

VTS Facilitator Certification Standards & Rubric

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These standards define the facilitation skills assessed for **VTS Certified Facilitator** designation. Grounded in research and informed by expert practice, they set a shared benchmark for effective, participatory, and adaptive facilitation. Assessors look for **consistent, accurate use** of these skills over time—not perfection in every session.

SETTING UP EXPECTATIONS

- ☐ Communicates expectations clearly and succinctly
- ☐ Marks separation from other kinds of learning
- ☐ Briefly shares the goal of student-centered group learning
- ☐ Briefly signals that participation matters
- ☐ Clarifies logistics
- ☐ Follows through

QUIET MOMENT: QM

- ☐ Uses QM correctly: **Let's take a quiet moment to look at this picture.**
- ☐ Reads the room—holds silence

CORE QUESTIONS:

Q1

- ☐ Uses Q1 correctly to open conversation: **What's going on in this picture?**
- ☐ Avoids narrowing the discussion by shifting Q1 into a different task

Q2

- ☐ Uses Q2 correctly: **What do you see that makes you say that?**
 1. ☐ W. D. Y. **See**
 2. ☐ T. M. Y. **Say**
- ☐ Uses Q2 frequently and consistently
- ☐ Selects a meaningful part of each comment to probe with Q2
- ☐ Places Q2 inside a paraphrase
- ☐ Limits to one Q2 per comment
- ☐ Uses Q2 to surface assumptions, complexity, bias, or discomfort appropriately
- ☐ Can use Q2 for concrete, seemingly “obvious” comments
- ☐ Demonstrates precise, evidence-based flexibility with Q2 endings as learned in APO

Q3

- ☐ Uses Q3 with correct wording: **What more can we find?**
- ☐ Uses Q3 frequently and consistently

PARAPHRASING: PP

- ☐ Listens carefully and consistently
- ☐ Captures the full meaning of what participants say
- ☐ Paraphrases with accuracy and nuance
- ☐ Adjusts language up
- ☐ Adjusts language down
- ☐ Paraphrases ideas without assuming, reshaping, funnelling or shifting developmental stage
- ☐ Honors ideas in whatever form they are expressed
- ☐ Honors ideas and linguistic forms grounded in experiences, cultures, or ways of learning different from the facilitator's
- ☐ Avoids privileging certain forms of contribution
- ☐ Allows silence for participants to respond
- ☐ Paraphrases uncertainty, drafting or unfinished thinking *positively*
- ☐ Paraphrases facial expressions, gestures, emotions, laughter, discomfort, silence, and struggle as meaningful contributions
- ☐ Paraphrases contributions that draw from diverse perspectives—cultural, experiential, or knowledge-based—including those beyond the facilitator's experience
- ☐ Consistently brings the discussion back to the group and artwork
- ☐ Avoids dismissing, ignoring, or skipping contributions that come from knowledge bases or perspectives unfamiliar to the facilitator
- ☐ Paraphrases challenges
- ☐ Avoids defending self or shifting focus back to facilitator
- ☐ Avoids filling in participants' thinking, completing or "finishing" participants' thoughts including answering their questions
- ☐ Avoids correcting "wrong" content
- ☐ Summarizes comments accurately and can use *brevity* when needed
- ☐ Uses conditional language appropriately (see below)
- ☐ Uses clarification questions only when needed
- ☐ Makes necessary clarification questions narrow and specific
- ☐ Avoids completion checks
- ☐ Avoids "I" statements
- ☐ Steps out of the spotlight, centers the group
- ☐ Gets past serial 1-on-1 exchanges
- ☐ Varies paraphrasing to keep the discussion dynamic
- ☐ Listens for and paraphrases the development/shifts/arc of the discussion as a whole
- ☐ Paraphrases comments that are unusual, unexpected, uncomfortable, biased, challenging or "disruptive" without judgement, in a way that supports group learning.
- ☐ Avoids ranking, evaluating or steering possibilities, speculations and other responses

LANGUAGE SUBSTITUTIONS

- ☐ Uses **conditional language (CL)**
- ☐ Inserts relevant or useful vocabulary as needed:
 - ☐ Levels up to more advanced, academic, technical, specific or precise when needed
 - ☐ Makes vocabulary more accessible when needed
 - ☐ Broadens to encompass more possibilities
 - ☐ Pinpoints location or detail clearly when necessary
 - ☐ Allows or provides translations into other languages, or time for peers to translate

