

Facilitating a Positive, Engaging Classroom Discussion (In Person or Virtual)

ABC Facilitation Model

Meaningful Facilitation

As the instructor, you play an interactive role in each of your courses: coaching students, keeping them on the right track, and facilitating learning of course content. Every class needs meaningful facilitation, or it will lack direction and an efficient foundation to help students succeed and achieve their personal and professional goals. Additionally, the instructor acts as a role model, leading the way by example through substantive participation, effective organization, and professional communication.

The study of Lim, Cheung, and Hew (2011) suggest facilitators should focus on three facilitation techniques, specifically expressing agreements, providing opinions or explanations to foster an in-depth level of critical thinking and questioning. As you facilitate discussions, model your interaction using the **ABC Model**:

- **A**cknowledge something the individual has said.
- **B**uild by adding personal experience or observations or relevant course content.
- **C**onclude with a question to the individual or class.

By implementing the principles of the ABC prompt, students are more likely to perceive us as facilitators rather than as teachers who rely on lectures to fill class time.

Leading the Way by Example

Highly involved instructors encourage students to actively engage in course discussions, which results in interactive classes, full of dynamic conversation, new ideas, and expanding views. Faculty participation that is highly involved includes the following:

- Building on students' comments by adding substantive contributions to the discussion, including suggesting alternative solutions, adding other perspectives, pointing out problems, and disagreeing constructively at times.
- Encouraging students to apply course concepts to the workplace environment and their daily lives.

- Encouraging student participation by asking probing questions that encourage them to think deeply.
- Demonstrating content knowledge by sharing experiences and analyzing course concepts in the class discussions.
- Referring to current course readings and asking students to apply these course materials to their discussion.

Take the time to share your own professional experiences, as related to the subject matter.

Ideas for Substantive Facilitation in Virtual Math Discussions

The ABC Facilitation Model can apply to facilitator participation in a math course as well. Even though the discussions may look different from those in social studies, business, or humanities classes, learner-facilitator discourse is also an integral part of math classes.

Promotion of a dynamic discourse is a crucial responsibility for math facilitators. A substantive faculty post in a math course might include one or more of the following:

- Offering additional content in a learning activity
- Providing a probing question on solutions or applications
- Acknowledging the student's work and expanding by sharing an application or insight
- Building on, and correcting, a mistake by reinforcing the concept. Include a comment on why students generally make that mistake and suggest ways to remember the information correctly in the future. Direct students to appropriate examples in the text and additional resources.
- Relating the problem to a real-world application or asking students to do so.
- Answering a student's question with instruction on strengthening a particular skill.
- Asking probing questions to stimulate critical thinking and help students think of alternatives.
- Discussing alternative methods of solutions and encourage students to try to solve problems differently.
- Praising students for what they did well in a problem or assignment; supportive feedback is important in all subject areas, but particularly in an area about which many students have anxiety, such as math.

It is important to note that the ABC Model is for facilitators and is not an expectation for students' posts.

When facilitating in a virtual classroom, as part of leading the way by example, make sure that all of your posts are clear, error-free, and well-formatted. Each message must reflect a high level of professionalism and critical thinking. Modeling critical thinking and clear, respectful expression will help communicate high expectations and also create an academic environment that encourages students to do their best work and interact respectfully.

References

Lim, S. R., Cheung, W. S., & Hew, K. F. (2011). Critical thinking in asynchronous online discussion: An investigation of student facilitation techniques. *New Horizons in Education*, 59(1), 52-65. Retrieved from <http://www.hkta1934.org.hk/NewHorizon/index2.html>

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