Session Facilitation

Session Facilitation	
Implementation Checklist	- Tutors reinforce the academic language and procedures of the classroom and hold students accountable for doing the same. - Tutors appropriately use open-ended questioning to ensure students are articulating their understanding of the content. - Tutors facilitate content clearly, correctly, and at an appropriate pace. - Students engage with content using a variety of learning tools that promote productive struggle given their unique needs. - Students experience multiple representations of new knowledge and repeated opportunities to apply new skills in order to solidify learning. - If Delivery Mode is Virtual: Tutors use a digital whiteboard to support session facilitation and share content with students. - If Delivery Mode is Virtual or Blended: During virtual sessions, student access is restricted to required applications as much as possible in order to reduce distractions. - If Student-Tutor Ratio is Small Groups: Tutors use student groups to promote dialogue and collaboration amongst pairs. - If Student-Tutor Ratio is Small Groups: Tutors are trained to effectively facilitate student behavior management as needed.
Implementation Tools	- Facilitation Moves Checklist: One-on-One Tutoring - Effective Facilitation Guidelines: Small Group Tutoring - Choosing and Using Virtual Tutoring Platforms
Key Insights	**Effective session facilitation elevates student voice over tutor voice.** - Tutors should ask open-ended questions and encourage student-led discussions to encourage and empower students to process ideas and solve problems independently. - Prioritizing student voices isn't just about making students feel empowered. It's also a crucial strategy for making students' thinking visible to tutors. This real-time qualitative data about students' internalization of the session content helps make sure that tutors can catch student misconceptions and keep students on track to meet their goals by the end of each session.

Facilitating sessions that are effective for all learners requires thoughtful preparation.

- A well-prepared tutor can ensure that any learner can learn session content and materials. For example, a tutor might share multiple representations of content, supplying a variety of media and supplemental materials, or providing accessible technology.
- To help all students reliably access session content, tutors should consider offering an alternative option for each student task (such as a choice to share answers aloud or write them down for the tutor to check).
- Tutors should look for opportunities to weave in tips about meta-academic executive functioning skills like planning, note-taking, and prioritizing.

Model-Specific: If your Student-Tutor Ratio is Small Groups, set clear norms for discussions.

- Student-led discussions about open-ended questions are powerful tools for engaging intellectual curiosity and elevating student voices. However, for these discussions to be equitable, respectful, and productive, tutors need to establish ground rules beforehand.
- All students should feel comfortable expressing themselves, have concrete guidance for how to respond to peers with different viewpoints, and generally agree on group behavior norms.

Model Specific [virtual]: Benefits of virtual learning

- Virtual tutoring allows tutors to instruct students regardless of physical location.
- Virtual tutoring can scale up much more easily than in-person tutoring, access a much wider pool of qualified tutors, and deliver services to students across a wider geographic range.
- Sessions can be observed in real-time and recorded for reference, giving supervisors and parents greater insight into tutor and student behavior than they would otherwise have.
- Virtual tutoring can democratize access to individualized learning, providing private and personalized instruction to students who cannot get it elsewhere.

Facilitation Moves Checklist: One-on-One Tutoring

Why does facilitation matter?

Facilitation is what keeps a student engaged and on-task throughout a tutoring session. Effective facilitation requires thorough planning: not just around what concepts and skills to work on, but also around the routines, directions, and logistics of the tutoring session itself. Time the tutor spends thinking these things through ahead of time maximizes the time the student spends actually learning during the session, rather than getting situated or resolving confusions.

Pre-Session: Preparation

Prior to a session, tutors should...

- Set a clear goal for the session based on data and informed by teacher, parent, or student input.
- Write out their main talking points for explaining concepts and plans for addressing misconceptions.
- Ensure all necessary materials (examples, practice worksheets, templates, digital resources, etc.) are ready to go.
- If tutoring virtually, ensure all materials are open in the tutor's browser and ready to be shared before the session begins.

During Session: Facilitation

Tutor sets and maintains a culture of high expectations for students.