- ☐ Demonstrates flexibility in all the above

POINTING:

- ☐ Uses pointing both while listening and while paraphrasing
- ☐ Uses physical space, body and gestures to direct attention when applicable

ENVIRONMENT (EN):

Conditions

- ☐ Manages technical, logistical, and lighting challenges effectively and graciously
- ☐ Ensures participants can see and hear clearly
- ☐ Maintains appropriate eye contact and connection with the group

Participation & Classroom Management

- ☐ Sustains an energy level that feels appropriate, useful and dynamic
- ☐ Uses participants' names when applicable
- ☐ Expands participation actively and consistently, drawing in as many voices as possible
- ☐ Manages dominant talkers consistently
- ☐ Draws out quieter students consistently
- ☐ Maintains group focus
- ☐ Student behavior reflects effective classroom management—where applicable (e.g., few side conversations, hands raised, listening to each other, limited disruption)

Discomfort

- ☐ Handles uncomfortable moments with steadiness and no judgment
- ☐ Allows silence during discussion (see also Quiet Moment and Paraphrasing)
- ☐ Manages laughter, silliness, or disruption by continuing with the method and refocusing the group
- ☐ Models learning by acknowledging mistakes and self-correcting

Facilitator Stance

- ☐ De-centers self, keeping focus on the group rather than the facilitator
- ☐ Affirms the participant's process without judgment: uses questions, paraphrasing and non-judgement evenly and consistently (see Paraphrasing section)

LINKING (LK):

- ☐ Uses basic linking words
- ☐ Notes new ideas or changes in focus
- ☐ Links agreements
- ☐ Notes and links disagreements
- ☐ Highlights when students build on others' ideas or have listened to each other
- ☐ Summarizes links
- ☐ Refers to past comments by participant name (when applicable)
- ☐ Refers back to specific ideas, themes, or differences of opinion
- ☐ Summarizes the scope or a trajectory of linked ideas

FRAMING– REFLECTING COGNITION & LEARNING:

- ☐ Frames what participants are doing cognitively
- ☐ Labels observing
- ☐ Highlights when participants use more detail or focus in
- ☐ Labels thinking

- ☐ Acknowledges when participants bring in their outside knowledge or experience
- ☐ Frames participant questions
- ☐ Recognizes and reflects aesthetic development
- ☐ Frames the work in unfinished comments, or uncertainty
- ☐ Frames emotions, facial expressions, body movements, gestures, or laughter
- ☐ Reflects the cognitive work happening in silence, confusion, or struggle
- ☐ Avoids skipping or treating silence, confusion, or struggle as mistakes
- ☐ Frames re-evaluations, multiple possibilities, or flexible/changed interpretations
- ☐ Frames repeating practices of participants
- ☐ Demonstrates range in uses of framing

VISIBLE STUDENT LEARNING (SL) in multi-visit sites:

- ☐ Shows evidence of developmental stage change
- ☐ Demonstrates increased participation
- ☐ Sustains longer, more focused consideration of the work
- ☐ Uses richer descriptive language
- ☐ Demonstrates more spatial precision
- ☐ Revises ideas, incorporates multiple points of view, or offers more than one interpretation
- ☐ Listens more attentively to peers
- ☐ Anticipates Q2 independently by supporting ideas with evidence
- ☐ Links their own ideas to others' comments
- ☐ Shows greater comfort and respect with disagreement, discussion, and sharing

Metrics for researchers (not checklist items):

- Aesthetic Development
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Social & Emotional Learning
- Group Learning/Scaffolding
- Cultural Responsiveness of Facilitators
- Participation

PRACTICES TO AVOID (or Unlearn)

- ☐ Avoids praising individuals, ideas or specific comments
- ☐ Avoids showing judgment
- ☐ Avoids giving direct answers
- ☐ Avoids adding outside content
- ☐ Avoids altering the developmental level of a participant's comment
- ☐ Avoids stepping back into the expert role rather than staying in the facilitator role
- ☐ Avoids "limelight" paraphrasing (paraphrasing at excessive length or drawing focus away from group learning)

CONCLUSION & TRANSITION OUT

- ☐ Thanks participants collectively
- ☐ Reflects on the discussion as a whole rather than singling out individuals or comments
- ☐ Clearly marks the transition back into other kinds of learning (when applicable)
- ☐ Provides a smooth closure and moves the group into the next activity or lesson