

Choosing Markers for Facilitation

By Wayne Vick

First, let me begin by saying the thought of me writing this article is difficult to even consider. Well, I am because from what I gather most facilitators don't. I have seen some facilitators struggle to find a working marker in front of a group and use markers that are not suited to the group size. I have examined and used many different types. These, plus my box full of different types of markers led me to writing this article. You see, I've found out that there is a difference in markers. Let me explain.



The selection of markers is largely a matter of personal preference. I have identified nine key considerations but, really only three are determining factors for purchasing by professionals.

1. **Cost:** For many this is the main determining factors in their marker purchase. Markers can be found with prices ranging from \$.70 to \$2.40 each. A wide range to say the least. In cases of the most expensive markers shipping costs must be added to the cost of the marker.
2. **Availability:** The second factor in most marker purchases is availability. The variety of markers available at your local office supply varies greatly. Some high quality markers are only available from online sources like the Grove.com or Neuland.biz.
3. **Size:** Markers come in four sizes; small tip, medium, large, and grande. Small is used by individuals for viewing by one to two people. Medium works with small groups, of 2 to about 10, or when the groups are

working close to a flipchart or sticky wall, but, not otherwise. Large has a tip that is approximately 1/4" to 3/8" (2 to 6 mm). This is the most common size and they are used with small to large groups. Grande is the chunky fat markers often called Training markers used with large groups of 40 or more.

4. **Tip:** Tips come in different shapes and may reflect the size of the marker. Shapes include chisel, round, and pointed. Round provides a consistent size and appears neater overall. Chisel point, like the charters above, offers a broad or narrow mark size. Pointed tip is similar to round tip but is longer and is less rounded at the end.
5. **Permanence:** Permanence refers to the washability of the mark. Use Washable Markers when ever possible. Facilitators always juggle several markers and will mark their hands, cloths, and anything else within reach. When cloths get marked, washable marks will wash out. Avoid permanent markers. Besides being permanent they are made of toxic chemicals that have a tendency to bleed through most papers.
6. **Aroma:** This refers to the odor the pen gives off. Permanent markers use a fast drying chemical medium that is often toxic and smells. "Bic 4x4 Grip" and Sharpie Markers are examples of this type. Some people are extremely sensitive to the chemical smells.



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Washable markers use a water base medium that takes a little longer to dry but are generally non-toxic and are often treated to give off pleasant smells. Mr. Sketch Markers are an example of this type.



7. **Shape and Feel:** A minor consideration is the shape and feel of the marker. Some are tapered to better fit the hand. Other have indentations or rubber grips to make them easier to hold.
8. **Disposable:** Most markers are disposable. Neuland is the only company that produces a set of markers that are refillable.
9. **Durability:** Durability refers to the operating life of the marker. If you set aside the first two determining factors for

purchasing markers, durability should be the one essential consideration left. At some point the marker will start to dry. Instead of leaving a solid, sharp line, it appears streaked. When a marker gets to this point it has served its useful life and must be replaced or refilled. In the chart below we have identified 9 types of markers, several in two sizes, that are commonly found in a facilitators kit. It is our experience that as you go down the list the durability goes up. Of course so does the price.

I have used all these markers. While my box currently contains some of the Colorific and FlipChart markers, it also contains several boxes of the higher-end, longer lasting markers that will remain as the less durable disposables are used up..



Name	Source	Tip	Type	Aroma	Cost
Bic 4x4 Grip	Office Supply	Bullet	Permanent	Chemical	\$4.88 for 4 color set
Sharpie	Office Supply	Bullet	Permanent	Chemical	\$5 for 6 color set
Colorific Classic	Office Supply	Pointed	Washable Non-Toxic	None	\$3.00 for 8 color set
Colorific Classic	Office Supply	Pointed	Washable Non-Toxic	None	\$3.25 for 12 color set
Mr. Sketch	Office Supply	Bullet	Washable	Fruit Flavored	\$.91 each or \$5 to \$6 for 8 color set
Mr. Sketch	Office Supply	Bullet	Washable	Fruit Flavored	\$.91 each or \$6.50 to \$9 for 12 color set
ColorView	Office Supply	Bullet	Liquid Ink washable	None	\$6 for 8 color set
Flip Chart Markers	Office Supply	Bullet	Washable	None	\$6 for 8 color set
Charters (formerly El Scribo)	Grove.com	Chisel	Washable	None	\$16 for 8 color set or \$2 each
Color Marker Set Neuland No 2	Neuland.biz	Chisel disposable	Water Based No-Bleed thru No Toxic Scent Washable	None	\$22 for 10 color set
Facilitation Marker Set Neuland No 2				None	\$20/box of 10 - one color
Color Marker Set Neuland No 1		Chisel refillable		None	\$24 for 10 color set
Facilitation Marker Set Neuland No 1				None	\$24/box of 10 - one color