/material to be used.
3	Conduct the simulation.
4	Facilitate a discussion of what happened to conclude.

Skit

The skit is a short, rehearsed presentation involving two or more workshop participants. It is acted from a provided script and portrays an incident that illustrates a problem or situation. The skit may be used at any point in the session. It may precede or follow a lecture(tte), film, or panel but should come before a discussion period. Two or more skits may be used – if so, they should be brief – to illustrate different approaches to a problem, or “before” and “after”.

Good or poor student-tutor relationships may be modeled. Demonstrating actual situations with positive tutor interactions helps participants to visualize themselves in the actual role.

In some cases, humorously illustrating the wrong way to do something makes an impression on the participants and generates discussion of better ways of handling the situation.

The purpose of a skit is to introduce a topic for discussion or highlight a situation already introduced – via discussion or other – in order to show the situation’s relevance to the workshop participants.

Advantages

- ✓ Stimulates lively interest and discussion and may be used to provide a change of pace.
- ✓ Personalizes a situation and promotes the participants emotional involvement with the issue in question.
- ✓ Demands active involvement by a few workshop participants.

Procedure

Step	Action
1	Select participants to perform the skit.
2	Explain their roles and provide a script. Allow them some time to rehearse.
3	Introduce the skit and have it unfold.
4	Conduct a Q & A or discussion to conclude.

Guidelines

- ✓ Discourage over-acting on the part of the role-players.
- ✓ If inappropriate humour and/or irrelevant action arises during the performance you may need to quickly get the role-play back on track.
- ✓ Carefully plan the skit and make sure that it has a useful purpose for the topic at hand.
- ✓ Follow the skit with specific discussion and debriefing.

Use of Audio-Visual Aids

There are a number of audio/visual aids available to assist with your workshop presentation. These may include

- ✓ Posters
- Charts
- Short films
- Slide presentations
- Overheads
- ✓ Videos
- ✓ PowerPoint presentations

These aids provide a visual impact and enable workshop participants to view real students and tutors.

Guidelines

Here are some guidelines for using audio-visual aids effectively:

- ✓ Check for the location of electrical outlets in the workshop room. Be sure to bring an extension cord if necessary.
- ✓ Prior to the presentation, make sure your aids and equipment are ready and that you know how to operate them. Practice running part of the presentation ahead of time on the actual equipment and have everything in the “ready” position.
- ✓ Read the script or preview the presentation before the workshop. This enables you to introduce the presentation and prepare the participants to observe specific points/highlights.
- ✓ Films and slide presentations are more effective if lights are turned out or low. Check the location of light switches. Videos may be shown in a lighted room as long as the light does not reflect on the screen. Some backlighting makes viewing easier.
- ✓ Be prepared to improvise if equipment fails. Always be prepared to demonstrate the chart, lead a discussion, or meet the objectives of the presentation in another way.
- ✓ Following the presentation, discuss with the workshop participants what they observed. Think of its purpose and ask questions which will help achieve the objectives of the segment.
- ✓ If time is not available during the actual workshop, you might consider viewing an audio-visual presentation during lunch or prior to one of the workshop sessions. ***Note:*** This would be optional for workshop participants and would not be a portion of the workshop which is considered mandatory.

Ice Breakers

An ice-breaker is an exercise that can be used at the beginning of a workshop to introduce the participants, put them at ease with each other, uncover expectations and/or identify any apprehensions. The ice-breaker that you use should connect to the workshop that you are providing.

Energizers

An energizer can be used at any time throughout the workshop when you believe that either energy is draining from the group and/or the momentum is dragging, or a quick distraction may be required to re-focus the group.

Energizers are designed to have motion and get the participants up and active for a brief period of time.

Source: *St. F.X. Reproduced and/or adapted by Laubach Literacy of Canada.*

Platform Skills

To be effective, trainers should be aware that they represent a form of visual aid and should therefore demonstrate appropriate platform skills.

