

# Section 1.8 - Capturing the Essence of the Discussion

## The Challenge

One of the roles of the facilitator is to capture the essence of the discussion in a way that is visible to the participants. There are **three reasons** for capturing ideas visibly.

1. To give participants visible reminders of what was discussed. This helps keep the discussion focused because participants will want to build on what they see written down. It also helps students who were not paying attention for a while, to jump back into the discussion.
2. To give participants some confidence that their comments are being noted and will contribute to the overall effort. This encourages students to participate more, because they know they are on equal footing with the rest of the group and have a voice.
3. To slow down the discussion while the notes are being recorded. This gives participants time to be reflective before they comment. This will help avoid the scatter-shot types of discussions that are common when a group gets together.

## Facilitator Tools

Here are some guidelines for capturing the essence of the discussion.

- Try to capture the idea and meaning from team member comments not simply take notes.
- Number the pages, so when they are hung up and retyped, team members can see the flow of discussion.
- Write the question you are asking on the top of the page, so that the other team members can relate their comments to the question.
- Often times it is helpful to summarize and restate an idea back to the team both for confirmation of understanding and to allow the team members to reflect on the idea. This will often start a discussion where the team will consider the implications of the idea.
- Be concise in your note taking. The notes do not need to be a transcript. Rather they should be simply a few words (5-7) that capture the essence of what was said.
- Try to use at least 2 colors of chalk or markers to capture notes. Alternate the colors to indicate separate speakers or ideas. This makes it easier to see the thread of the discussion.
- Keep the notes visible. If you are using a flip chart, post completed note pages on a wall. If you are using a blackboard, try to get all notes on the board at one time.
- Print (rather than write) large and legibly so that all participants can read what you are writing. Use lettering that is 1"-2" high, and aim to keep notes on a straight line rather than tilting.
- If you as the facilitator are having trouble understanding an idea that a member is trying to convey, do not be afraid to allow the member to present his/her idea to the team in facilitator fashion. This will not reflect negatively on your ability to facilitate.
- Allow the team members to take turns in reading notes out loud. This makes that student speaking focus on what they are saying and helps create and retain a better understanding of the discussion.