

# Adult Faith Formation

## Spark Handbook



### Session Five Handouts

- 5.1a:** Evaluating Facilitator Skills
- 5.1b:** Strategies for Effective Group Facilitation
- 5.1c:** Scenarios to Practice Facilitation Skills

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## Handout 5.1a: Evaluating Facilitator Skills – Prewrite ahead of session

Place an X on each continuum line to show your own facilitator skills for Online Sessions. Note that being to the right is not always the end goal!

This is available as a [Self-Evaluation of Facilitator Skills Google Form](#) and will allow you to directly input your answers. The Google Form will also provide a class summary with no personal detail of the group's self-evaluation.



### 1. Creating a Covenant

Affirming a Template

Starting from Scratch

### 2. Think About Timing

Often run long or short

Flex to Meet Group

Always running too long

### 3. Create Flexible Agendas

Tight Ship

General Timeframe

What Agenda?

### 4. Facilitator Brevity

Often Talk Too Much

Engagement Feels Spot On

Often Say Too Little

### 5. Form Small Groups (Breakout Rooms)

Too Techy for Me

Value Enough to Try

Are a Breeze

## 6. Intervene When Necessary

Uncomfortable

Constructive

Too Persnickety

## 7. Equalizing Opportunities to Speak

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Timid

Comfortable

Abrupt

## 8. Checking in with the Group About their Experience

Don't Generally Ask

Intermittently

Solicitous

## 9. Post in Park Bench

Ask folks to hold questions until end

Use Regularly

Don't Like to Interrupt

## 10. Sensitivity to Normative Culture – Anti-Oppression Skills

Resistant

Novice

Can Recognize and Address

## 11. Communication Skills

Challenged

Timely and Clear

## 12. Relational Skills

Prefer Independence

Collaborative

## Handout 5.1b: Strategies for Effective Group Facilitation

Using the results of Handout 5.1a: Evaluating Facilitator Skills , here are accompanying strategies and skills to help facilitators of adult faith formation offerings, or any ministry group endeavor, create a learning space where all participants have a chance for listening and speaking.

### 1. A Group Covenant

Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal free church faith, which means:

“A covenantal free church is a body of individuals who have freely made a profoundly simple promise, a covenant: We pledge to walk together in the spirit of mutual love. The spirit of love is alone worthy of our ultimate, our religious loyalty. So, we shall meet often to take counsel concerning the ways of love, and we will yield religious authority solely to our own understanding of what these ways are, as best we can figure them out or learn or remember them, together.”

— Alice Blair Wesley, Unitarian Universalist minister

Whenever we gather together, creating a covenant allows us to teach and renew this foundational process. Covenants can help us be bold and brave, build community, and learn how to be more fully human. In our small group gatherings, covenants tend to be prosaic, addressing a range of issues, such as arriving on time, keeping confidentiality, respecting someone’s choice not to speak, avoiding negative comments, the right to pass, etc.

A group covenant can:

- Clarify expectations around process;
- Illuminate power differentials to help minimize their impact on process;
- Clarify that all group participants are responsible for keeping the Covenant; and
- Provide a clearer and more specific reference for addressing out-of-covenant behavior.

Covenants can be created from scratch using a variety of resources and samples. Or, facilitators may offer a covenant template to the group for revision and reflection of who in particular is in the group. Your covenant should address what to do if the process the group is trying to create with their covenant becomes broken. Ongoing groups should review and renew their agreements annually, or whenever new members are added. Reading a part of the covenant at each meeting is recommended.

Some resources on how to create a covenant:

- [Writing a UU Covenant Workshop](#)
- [Sample Covenant of Right Relations](#)
- [Sample Group Covenants](#) (Small Group Ministry Network)
- [Our Covenantal Faith](#), Workshop 10 from “A Place of Wholeness” curriculum

## 2. Think About Timing

As a facilitator, it is important to begin and end on time and to do this, you will likely have to pay attention to a few things:

- A realistic sense of how much time each session takes.
- Participants will join and leave the group at different times. Make clear to the participants your intentions of beginning and ending on time. It is not a judgement, life happens. It is necessary to prepare a way to acknowledge a person with welcome, not judgment.
- Having a backup plan and modeling a forgiving spirit when tech fails or throws you off your planned timing.
- Sometimes pastoral or other events are more important than the planned session and inviting group consensus here is important. There is a saying that “In an effort to cover the lesson plan, if you leave behind your students, you have failed.” With the group’s approval, attend to the dynamics in the group. This is a way of modeling the relationality of our faith community.
- Enlist the whole group in taking responsibility for the process of moving through the session. If you fall behind in the timing, say “I’m concerned (or ‘I notice’) that we are behind what we planned on covering today. What do you suggest we do about this?” Let the group make suggestions. Usually, they volunteer that they need to be more focused and self-disciplined, particularly if you ask, “Shall we extend our meeting time by 45 minutes?”

