

The Challenge

The beginning of any discussion can be awkward. As a facilitator, you want to get your classmates to understand what is to be discussed, but you don't want to begin with a long description of the discussion assignment. The challenge you face is starting the discussion so that everyone becomes involved and fully understanding the discussion's objective. *It is important to be specific when stating what the objective of the meeting is and allow time for team members to ask questions and gather information.*

Facilitator Tools

Start the discussion with high energy

- It is important as a facilitator to seem enthusiastic about the assignment. It will help your classmates become more involved in the issue.

Be aware of your time

- Limit this to about five minutes.
- One way to do the start-up is to prepare a short (less than one-half page) description of what is to be discussed and outline the objectives, goal, and topics on a flip-chart. In this document, you can outline the essential discussion questions and what the overall goal of the discussion is.
- You can also provide cautions about issues that are beyond the scope of this discussion.

State how the discussion will be preformed

- *In what order will members answer questions/ provide answers*
- *If someone wants to add onto a topic, how should they go about it? (i.e. raising their hand)*

Explain the objective

- *State what the point of the meeting is*
- *State parameters and assumptions*
- *Ask if anyone has a questions*

Set goals

- *Ask the team to establish a list of goals to be achieved within the time frame*

Examples

- While the facilitator is not supposed to interject too many of their own ideas, giving a quick example here can help get your classmate's minds churning in the right direction.
- It might even be appropriate to start the discussion with a personal experience, this will help the team relate to the topic and help get their attention from the beginning.
- Next you can ask each of your classmates about their own experiences that might be relevant to the topic. Make sure that you get each and every member involved as early as possible, but refrain from verbose story-telling.
- This will help encourage participation from each member, and will help them feel more comfortable early on in

the discussion.

- You can use a question such as this: "What has been your own personal experience with the issue we will be discussing today? Please, give us a quick example." By framing the initial discussion question as a personal experience, you are more likely to get every one of your participants comfortable in speaking about the issue. You may also want to share your personal experience to demonstrate the question.

Restart

- If a discussion fails to begin, it may be necessary to take a moment to develop another lead in question.

Note

Additionally, it may help if the team also reads the agenda, class notes, or materials provided for that team meeting.

Without establishing a strong start to the discussion, it will be difficult to maintain control of the group's focus later on as classmates get lost in the discussion itself. At times, there may be key themes or guidelines to keep in mind when students contribute.

After your primer, it may be a good idea to write these themes on the side to remind students that they need to keep those ideas in mind while contributing to the discussion. For instance, common pitfalls can be avoided by creating a brainstorming session. Write such things on the flipchart and tell your group to keep them in mind.