Verbal communication (the voice) and non-verbal communication (positioning, moving and gesturing) must be coordinated in order to contribute to, rather than detract from, the learning experience.

Here are some common skills that effective trainers use “on the platform”.

Eye Contact

“Look me in the eye when you say that.”

The implication of this statement is that a message without eye contact lacks sincerity, honesty, or interest. Most of us would agree that making eye contact is a primary skill in any communication setting.

Making eye contact with participants indicates that the trainer is sincere, interested, and looking for reactions.

Returned eye contact by the participant provides important feedback to trainers regarding their understanding, interest, excitement, or boredom.

In facilitation situations, the knack is to be able to make eye contact suitably – especially in discussions with a large group. Eye contact is not always easy to accomplish. While we, as trainers, are moving our eyes we are taking in lots of information. At the same time, we are trying to think about the subject matter.

Patterned eye contact is a common pitfall. Eyes constantly sweeping right-to-left scanning – or in the pattern of side, middle, side and back again (triangular scanning) can be very distracting. As well, such eye movements can produce an unmanageable volume of information for the trainer.

Eye contact should be random and partial and involve the whole group. Timing is the key. Try maintaining eye contact for at least 3-5 seconds per person before looking to the next person. Remember to include those sitting in the wings (extreme left and right) and those sitting toward the back of the room. Try to imagine that you are having brief discussions with each individual for 3-5 seconds at a time.

Gestures

Some experts say non-verbal communication is responsible for over 90% of the impact of a message. The purpose of gestures is to make a message visible. Gestures can be powerful tools if they match your speech, reinforce the verbal communication and are not overdone.

Effective gesturing – the use of one's hands, arms and head – rewards the trainer in many ways. Chiefly, gesturing increases a trainer's dynamism and adds to their professionalism. As well, the appropriate use of gestures by the trainer increases participant involvement.

Here are some things to consider when using gestures:

DO:

- ✓ Let your hands talk for you: use actions that support key words

▪ We need to seize this market opportunity	Closed fist
▪ Let me demonstrate this chart	Hands illustrate chart
▪ Everyone's ideas are needed	Arms stretched out
▪ There are three reasons why	Three fingers held up

- ✓ Make your gestures big enough so that people at the back of the room can receive the overall effect.
- ✓ Be yourself. Allow your gestures to be natural. Artificial gestures can work against you and become distracting and boring to learners.

DON'T:

- ❖ Memorize gestures. Consider where and when you might use certain gestures, but do not plan them in exact details. A planned, but missed gesture can distract you from dialogue with the participants.
- ❖ Make annoying gestures such as jingling change or keys in your pocket, clicking a marker or pen, touching a pointer or your hand on an overhead screen, scratching your head, palm-rubbing, wagging a finger at participants.
- ❖ Allow your gestures (hands and arms) to find themselves for long periods of time in these positions:

▪ Parade rest	Hands held behind back
▪ Fig leaf	Hands clasped low in front
▪ Pocket(s)	Hands in pockets
▪ Wringing	"Washing" hands while clasped at waist
▪ Arms folded	Crossed arms

An effective way to get feedback on your gestures (and other components of platform skills) is through a rehearsal with feedback provided by a trusted person or through videotape and self-review and assessment.

Video Tape Review Tips

- ✓ Watch the tape to identify
- those positive gestures that support your messages
- which gestures need to be adjusted or used less frequently.
- ✓ Watch the tape without sound or in fast-forward mode to identify those gestures which may be distracting.

Stance, Positioning & Movement

Stance, positioning and movement are effective ways of managing the adrenaline flow that trainers experience.

Where do I stand? How do I move around the platform? When/where do I move?

Stance guidelines

- ✓ Stand in the neutral posture; that is, with your hands at your sides.
- ✓ Distribute your weight evenly, from your shoulders through to your feet.
- ✓ Position feet approximately 8-10 inches (20-25 cm) apart.
- ✓ Your body should be leaning slightly toward the participants when listening and/or responding to questions.

