Charrette Facilitation Guidelines

Technology (for online charrettes)

* Accept that technical difficulties may be part of the experience for you or one (or more) of your participants. Have your group members’ email addresses handy in case you need to communicate with them about any last-minute connectivity problems. If someone has trouble connecting, don’t spend too much time waiting or trying to solve their problem; you can catch them up if/when they manage to join the group. If a technical problem leaves you with only one or two group members or if it substantially cuts into your time, use your best judgment about whether/how to continue. We can try to reschedule a group, if needed.

The Charrette Process

* Prepare for the session by reading all the assignments carefully and come with some questions and issues that seem important to raise if they do not emerge naturally within the discussion. It may be helpful to look at NILOA’s handout “Questions to Ask about an Assignment.” This document is located in the Charrette Handouts folder in the Assignment Charrette Toolkit: https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/ourwork/assignment-charrette/.
* Explain the charrette process to the participants. NILOA’s charrette model allows 25 minutes per assignment, which includes a brief introductory context-setting by the assignment author, and 5 minutes for written feedback at the end, with discussion in between. For an online charrette, the total time together is one hour and fifty minutes—with a group of four participants, that allows five minutes at the beginning for the facilitator’s opening remarks, 100 minutes to review all of the assignments, and five minutes at the end for final thoughts and wrap-up. If your group has fewer than four participants, you can take more time for each segment or simply end early.
* Manage the time. Whatever timing you decide upon, the facilitator’s first and sometimes hardest job is to monitor the time and make sure that everyone in the group can contribute--and benefit. You might want to have an index card with “2 minutes left” to gently remind the speaker/group when it’s time to start wrapping up their verbal comments.
* Encourage the author of the assignment to take notes while others are giving verbal feedback. Although the author can be asked to answer clarifying questions, the author should do more listening than talking during that portion of the process. This might be hard for some people, who may feel the need to justify aspects of their assignment. If that happens, you can remind them that feedback is not about telling them they are wrong; it is intended to be helpful and to give them some ideas to consider.
* At the end of each round, ask everyone in the group to write feedback to the person whose assignment was just discussed. Let them know that it’s okay if the written feedback repeats what was discussed during the verbal portion. Receiving the same feedback in different forms can be useful. For online charrettes, a feedback form for each participant will be included along with the assignments and memos in the group’s Google Drive folder. Participants can write their feedback there simultaneously. Although it’s okay for people to make notes during the discussion, it would be better if they did that by hand (or just not on the Google Doc) until the time comes for written feedback; we don’t want participants to be distracted by reading/writing comments while they are supposed to be in listening/discussion mode.
* At the end of the charrette, after everyone’s assignment has been discussed, the facilitator can invite participants to reflect on the process: what have they learned, what themes seemed to emerge, how did it feel, what next steps (personally or for the program or institution) would be useful? This is also a chance to invite insights about the characteristics of powerful assignments.

Communication Guidelines and Setting the Tone

* Recognize that participants are likely to be nervous about sharing assignments, which have traditionally been fairly private work. It may be helpful to begin by acknowledging this outright, using the occasion to set a tone of constructive review and sharing (“we’re all in this together”), a focus on improvement, and an understanding that every assignment is a work in progress, which requires adjustments and modifications over time.
* As the facilitator, be mindful of participants who might be speaking too much as well as those who are reticent or not contributing. You may need to offer gentle reminders that full participation is important.
* When someone makes a comment/provides feedback, and no one else responds, offer a “thank you, X” or some indicator that they were heard. Dead air after a comment is a bit uncomfortable and difficult to “read.”
* Work with the group to establish some “rules of engagement.” These might include turn taking, the importance of active listening, a focus on being helpful rather than critical, and mutual respect. For online groups, you might encourage participants to:
  + make use of the video capabilities and raise a hand or give another visible signal if they have something they want to say.
  + take notes. Jotting down notes might help them to maintain attention and enhance understanding in the absence of face-to-face contact.
  + wait until there is a slight pause before speaking; otherwise participants might inadvertently cut off the last speaker before s/he is finished.
  + be fully present, and remove any potential distractions.
  + self-monitor their speaking time. Brief, meaningful comments are more effective and enable others to contribute.
  + be mindful of their microphone. If it is not on mute, background noise can be amplified.

Modified from NILOA’s “[Guidelines for Assignment-Design Charrette Facilitators](http://degreeprofile.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Guidelines-for-assignment-design-charrette-facilitators.pdf)”:

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