

F.A.S.T. Abbreviated Training Manual

Tips and Guidelines For Class Leaders and Co-Leaders

In order for the participants to get the most out of the F.A.S.T. sessions it is very important for you (i.e., the class leader or co-leader) to accomplish the following:

1. Capture participant attention and maintain participant interest as much as possible.
2. Make materials relevant to participants.
3. Make sure that participants understand the materials that are being presented.
4. Have participants practice, practice, practice.
5. Make the class environment conducive to learning.

Capturing attention and maintaining interest:

- 1) Although it is not required, standing while giving the class is recommended. This is helpful for several reasons. If you move every so often it will help maintain the participant's focus.
- 2) When someone is participating, it is often helpful to walk just a little towards him/her. This shows the participant that you are paying attention. If it is a large class room, it will keep them from feeling like they have to shout across the room, which may in turn increase their willingness to participate. Vary your tone of voice.
- 3) Do not just read the entire session to them. Regardless of how much you vary your tone of voice and how animated you are, odds are that they will stop listening to you after a couple of paragraphs. It is useful to stop after every paragraph and quickly summarize what was said. Get input from the participants.
- 4) Ask them if they have had any experience with what you just discussed (e.g. if the paragraph was about checks, ask if anyone has ever written a check before, etc.), or if there is a situation where they might find the skill useful. Asking about past experiences will help you in a number of ways: it will maintain their interest, it will help you gauge how familiar the participants are with a given skill, and it will give you a basis for examples that can be used during the rest of the lecture.
- 5) Give the participants a break from hearing your voice. Throughout the lecture ask for volunteers to help you read the materials. The same participant can read a few times during the lecture but limit their participation to one medium-sized paragraph or two small paragraphs at a time. After they are done reading the paragraph, it is important to thank them for participating and to quickly summarize what was said.

One of the best ways to capture the attention of your participants and to maintain their interest is to make the materials relevant to them.

Making materials relevant to the participants:

- 1) Using examples that apply to them, will make the information seem more useful, interesting, and real to them (concrete vs. abstract). As you become familiar with them, you will intuitively know what is relevant to them, what is useful for their everyday lives. However, even if you have no clue as to their backgrounds, everyday life, or interests, you will find out what applies to them as you go along because throughout the lecture you will be asking them about times when they have used a skill in the past or times when the skill would have come in handy.
- 2) Take advantage of the information they give you and, whenever possible, use it during the lecture. Feel free to modify example / practice items whenever you feel that that would make it more relevant to them. For example, if someone mentions that he/she wrote a letter a few years ago to request travel information about New York City, when it is your turn to write an example letter in front of the class you could write a letter to request travel information to a city that the group would like to visit.
- 3) Also, when you are writing an example on the board, try to get their input – as long as it is feasible. Returning to the example given above, you can ask the participants where they would like to go, what questions they would like to ask, etc. If you are writing a check and you just went over the parts of a check, you can ask them what goes where as you write the check.
- 4) Pay attention to their non-verbal communication. For example, if a participant nods as you or another participant is talking about a skill, ask him/her about their experience (i.e. so... I see you nodding, has the same thing happened to you?). Paying attention to their nonverbal communication will also let you know if they understand the class materials.

Make sure they understand the materials that are being presented:

You can ask participants if they have any questions as you go along, but don't rely solely on this to know whether the information is being understood. Ideally, if someone had a question he/she would simply ask you about it. This may not always be the case, which is why it is important for you to pay attention to your participants' answers or lack of them. As mentioned above, their nonverbal communication might also let you know if they understand the class materials.

Have them practice, practice, practice:

Make sure that everyone has a chance to practice the skill. Furthermore, whenever you have extra time have the participants do more examples.

Make the class environment conducive to learning

It should be an environment where people feel safe to participate. There are a few things you will want to keep in mind in order to accomplish this:

- Stress the importance of respect from day one.
- Make sure that everyone has a chance to participate and to practice the new skill. A good rule of thumb might be equal time for everyone.
- It is great to have volunteers, but don't always pick on the same person(s).
- Some people do not feel comfortable participating in front of the class. If that is the case, just make sure that they practice with another participant. For example, a participant might not feel comfortable about participating in a role-play about being assertive in a conversation in front of the class. Don't pressure him/her to do so, but when it is time for everyone to practice with a partner make sure that he/she participates. Hopefully, they will become more comfortable as the class goes in, but if they don't, the important thing is that they learn the skills, not that they get rid of their stage fright.

Additional Suggestions:

For people who learn the information more quickly than others and get bored just waiting for the rest of the group to catch up, you have a few options. You can give the participant more exercises to do or you can have him/her help one of the participants who is struggling with the materials. Just make sure that both of the participants are fine with this. Also, if you think it is helpful and if this happens during the first session(s) of a module, you may want to remind the person that the sessions build up and that you are starting with simpler things before moving on to the more complicated things.

Once in a while a class will be so complicated or tedious that the participants will often feel drained before the class time is over. If you are already close to being done with the materials, you may want to end the class early. Let them know, that you know that the class materials were difficult and that you appreciate their effort.

When people participate, acknowledge them. For example, if you are asking them about what lists they've made in the past or what lists they know about, write down their responses (verbatim if possible) on the board, this will make them feel like their input was taken into consideration. Even when they give you examples that don't necessarily apply, try your best to tie it in to the class if you can.

The skills that you are teaching participants and helping them improve are important. If possible, make sure that your participants understand this. One way to do this is for you to give an example of a time when it would have been helpful for you to use the skill. For example, for the list writing session, you can talk about the time when you went to the store to buy a stick of butter. You went to the store and bought cereal, milk, eggs, oranges, apples, asparagus, and chicken and it was only when you got home that you realized that you forgot the stick of butter! If you had written a grocery list, you probably would have remembered to buy the stick of butter.

Address problematic behavior immediately; do not ignore it!!