



SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY
—
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
—
CENTER FOR EDUCATOR
DEVELOPMENT, ADVANCEMENT
AND RESEARCH



CEDAR Conclusion!
*Small Group
Facilitation*

[Small group facilitation](#) requires adequate preparation, intentional use of active learning, monitoring of engagement, and interactivity among learners. This CEDAR Conclusion on Small Group Facilitation offers helpful tips.

Small group sessions serve multiple functions including but not limited to 1) reinforcing basic science content; 2) placing content in a clinical context; 3) supporting students in participating in active, peer-to-peer learning; and 4) encouraging an educational alliance between the faculty facilitator and the students. Effective faculty facilitation to encourage active learning is key. [Active learning](#) involves practices that encourage understanding through interactive engagement of students in stimulating and hands-on activities which result in subsequent feedback through discussion with facilitators or peers. Knowledge cannot be transmitted from teacher to student; instead, it must take place through learners actively constructing and applying their new knowledge.

- **Prepare for the Session:** Review session information in advance to identify and appraise learning objectives, prepare key points to make aligned with discussion questions, and plan for using your time.
- **Share Session Goals:** Adult learners need to know *why* they need to know something, so be transparent about session objectives and indicate how learners will benefit from this knowledge now or in the future.
- **Set Engagement Expectations:** Effective small group learning requires interactivity, so let learners know expectations for engagement, make ground rules clear, and encourage shared leadership and interaction.
- **Give Learners Time to Think:** [Hit Pause](#) to focus attention when starting sessions by trying an exercise:
 - o *Welcome to our Learning Space:* All learners engage in a 1 minute deep breathing activity guided by the facilitator to welcome everyone into the learning space with intentionality.
 - o [Emoji Check-In:](#) In pairs of 2 – 3, all learners share where they are on an emoji chart and identify one way they could improve their affect.
 - o *5 Facts I Know:* All learners write down 5 facts or concepts they know about the days' topic to prime session learning, with brief report out to a partner or the large group.
- **Model Strong Facilitation Practices:** Stay conversational, listen more than you talk, move around, visually connect, and embrace silence.
- [Encourage Psychological Safety:](#) Support the belief that learners will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes by cultivating a predictably respectful learning environment.
- [Ask Questions:](#) Arouse interest and curiosity, assess knowledge, encourage critical thought, scaffold learning, and initiate, sustain, or direct a conversation.
- **Redirect as Needed:** Check for understanding, correct misinformation, paraphrase what learners say, and model good clinical reasoning.
- **Monitor and Encourage Participation:** Use encouraging phrases such as “who would feel comfortable starting our discussion” and “I would love to hear from a student who has not yet had the opportunity to share.”
- [Support Active Learning:](#) Limit interruption of learners and encourage engagement among learners. Employ active learning methods such as:
 - o [Think-Pair-Share:](#) Have learners think about the topic, pair up, share insights, and report to large group.
 - o [1-2-4-More:](#) Have learners independently think about a question for 1 minute, then build on ideas in pairs for 2 minutes, then share and develop ideas from each pair in foursomes for 4 minutes, and have each group share “one idea that stood out in their conversations” to the large group for 5 minutes.
- **Summarize Learning:** Share key points, identify linkages, encourage learners to reflect, thank the group, and consider using the [Plus/Delta Debriefing Model](#) to identify improvement opportunities.
- **Embrace your Impostor Phenomenon:** Recognize that you cannot be an expert on everything, model uncertainty when appropriate, and remain humble.

Have colleagues who would benefit from a session on Small Group Facilitation? Email CEDAR@health.slu.edu to request. CEDAR is piloting a peer observation of teaching initiative. A CEDAR team member will observe your teaching, prepare a brief report, and debrief for 30 minutes to offer improvement opportunities. Email CEDAR@health.slu.edu to request.