## 3. Create Flexible Agendas

Because people like to know what they are doing and what they will be covering, sharing a planned session with the group is important. However, strict agendas can be a characteristic of White Supremacy Culture. [RacialEquityTools.org](https://www.RacialEquityTools.org) suggests,

“Consider including different opportunities for all participants to help shape what gets covered in a session for example, by leaving time at the end of meetings to do a quick review to make any suggestions. Also, it is important to encourage people not to lobby for agreements outside the meeting process before things are even brought to the larger group, or if that is the process, it needs to be acknowledged and managed equitably.”

This may not be possible in the middle of class, so seeking more viewpoints or perspectives on the planned class *before* it begins is ideal. Or leave time at the start of a class for everyone to review the session and make any suggestions about timing and/or what might be left out or what is covered.

## 4. Model Brevity

Make sure your thoughts are organized and stated as succinctly as possible. For instance, during check-in and other sharing, be sure you share far less than the time allotted for each person to

model brevity.

It is also important to add your own professional knowledge and experience, especially if a conversation has gone off track where incorrect knowledge is being shared. Be who you are. If you are an extrovert, be one within limits that doesn't get in the way of others' learning. Zoom has a timer that allows you to see how long you have been talking. If you are an introvert, be one, and you will likely have to stretch a bit to facilitate. You may consider pairing an introvert and an extrovert in your facilitation team.

- When you are online, participants can mute and unmute to help the group see who is ready to speak and when people are finished.
- If someone is taking longer than the time allotted, the host can unmute themselves and gently note when time is up.
- You can also use the promise of small group time to interrupt lengthy or tangential discourses, suggesting that the small group exercise will be a more appropriate place to share an extended story or have an in-depth conversation.

## 5. Form Small Groups

People like to talk, and the size of a group can have an outsized effect on who speaks and who doesn't. One way to give everyone more time to talk within a limited timeframe is to use breakout rooms, which can create space for some to be more comfortable speaking. When the whole group regathers, the small groups can share highlights according to the time you have allotted—from as little as a word or phrase written in the chat box to a written report from each group.

## 6. Intervene When Necessary

Facilitators often fail or succeed on their willingness to intervene with a participant or group issue when necessary. To muster the will, train yourself to think of the larger group only and their needs, which can often provide motivation to speak with individuals about their online behavior.

Participants are usually reluctant to confront each other and look instead to the facilitator to handle dominating members. If preventative strategies have failed, try these interventions:

***Interrupt.*** Don't be afraid to interrupt a speaker in front of the group. Letting one individual go on and on is disrespectful of all participants. Respectful but firm interruptions include:

- "Excuse me, Tara, but I'm concerned about the time."
- "I'm going to stop you there, Marta, because I'm concerned that we are moving off our focus."
- "Rico, can you summarize your point in 25 words or less, because we need to move on?"
- "Chaz, is this an issue we can put on the Bike Rack for later? We can't address it right now."

Usually people respond by cooperating. If the facilitator is willing to interrupt garrulous behavior, the garrulous usually become quieter, the quiet becomes bolder, and a rough equality evolves. If appropriate, appeal to the group covenant and the agenda as objective references for behavioral expectations.

***Speak to the person privately.*** When a participant is really not responding to preventative strategies or gentle confrontations in the group, speak with the individual at the break or after the meeting. You can be more candid in private.

- Use “I” statements to state the problem: “I am concerned about staying on our schedule.” “I am concerned that not everyone has an opportunity to speak when some people speak at length. It is my responsibility to bring everyone into the process.”
- Name participants’ behavior if they don’t own it themselves. Be specific.
- “Chris, are you aware that you interrupted Ana, Rani, and Louise when they were sharing? We agreed as a group to listen to each other respectfully.”
- Give the person an opportunity to voice concerns. “Sal, how is this group working for you? You seemed frustrated tonight. Is there something you need from me or the group?”
- Try to enlist their help in agreeing to a solution. Affirm them and appeal to their sense of fairness. “Frank, I value your participation in this group, and I need to be respectful of everyone’s time and needs. What do you think I should do when someone repeatedly interrupts others?”

Hopefully, the participant will acknowledge their behavior and modify it in the future. If the behavior continues unabated, the issue may be bigger than the group. Speak with your minister or religious educator before confronting the person privately again and reiterating your concerns. If, as a result of this confrontation, the person chooses to leave the group despite your respectful efforts to include them appropriately, do not count their departure as a failure. Your priority as facilitator is the well-being of the group and its process.

