

The Basic Facilitator's Toolkit

Facilitating with Flip Charts

by Wayne Vick

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to examine the considerations for purchasing and using flip charts for group process facilitators. That is for facilitators operating in a group process that is fluid. While provide training, facilitators/trainers can develop many flip charts in advance. In the group process they are usually created on the spot with information provided by the group.

There are several alternatives so let's look at the advantages and disadvantages of flip charts:

- **Advantages:** Easy to use, readily available, portable, inexpensive, flexible, can maintain work in clear sight of participants, documents the groups actions in real time.
- **Disadvantages:** Limits the size of the group, not a permanent record, must be transposed, limited space.

Before selecting your equipment consider the following:

- **Easel's:** There are four considerations to take into account when purchasing;
Sturdiness: Does it provide a sturdy writing surface and is it stable? Avoid easels that just hang the pads with no backing.
Portability: Can you easily fold it to transport it to a work site. What does it weigh? This is not so critical if it is going to be used in a single room. However, if you are moving it between buildings and floors, it can be a big deal.
Durability: Is it going to last? The biggest consideration here is does it have small critical parts that may be lost?
Cost Effectivness: Costs vary widely. Search the internet if needed to see what's available and what the cost ranges are. A nearby office supply should not be considered your only source.

- **Chart Packs:** There are three basic types with varying degrees of quality: Plain paper, Printed Grid, and Post-it. Most popular size is 27" x 34" although there are other smaller sizes. Paper type varies from cheap newsprint, to heavy bright white. Another consideration is binding and removability. Most chart packs are bound with two to four staples to



a poster board backing with two holes at the top for mounting to the easel. The holes are not standard from manufacturer to manufacturer. Make sure the type you purchase will fit the easel. Removability is one key differentiator. Most manufacturers take the time to perforate the top edge of the pages for easy removal. Some are better than others. A laser perforated edge removes easily and with a clean line. Finding the right type takes research. Staples™ sells one type with a maroon top tape and 1-inch blue grid that is laser perforated. Another brand is recognized by its blueprinted lines on the binding sold by Office Max™

- **Markers:** This is largely a matter of personal preference but there are a few key considerations.
 1. *Marking Tip:* Tips come in different sizes and shapes. In general choose a large size. Shapes include chisel point and round. Round provides a consistent size and appears neater overall. Chisel point offers a broad or narrow mark size.
 2. *Marker Type:* There are two considerations; permanence and aroma. Permanence refers to the washability of the mark. Use Washable

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Markers. Facilitators are always juggling several markers and will mark their cloths. When cloths get marked, washable marks will wash out. Avoid permanent markers. Besides being permanent they have a tendency to bleed through most papers.

Aroma refers to the odor the pen gives off. Permanent markers use a fast drying chemical medium that is often toxic and smells. Washable markers use a water base medium that takes a little longer to dry but is non-toxic and often is treated to give off pleasant smells.

How to use Flip Charts: Here are some basics:

Color Markers: Having a wide variety of colors is always good. However, select just three basic colors to use for each exercise. Choose a dark color for most writing, a bright color for highlighting points and one for special emphasis. Change them for each exercise.

Avoid the lighter colors like yellow and orange. They are hard to read and difficult to see from a distance.

Print Size: Print letters 1.5" to 2" each. Paper with grids make that easier.

Type Printing: Use both Upper and Lower case letters. This makes them easy to read and allows you to use all uppercase for emphasis.

Heading: Give each page a heading separated by decorative lines from the body of the information. If you use several pages for one topic make the heading smaller but keep it separated from the body.

Page Numbers: Number or letter your pages.

Overall Lines: Use 7 to 10 comment lines per page and 5 to 7 words per line. When ever possible use the speakers key words to capture ideas. Don't crowd the page. Put at least one inch between lines. More white space will allow you to add small notes to a thought later.

Add organization with bullets, stars, check marks, etc.

When writing stand to the side as much as possible so that the participants can see what you are writing. This will allow them to correct you if what you write is different than what they said. After writing the comment check back with the speaker to make sure it reflects their central comment. While you are writing prompt the speaker to explain or add comment to their statement.

When you're rolling, enlist the participants to assist with hanging the completed flipcharts on the wall.

Organizing Your Room: Size up your room before the participants arrive. Know where you are going to stage the flip charts and easels and where you are going to display the pages as you go through them. Make sure you can easily get to them without climbing over participants.

Be prepared. Have your tape ready for immediate use. Don't waste the participants time by having to find the end of the tape and tear off pieces to use. Don't flip the charts over the back of the easel.

Resources:

Kearny, Lynn The Facilitator's Toolkit (pg 73-84) HRD Press, Amherst, MA, 1995

Hart, Lois B. Faultless Facilitation: A Resource Guide for Group and Team Leaders (pgs 8-2 to 8-4), HRD Press, Amherst, MA, 1992

<http://www.businessfundamentals.com/FlipCharts.htm>

<http://www.wlsc.wvnet.edu/www/schofedu/EDDEPT/ROSE/403/visdesign/w3s4.html>

The diagram shows a rectangular flip chart page. At the top, there is a title area with a decorative green bracket on the left and the text "Flip Chart Title" in red, followed by "Pg#" in black. Below the title is a list of seven guidelines, each preceded by a circled number 5. The text in the guidelines is color-coded: red for emphasis, green for interest, and black for standard text. A double quote is used for the second guideline.

Flip Chart Title Pg#

- ⑤ Make **letters 15 to 2 inches**
- ⑤ Use **upper and lower case letters**
- ⑤ **Space 1 to 15 inches** between lines
“ Use extra space to add comments later.
- ⑤ Use **6 to 10 lines** per page
- ⑤ Use **3 colors** for **interest** and **special emphasis**
- ⑤ Use **Speaker's own key words**
- ⑤ Leave **White Space**