- **Activity Directions**
  - o Tutor gives simple, concise, step-by-step directions.
  - o Tutor breaks activity directions down into "chunks" whenever they exceed 3-4 steps.
  - o Visual directions (i.e. written on whiteboard, worksheet, or screen-share) accompany verbal directions.
- **Behavioral Expectations**
  - o Tutor makes expectations clear when giving direction. Tutor appropriately sets and enforces expectations to create a culture of productive struggle so the student knows what to do if they get stuck or can't get started.
    - ▪ For example, before digging into the content of a session, a tutor may say something like, "For the next 10 minutes we are going to work through this set of problems. I'm going to walk you through the first example then I'm going to have you work with a study buddy to complete the second example. If you feel stuck, try to work it out with each other before I give you some help. We're only going to focus on these problems for the next 10 minutes. Sound good?"
  - o Tutor has considered what they want the activity to look like or sound like when designing expectations.
- **Academic Expectations**
  - o Tutor shares the session learning objective, rationale, and regular updates on progress to goal with the student.

o Tutor appropriately supports the student during productive struggle with the least invasive method of support.
o Tutor cultivates a growth mindset throughout the session by praising effort and connecting it to growth.

Tutor uses precise academic language in their delivery and hold students responsible for doing the same.

- All key conceptual and procedural ideas are discussed in specific academic language throughout the session.
- Tutor limits talking points to the most essential ideas needed to be conveyed.
- Tutor demonstrates all procedural steps necessary to perform a skill through an Explicit Model, making the critical thinking and question asking alongside the steps visible to students.
- Tutor reinforces high expectations for all student responses (e.g. use academic vocabulary) and engagement with the content (e.g. cite specific examples from the text and explain their relevance to a claim).

Tutor uses open-ended questions to ensure students are articulating their own understanding of the content.

- Open-ended questions provide visibility into the student's thinking. Using open-ended questions also sets tutors up to give students the most air time. While students are sharing, tutors should actively listen for signs of misconceptions and understanding. Examples of open-ended questions include:
  o "I'm curious about your thinking and your process. Can you tell me what you did here?"
  o "This is interesting; what was the thinking behind this strategy or step?"
  o "What questions (or steps or parts) were most tricky or challenging? Why is that?"
  o "I see you answered these two similar questions a little differently. What's your thinking on that?"
  o "I think there might be a mistake in this response. Can you tell me where you think it is? Why is that?"

Tutor addresses student misconceptions and leverages them for instruction.

- Tutor proactively addresses common misconceptions (based on student mastery data) during the session.
- When an unexpected or uncommon misconception arises, tutor helps the student understand and correct it.

Effective Facilitation Guidelines: Small Group Tutoring

Why does small-group facilitation matter?

If your Student-Tutor Ratio is Small Groups instead of one-to-one, your tutors will need skills to establish group norms and manage behavior during sessions. In addition to the facilitation moves listed in the Facilitation Moves Checklist, small-group facilitation requires additional planning and tools to foster a positive, productive learning environment for a group.

Understanding Group Members

Each group will require a different level and type of facilitation depending on its members. With each new group, understanding each member will inform how you approach establishing group norms and re-engagement strategies.

Consider the following:

- **Students' Personalities.**
  - Who are the extroverted or assertive "natural talkers" in this group?
    - How will we encourage them to make space for others and learn to listen actively to their peers?
  - Who are the introverted or passive "natural listeners" in this group?
    - How will we encourage them to take space proactively and advocate for themselves as learners?
- **Students' Maturity Levels.**
  - How old is each student in this group?
  - How developmentally mature are they?
  - Would some groups act less maturely than their constituent students alone? What about more maturely?

STEP 1: Establish Group Norms

Students can't follow the rules if there are no clear rules, or if they don't understand what those rules are. Setting norms is an opportunity to establish high expectations and cultivate an environment where students want to spend time and learn. Tutors should seek to establish two types of norms from the start: **Session Culture Norms** (the ground rules for learning together in a group) and **Group Discussion Norms** (the standards for successful, productive academic discussions).