## 7. Equalize Opportunities to Speak

Some people are quick to speak up; others need time for reflection. Some are comfortable competing for the floor; others are not and will not. Here are some techniques to equalize opportunities to speak:

- **Moment of Reflection.** After you have raised a question or topic, ask everyone to reflect silently for a minute (or two) and collect their thoughts. Do not allow anyone to break this silence except to ask a clarifying question. Then break the silence by calling on someone who has not spoken at length or by using one of the options below.
- **Around the Zoom Room.** Type the names of participants in the chat box and say that we will respond in this order. Start with someone who has not previously spoken at length.
- **Raising Hands.** Ask the group to agree that they will raise their hands when they wish to speak, refraining from interrupting when someone else has the floor. The facilitator

makes a note of the order in which people raise their hands and periodically indicates who will have the floor next. For example, “Marta is up, then John, Aisha, and then Christa.” If this system seems “juvenile” or controlling, try it. It is actually very fair, inclusive, efficient, and relaxing because people can turn their attention to speaking and listening with respect rather than competing for the floor and trying to hold it against the threat of interruptions.

- **Stepping back.** If some of the group have not yet spoken, ask those who have spoken to yield the floor and allow those who have not to go next if they wish. Remember, this is an invitation; it should not feel coercive and passing should be discussed as a viable option at any time.
- **Body language.** Watch for body language indicating that someone wants to speak but is hesitant to compete for the floor. In Zoom, this may include people reaching for the “unmute” button, but it can also be someone who looks as though they have stopped participating if they are not able to get into the conversation. Call on them in an encouraging way, by saying things like, “Can we hear from anyone who hasn’t yet spoken today?” or “We want to give some space here for folks who are primarily listeners to speak now.”

## 8. Conduct a Process Check

Schedule a five- to ten-minute group process check as a regular feature at the end of each session or meeting. Ask, “How was our process?” When you introduce this concept, make it clear that a process check is not an evaluation of the facilitators or class material, but an invitation to everyone to reflect on their own participation and their experience of the group process as a whole. A process check encourages self-awareness, communicates that everyone shares responsibility for the process, and gives people an opportunity to voice their concerns or suggestions. Note: If there is a particularly learning activity that may rest uneasy with some, having a process check allows participants to speak what they are feeling.

**PREWORK to be used in the session:** Create a 5-10 minute process check or record one you have noted before and used. We will invite someone to lead this process check in the session:

## 9. Post an Unfinished Business (or Park Bench) in the Chat Box or Google Slides

Put unfinished business in the chat box to return to later, or to respond individually, when participants move off topic. As people go off on tangents that are important to them, but not germane to the task at hand, interrupt politely, affirm that their issue deserves attention, explain that it cannot be addressed at the moment, and ask them to write: “Park Bench: The topic or question.” Be sure to address it at the time you have set aside.



## 10. Sensitivity to Normative Culture –Anti Oppression Skills

The normative culture in most of our Unitarian Universalist congregations is whiteness, ableness, 60 years and older. It is not necessarily male any longer though behavior norms may linger. This culture operates with a set of unspoken assumptions and unexamined practices.

Facilitators need some awareness and ability to shift this or address this normative culture from the center. This takes a great deal of practice and experience but any practice and experience is worth every minute of time spent.

There are many ways to learn how to recognize and shift the center, including classes such as Beloved Conversations, UUA Common Reads and other books, LREDA Fall Cons, and Regional and General Assembly workshops.

Setting up diverse (around identity characteristics) co-facilitating teams is another way to shift some part of the center. Reading and studying the UUA's Commission on Institutional Change's report *Widening the Circle of Concern* or engaging in a study of the [8th Principle](#) are excellent places to begin.

A note of caution: As a professional, learning and practicing these facilitation skills are best done in professional settings instead of congregational ones as a participant. Engaging staff in a class, book read, or reflection on the COIC Report is beneficial.

## 11. Communication Skills

An online learning community requires notices and directions to be clear, concise and timely. Repeating directions, using multiple modalities, short and informed by more than one "voice" are also important. Story-telling and relational community building are not so dependent on these skills, but may require flexibility and creating open space. Here is a [Communication Inventory Google Form](#) to inventory a variety of communication skills that support the implementation of an Adult Faith Formation ministry.

## 12. Relational Skills

Facilitators need to have good relational skills, which can be defined as “the ways in which people interact with each other.” Relational skills go beyond knowledge of information and experience to include personal traits. They differ from person to person. These can include:

- Patience
- Empathy
- Reliability
- Influence
- Co-learner orientation
- Interested in listening

Here are some questions when interviewing possible Adult Faith Formation facilitators for your congregation:

- What does collaboration mean to you?
- How would you describe your ability and interest in making decisions within a group?
- What is your background in anti-oppression work?
- Why do you want to facilitate this class?
- How do you think people learn best?
- Whom might you want to work with as a co-facilitator?

