

FACILITATION SERIES: The Art of Flip Charting

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The discussion has begun, and words are flowing from each person like the water in a rushing stream. These words must be captured and become the wallpaper plastered throughout the room. It is this process of flip charting that creates the visual summary of key discussion points and provides the group memory that supports the process of a facilitated conversation.

Every trained facilitator understands the benefits of recording comments made by group members. But it is how those comments are recorded that will either encourage expanded thinking of the group or will create frustration among the participants. The following promising guidelines for using flip charts have been gathered from numerous sources including published reports and the experiences of seasoned facilitators.

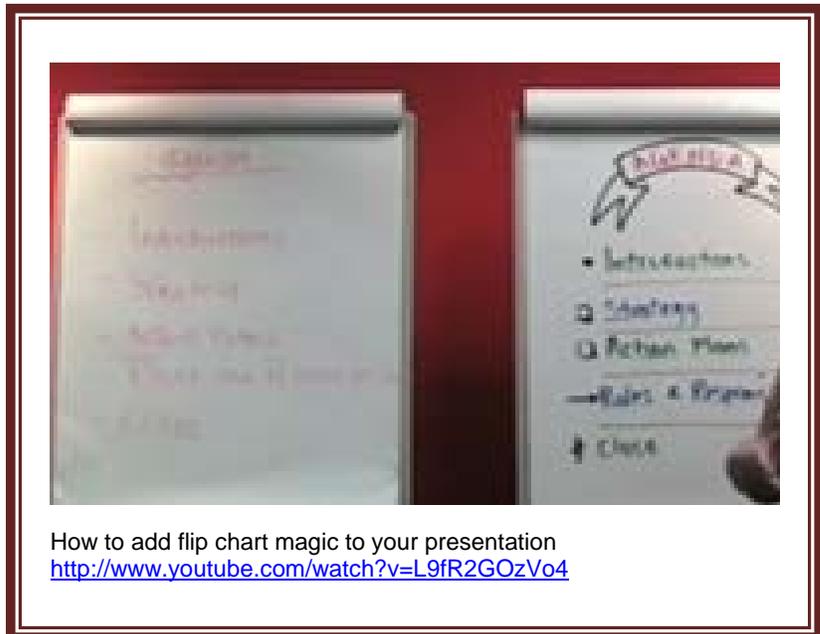
Promising Guidelines of Flip Charting

Flip charts are easy to use with no electricity required and support spontaneous, creative group interaction. As you plan for the facilitated discussion, consider the size of the audience and the size of the meeting space.

- Position the flip chart so that all members of the audience can see the text.
- Bring your own markers. These are the basic tools for creating effective charts.
- Use colored markers that will create significant contrast between the paper and the text.
- Alternate the color used for recording the statements in order to make it easier for the reader to distinguish between the statements. Some facilitators prefer to use different colors to designate major topics/headings from the proposed ideas. Dark colors for text, bright colors for emphasis.



- Write large enough to allow the audience to easily read the words. In most cases, the text should be between 1.5 and 2-inches in height.
- Draw pencil lines, if needed, on the chart to keep your writing flowing horizontally on the page and create a neat appearance.
- Stand to the side of the easel during the facilitated discussion or when writing to allow everyone to see what is being written.
- Write first . . . then turn back to the group to clarify or confirm that what you recorded was what the person said or meant to say. Some facilitators prefer to clarify the statement before recording anything on the flip chart. Both are acceptable practices.
- Admit the challenge of spelling and ask for the group’s assistance in spelling the words correctly... or abbreviate! Spelling always seems to be challenging when recording in front of a group.
- Remember less is more. Keep the number of words limited on each chart. If there are too many words recorded on a single chart, the chart looks too busy and will create confusion with the readers.



Make the chart interesting, engaging, and readable.

- Create artwork on the chart . . . even if it is something simple such as a “?” or an “!”
- Consider using a pencil to trace artwork onto the chart if the picture is important to the discussion . . . then, during the discussion, trace over the pencil drawing with your marker.
- Keep at least one white page between “prewritten” flip chart pages. Often a facilitator must create charts before beginning a facilitated discussion. Keeping one white page between each prewritten page prevents the text from “showing through”.
- Create distinction and hierarchy between groupings of text using font size, white space, color, and graphic elements.

- Use bullets . . . a dot, an arrow, a box . . . are just some of the options.
- Use fine lines to separate key points.
- Number the flip chart pages just to keep your organized when the charts are removed from the wall.
- Take pictures of the charts with your cell phone or digital camera. You can use these pictures as graphics within a written report.

Although these are just a few suggestions, each guideline should support your facilitation work and allow you to easily capture the ideas others are offering during a discussion.

Resources

- How to add flip chart magic to your presentation <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9fR2GOzVo4>
- Simple techniques for great flipcharts. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3ANeV2X-WM>
- Walker, M. & Tyler-Mackey, C. (2012). Facilitation Series: Facilitating Group Discussions Generating & Narrowing Ideas and Planning for Implementation. VCE publication CV-7 http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/CV/CV-7/CV-7_pdf.pdf
- Walker, M. & Tyler-Mackey, C. (2012). Facilitation Series: The Things Facilitators Say Facilitating Groups. VCE publication CV-6 http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/CV/CV-6/CV-6_pdf.pdf
- Walker, M. & Tyler-Mackey, C. (2012). Facilitation Series: The Dynamics of Group Decision Making. VCE publication CV-8 http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/CV/CV-8/CV-8_pdf.pdf