STEP 2: Apply Behavior Re-Engagement Strategies

Norms are meaningless if they are not enforced. Behavior re-engagement strategies help tutors influence student behavior so students uphold group norms, make responsible choices, and maintain a productive learning environment for the group. Students won't respond well to redirection from someone they do not respect, so for your tutors' behavior re-engagement strategies to work, they must be grounded in strong student-tutor relationships built on trust and focused on learning. Behavior re-engagement isn't

just about tutors' tactics in the moment, but a cohesive strategy founded in pedagogical philosophy and the mindsets tutors hold. Tutors should consider student behavior before, during, and after sessions.

Session Culture Norms

Crafting Session Culture Norms

- Design culture norms to embody values that foster a safe and productive learning environment for all students.
- Establish norms right away, during the first session or two. Otherwise, implicit norms will emerge on their own.

- Write up some core culture norms beforehand, then invite the group to discuss and add any they think are missing.
- Norms should focus on what culture should look like (with examples), instead of what it should not look like.
- Considerations for developing culture norms:
  - What values do I believe should be represented and prioritized in my learning environment?
  - What statements of fact do I always want to be true of my learning environment?
  - What would respectful, inclusive, safe interactions between students look like and sound like?
  - What rules and standards do I need in order to uphold these values and encourage these interactions?

Example Norms

Be Responsible to Yourself	Be Responsible to Each Other	Be Responsible to our Collective Time
- Ask for help when you need it. - Communicate how your tutor or peers can help you succeed. - Let your tutor know if someone said something that hurt you.	- Use kind and respectful language with one another and with tutors. - Listen actively while others speak, and let them finish before sharing. - Respect diverse ideas or opinions - Acknowledge each other as people with complex ideas & perspectives.	- Be on time. - Come prepared with all necessary materials.

Applying Session Culture Norms

- Display culture norms prominently during sessions, and pause to refer to them when redirecting student behavior.

- Explain redirections in terms of the norms, and give affirmative directions on how to act in accordance with them.
- Return to revisit and revise culture norms whenever the group needs a reset or a challenging session demands it.

Group Discussion Norms

Crafting Group Discussion Norms

- Design group discussion norms that foster a safe and equitable discussion environment for all students.
- Establish group discussion norms right away, the first time the group engages in discussion.

- Write up group discussion norms beforehand, then invite the group to discuss and add any they think are missing.
- Norms should focus on what discussion should look like (with examples), instead of what it should not look like.
- Considerations for developing discussion norms:
    o How should students share? What does a quality contribution sound like?
    o How should students indicate they want to share something?
    o How should students respond to ideas so that it is safe to share?
    o What should students do while their peers are sharing?
    o What other actions or behaviors result in a quality discussion?

Example Norms

- When one person is speaking, everyone else in the group is listening silently and actively.
- To indicate that you would like to speak next, raise your hand silently and wait to be called on.
- When someone shares, the next speaker must respond to their idea, using phrases like "I agree with X statement because..." or "I disagree with X statement because..." or "I have a question about X statement because...."

Applying Group Discussion Norms

- Revisit group discussion norms before every group discussion, and display them prominently during discussion.
- Explain redirections in terms of the norms, and give affirmative directions on how to act in accordance with them.
- Return to revisit and revise discussion norms whenever a challenging topic or a combative discussion demands it.
- Tutors should facilitate group discussions, not participate. Use the strategies below to keep conversation going:
    o **Wait time**: Practice being comfortable with silence. Let the group remain silent for a prolonged period of time to encourage student participation before jumping in and asking a question or contributing an idea.

- o **Everybody speaks**: If conversation stalls, ask an open-ended question and have every student answer in turn to get the conversation flowing again. Students may need time to think or write before answering.
- o **Prioritize speakers**: Monitor who is contributing more or dominating the conversation. When there is a lull in conversation, ask a question and then give preference to students who have not had the opportunity to contribute yet. Use wait time to signal that every person's contribution is important.
- o **Consider charting responses** on a whiteboard or screen-shared presentation slide. When there is a lull in the conversation, highlight comments or questions from earlier that no one has responded to yet.

Behavior Re-Engagement Strategies

Behavior re-engagement isn't just the tactics tutors use to keep students on-task during session. It also includes proactive planning and preparation before each session, foundational principles for facilitation during each session, and follow-up after a session to address any behavior issues, promote future learning, and maintain a strong student-tutor relationship.