## Handout 5.1c: Scenarios to Practice Facilitation Skills

**Prework:** Read through these scenarios so you can choose which two or three we will do in session.

<p><b>Covenant</b>          One member of your small group is chronically late. When the group first began meeting, they would be only a couple of minutes late, and the group was happy to wait. Of late, they have been coming in later and later. When they enter, they often have technical issues and request if the group can hear them or see them and interrupts conversation to explain why they are late and to ask for a summary of what has been discussed. It is becoming a real problem and others have started to come late too. You can't really get started until about 20 minutes after the appointed time, which cuts the group time short.  <b>What practice you might use to improve the group work.</b></p>	<p><b>Timing</b>          At the facilitator training you are leading for future Adult Faith Formation facilitators, you run a few minutes over, and a Facilitator or two comes to talk with you about the importance of finishing exactly on time and that they plan to set this expectation in their offering. They do not explain why it is so important to them. You are aware that this can be a feature of white supremacy culture and need to help facilitators learn how to be more flexible.  <b>Share what you might say to convey the issue to them and the others.</b></p>
<p><b>Agenda Making</b>  <b>1. How would you help a facilitator make this agenda more flexible?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome and Announcements      6 min</li> <li>• Review Covenant                      3 min</li> <li>• Chalice Lighting                        1 min</li> <li>• Check in (2 min/person)            10 min</li> <li>• Introduce topic                         2 min</li> <li>• Show Video                               3 min</li> <li>• Large Group Discussion            15 min</li> <li>• Breakout Groups and Questions   30 min</li> <li>• Closing                                     5 min</li> </ul> <p><b>2. How might you improve the following agenda for a 75-min session?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening</li> <li>• Discussion</li> <li>• Closing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intervene When Necessary (1)</b>          A facilitator comes to you to problem-solve the participation of an individual small group, checking on whether it may be a pastoral situation. The situation they name is:</p> <p>A participant comes to almost every session of the small group but they often, if not always, “pass” during check in. They seldom offer comments, questions, or reflections. They seem content listening to others. Since the small group process utilizes personal stories and reflections, the facilitator is wondering how to engage them and if it is important to do so for their own and the group's benefit. <b>What do you suggest to the Facilitator?</b></p>

**Intervene when Necessary (2)**

A well-loved member of your congregation has joined the class on ethics you are leading. At first, all was well, as their stories and sense of humor made people more comfortable. Of late, you have noticed that others are having trouble getting a word in edgewise. For every ethical dilemma raised in the program, they have a story. Body language tells you that others are frustrated and one participant has told you that they don't want to attend anymore. **What do you do?**

**Process Check**

In your facilitator training, you speak to the participants about building in a five-minute process check. One, they don't seem to want to "waste the time" and two, they don't have confidence about how to conduct a process check. **How might you solve this?**

**Park Bench**

You are facilitating a series of workshops on themes in Unitarian Universalist history. One of the participants, a longtime member of the congregation, is very interested in the nineteenth-century abolitionists. They have a great deal to share, sometimes going on and on, adding details that you did not plan to include in the workshop. At first, others were polite and interested, even encouraging them to share what they know. Now this is monopolizing the workshop and interfering with the agenda. Body language tells you that other participants are annoyed, but no one else refers to the Covenant. **Share the phrases you might use in Chat.**

**Sensitivity to Normative White Culture**

A facilitator comes to you with a service-learning program article they want to place in the newsletter:

**First UU Family Food Prep**

Join us to learn about and stand up to injustice by joining our online Zoom class which will include sessions on food insecurity in our predominantly Latino and Black neighborhoods and also classes on food prep designed to provide meals for Third Harvest Food Bank! We'll meet at 9 a.m. on Wednesday at (Zoom link). Bring your laptops and iPads to your kitchens and as families we will hear from Third Harvest Food Bank leaders about food insecurity and then create lunches for boys and girls of color under the age of ten. This week we are making sandwiches. You will need bread, cold cuts, cheese slices, condiments, and individual baggies. You will also need a cool place to store the sandwiches and a car to drive them to Third Harvest Food bank by 11 a.m. after the class.

Identify the issues in the blurb. Consider how you would engage the facilitator who wrote this write-up about these issues, and/or if any were spoken aloud in a group you were facilitating, how you would handle the engagement publicly.

**Communication Skills**

Have everyone in your group complete this [Communications Inventory quiz](#). **Write a task list related to improving two skills that you need to improve and share it with the group.**

**Relational Skills**

As we determine who will facilitate sessions, interviewing adults is a better practice. **What are three (3) questions you would ask (do not include any already noted in your group)? Share them.**