Appropriate stance allows the trainer to become comfortable and to stay relaxed, and to achieve three guidelines of body positioning.

- ✓ Face the participants when speaking with them.
- ✓ Face the participants when listening to them.
- ✓ Face away from participants minimally (not more than 3-5 seconds at a time).

Positioning Guidelines

Positioning is particularly an important issue when co-training.

- ✓ Co-trainers can use cues to signal that the "off" trainer wishes to assume the "on" role. For instance, while one co-trainer is speaking, the other can move to stand beside them, wait until they finish speaking and then assume the lead role.
- ✓ Effective positioning during co-training avoids the sensation of split screen from the participants' perspective – to whom should they pose their questions or responses?
- ✓ Positioning also can eliminate confusion for co-trainers trying to manage the traffic that effective discussions generate. Co-trainers should not call on different participants at the same time.
- ✓ Trainers must also be aware of their positioning relative to the visual aids that are used to avoid blocking the view to the visual aid.

Movement Guidelines

Movement assists the trainer in managing nervous energy, and in providing an interesting visual for learners. Trainer must rely on their own instincts in this regard. However, certain guidelines are helpful:

- ✓ Use as much of your platform as is comfortable. Be careful not to get rooted in one spot, because doing so will affect the degree to which you are able to maintain eye contact evenly around the room.
- ✓ Use the platform from right to left, and forward and backward. Moving close to an individual or subgroup can be effective, but do not overdo this. Remember: while you are having a more direct conversation with an individual or subgroup, the full group may feel disengaged.
- ✓ The notion of personal space must be respected. Personal space is situational and is dependent on many factors including the participant's age, culture, and familiarity with the trainer.
- ✓ It is recommended that the trainer assume centre stage – the place of influence – when opening a session or beginning a discussion, or when tasking groups. Not only does centre stage capture attention, it also is the best viewing position for both the participants and the trainer.

Pauses

"The pause is the mind's measurement of thought"

Pausing is one of the most productive yet underused facilitation skills.

Why? Because many trainers are uncomfortable with silence, particularly if the trainer's role is viewed as that of the primary speaker.

Silence is a powerful opportunity for learning to occur. Silence allows people to analyze, assimilate, evaluate and/or resolve an issue.

A lack of pausing (by the trainer) can leave participants feeling clogged with information and this overload can impede the learning process.

- ✓ Pauses should be deliberate and they should be used at critical moments within the learning environment – such as after a question is asked, an opinion is stated, a role play is completed or a "learning moment" has occurred.
- ✓ Trainers must view pauses as useful parts of, not lapses in, the learning process.
- ✓ Try combining pauses with eye contact. Select an individual in the group, make eye contact, and pause at least 2-3 seconds before starting to speak.

Voice

Your voice has an immediate and significant impact on your success as the trainer. To be heard and understood, whether in person, on the telephone or in presentations, your voice must be clear and melodious. It must also reflect your meaning and intent. The sound of your voice will influence your listener. There are a variety of techniques that can be used to upgrade your vocal skills to maintain a healthy voice with proper pitch, appropriate volume, clear articulation and a pleasing resonance. Also important are the combined techniques of pacing, correct emphasis, well placed pauses, gestures and body language that reflect your meaning.

- ✓ With your eyes closed, try listening to a trainer. This may help support the claim that vocal quality accounts for up to 85% of the trainer's believability. As you can hear, our voices are used for many purposes.

  For example:
  - ✓ The trainer's voice commands attention when needed
  - ✓ It emphasizes and gives meaning to important or difficult points
  - ✓ It conveys enthusiasm and energy for the subject matter.

- ✓ Increasing the volume of the voice assists in increasing the overall enthusiasm factor. It is rare that a trainer is criticized for being too loud. The more common complaint is that one's voice is too low or too soft.

  Note: It may be necessary to adjust the volume of your voice to the workshop site and any prevailing conditions. If you have a soft voice, practice projecting your voice to reach different targets. Projecting your voice toward the back of the room is one way of ensuring that the overall volume is appropriate.