Before Session

Tutors should use this checklist to make sure they have laid the groundwork for re-engagement to be effective.

- Have I planned clear directions and expectations for every activity?
- Have I planned activities for the full duration of the session, including extension activities if students finish early?
- Have I planned engaging, relevant, and inclusive activities and materials?
- Have I invested time and thought into learning about my students and developing relationships with them?
- Have I established clear norms for appropriate behavior during sessions with all my students?

Choosing and Using Virtual Tutoring Platforms

What is a Virtual Tutoring Platform?

A virtual tutoring platform is an online conferencing system that facilitates virtual tutoring. This can include commonly known video conferencing software such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams as well as video conferencing software specifically designed for online learning such as BigBlueButton and GoBoard. Additionally, some tutoring programs specifically designed for online tutoring, such as AirTutors, have custom-built virtual tutoring platforms. This document should help you when selecting and using a tutoring platform.

Why use a Virtual Tutoring Platform?

Virtual tutoring allows tutors to help students regardless of physical location. When meeting in the same physical location is not feasible, virtual tutoring can provide some of the same educational benefits in a safe and potentially cost-effective way. Even when in-person tutoring is feasible, virtual tutoring offers some advantages. Largely unconstrained by the limitations of physical infrastructure, virtual tutoring can scale up more easily than in-person tutoring, access a wider pool of qualified tutors, and deliver services to students across a wider geographic range. Sessions can be observed in real-time and recorded for reference, giving supervisors and parents greater insight into tutor and student behavior during sessions than they would otherwise have. Virtual tutoring can democratize access to individualized learning, providing private and personalized instruction to students who cannot get it elsewhere.

What common problems should I consider?

While virtual tutoring is sometimes the best or only option available, programs must be aware of some common problems. In particular, students may not attend or otherwise engage in virtual tutoring as well as they would in in-person tutoring.

- **Accountability**. Students' families may need to play a bigger role in ensuring attendance and resolving tech issues.
- **Connection**. While students may already be accustomed to building deep and meaningful relationships mediated by technology, it can still be harder for tutors to cultivate a rapport with students online than in-person.
- **Time Crunch**. Virtual conversations take longer due to accumulated lag. Plan short sessions with few transitions!

How do I choose a virtual tutoring platform for my program?

Platform Capabilities: What core capabilities does your platform need to have? How will students access sessions?

- **Live video conferencing**. Can the platform connect students and tutors over live video chat with camera and mic?

- **Live text chat with direct messaging**. Can students without camera or mic access still participate in sessions?
- **Collaborative digital whiteboard**. Can students and tutors work in the same shared space to visualize content?
- **Two-way screen-sharing**. Can tutors broadcast their screens to students? Can students do the same if allowed to?
- **Real-time document collaboration**. Can students share documents with tutors and get feedback as they work?
- **Recording**. Can the platform record live sessions and store backup recordings for supervisors and parents?
- **Asynchronous delivery**. Can students access session recordings or transcripts afterwards for review?
- **Accessibility**. Can session recordings include closed captions? Can students dial in to sessions from a phone?
- **Role-Based Access Controls**. Can the platform restrict who has access to what? Can it keep sessions secure and private? Can it prevent students from accessing tutors' backend data? Can it provide tutors with moderation tools so that they control how students are able engage in the session?

Platform Considerations: How can I choose the best platform from among the fully-functional options?

- **How much specialized training will tutors and students need to use all the platform's useful features?**
- **Is the software's interface intuitive for both students and tutors to navigate?**
    - o Is the software accessible for all students, according to UDL and web accessibility guidelines?
    - o Is the interface minimalistic, not overwhelming, for students and tutors?
- **Will infrastructure limitations (such as slow internet connections or old devices) prevent students from using the software at school or at home?**
    - o Don't test your software in ideal conditions on new desktop computers connected to gigabit ethernet. Test it on the devices and internet connections that your least well-equipped students will use.
        - ▪ What devices will your least well-equipped students be using?
        - ▪ How slow will their internet be? How reliable will it be?
        - ▪ Consider all use cases, both at your students' schools and in your students' homes, before committing to specific software.
        - ▪ Can a five-year-old Chromebook connecting to the internet over a phone's data hotspot run your software fluidly? If not, where will all your students get faster computers and connections?

> **Additional features** may seem like pure upside, but they're quite the opposite if they make your software **so processor- or bandwidth-intensive that students' devices can no longer run it fluidly**. Perfect software is not software **to** which nothing more can be **added**, but software **from** which nothing more can be **taken away**.

How do I facilitate effective virtual sessions as a tutor?

Tutor Preparation

- **Use your best tech**. Ethernet, not wifi, if possible. Bright, diffuse lighting. A separate microphone and webcam, if possible.
- **Know your platform**. Spend time testing out its features and foibles, and be prepared to assist students with it.
- **Be engaging**. Look directly at the camera. Set up a background environment that is interesting, not distracting.
- **Get there early and stay on-task**. Load up all your materials ahead of time, and close all unrelated programs.
- **Keep the time**. Set up a visible timer for yourself to check the time remaining and stay on pace during sessions.

Student Preparation

- **Get to square one**. Provide students extremely detailed instructions for how to set up an account, log in, and start.
- **Stick to a schedule**. Communicate with students and families ahead of time exactly when sessions will take place.
- **Set norms early**. Make it clear to students how they should engage during sessions, with you and with their peers.
- **Keep interfaces consistent**. Make it easy for students to find everything they need in the same place every time.
- **Show, don't tell**. Share your screen to demonstrate various features, such as how to access asynchronous content.
- **Step by step**. Explicitly model each step in a new process for students, whether using new software or new skills.

Presenting Content

- **Practice makes perfect**. Rehearse sessions beforehand. Watch your recordings to find what to change next time.
- **Create structure**. Create and display an agenda for the session so students know where they are in the process.
- **Outline your gameplan**. Don't just read from a script, but do write up clear and coherently structured key points.
- **Make your thinking visible**. Show your own work visually, whether it's calculations or margin notes on a text.
- **Mix up the medium**. Include multimedia like images and video in your sessions to make them more memorable. Make sure to include multiple means of representation and accessibility supports (e.g. subtitles for videos).
- **Present multimedia yourself**. Broadcast multimedia via screen-sharing, rather than redirecting students to other sites. This is more taxing on your own device, but less so on your students', and it reduces friction and distraction.
- **Provide additional resources**. At the end of a session, share links to websites or videos that illustrate, explain, or elaborate on concepts and help the student become more familiar with the material and understand it more clearly.

Interactive Learning

- **Wait for it**. There is a delay between speaking and being heard. Give students extra time to hear you and respond.
- **Student voices first**. Prioritize students' voices in your sessions. Ask clear and concise questions; let students take their time giving thoughtful answers. Ask follow-up questions rather than restating their ideas in your own words.
- **Multiple methods**. Give students several different ways to interact with you and with the session content. Let them share aloud with camera and mic, type in the chat, write or draw on the digital whiteboard, share screen, etc.
- **Check for understanding**. After modeling a new concept, ask quick questions designed to catch misconceptions.
- **Don't just talk**. Students should always be able to apply the ideas from discussions right away to practice tasks. This helps cement new knowledge in students' minds while making sessions more stimulating and engaging.
- **Watch them work**. Via screen-sharing or a shared document, monitor independent work to keep students on-task.
- **Give specific feedback**. Instead of vague exhortations ("Pay closer attention!") or banal praise ("Good effort!"), give students feedback they can use to improve immediately and measurably. ("Make sure to carry the 1 there.")
- **Make progress visible**. Give quick closing assessments and record results to show students their own progress.
- **Purposeful pairing**. If you are tutoring small groups, give students opportunities to work in pairs — and use data to pick purposeful pairs (e.g. students with similar skill levels) depending on the particular group-work task.

Additional Resources

For more detailed information on facilitating online learning, check out these resources from Instruction Partners, originally designed for teachers working with entire online classrooms of students all at once:

Guidelines for Effective Distance Learning
Student Engagement
ELA-specific
Math-specific