- ✓ The rate or pace of the presentation should be set so that the participants are kept alert. Remember, their thinking will match the trainer's pace. A faster pace can be used to stimulate enthusiasm and a slower pace can be used to stress more important or difficult points. If you talk too quickly, use a stopwatch and practice slowing your speech until it matches your singing speed.

- ✓ It is important to articulate in order to be understood. You should produce clear and distinct sounds. If you are challenged throughout the workshop with articulation, suggest a five minute break.

- ✓ Varying the pitch of the voice makes it more interesting to the participants. Trainers should alternate voice tones more than we would in a one-on-one conversation.

- ✓ Nervousness can tighten the muscles around the vocal chords, causing the voice to squeak or crack. Some trainers rely on these simple exercises to address this problem:
  - Avoid shallow breathing from the throat or chest; breathe from the diaphragm.
  - Learn to relax the neck and shoulder area. Shrug the shoulders, let them drop, repeat. Clench all the muscles in your neck and shoulder areas, hold for a few seconds then relax. Repeat this several times.

Voice Exercises

Listen to your voice on audio-tape in order to identify specific things you can do to improve vocal performance. You will notice traits regarding your tone, volume and enthusiasm of expression. In order to both protect your voice and use it to your best advantage, you can begin by caring for your voice with this five-step approach.

Step 1. Breathe Deeply

You can speak only as well as you breathe. The voice, after all, is a wind instrument. You need to supply it with ample air in order to power your talk. Before getting up to speak, find a place where you can pause quietly for a while. Do a few breathing exercises. Take deep (diaphragmatic) breaths to supply your voice with air.

Beginning speakers often hurt their voices because they are not breathing deeply enough. When you breathe in, your stomach should push out. When you breathe out, your stomach should push in. Place your hand on your stomach when you are practicing your presentation. See if you are bringing air all the way down into your diaphragm.

Breathe deeply even as you make your way to the front of the room. Pause for a few seconds and breathe as you look around the room. Taking even one additional deep breath will help your air supply and give your voice more support.

Step 2. Learn to Relax

Tension in your upper body diminishes the power of your voice and can cause hoarseness. Over time, it can adversely affect your throat and can lead to vocal chord damage. Through vocal warm-up exercises, you reduce tension in your shoulders, neck and throat. As you exercise, allow your body to breathe naturally. Relax your body and let whatever tension that may be present to flow out each time you exhale.

Step 3. Condition your Voice

Try some tender loving care on your voice. A teaspoonful of salt and a teaspoonful of baking soda dissolved in a cup of warm water make a simple solution that will wash away allergens and other irritants. It is especially helpful if you have a cold on the day of your presentation or workshop. After you gargle, coat and soothe your throat with a cup of herbal tea or decaffeinated tea with plenty of honey.

Step 4. Hydrate

Drink plenty of water before and during your workshop. Talking for long periods can dry out your vocal apparatus, making it more prone to damage and fatigue. Avoid spicy foods and caffeine.

Step 5. Empower your Voice

One of the best things you can do is get a god night’s sleep. You will have more vocal energy and will avoid sounding tired.

Once you have begun speaking, open your mouth wide to produce a big sound.

Gestures from your shoulders reduce upper body tension and empower your voice.

You can learn to inject interest into your voice by saying words sliding up and down the scale, or saying words in different ways to convey different meanings.

Appearance and Attitude

A neat appearance, matched to your audience, will create positive first impressions and communicate interest in the participants.

Your overall attitude will affect participant motivation. If you are enthusiastic, helpful, have a sense of humour and show sensitivity toward the participants, they will be more responsive.

Your enthusiasm and confidence will also inspire.

Platform Skills Assessment

You may wish to ask an observer to complete a platform skills assessment during your presentation practice and/or your actual workshop presentation. This is a good opportunity to understand how others see you, your strengths and areas for improvement relative to your presentation skills.

An Observation Competency Assessment - Platform Skills form is provided in the Tools and Resources section at the end of Part A.

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