

Facilitation Moves Cheat Sheet

Purpose: A quick-reference handout for facilitators working in settings with participants representing cross-functional roles, power dynamics, and/or community settings. Use these moves to protect the *process* and help groups think better together.

1. When the Conversation Gets Vague or Abstract

Goal: Get concrete.

What to say

Can you give a specific example?

What does that look like in practice?

When did this last show up?

What *not* to say

I don't know what you mean.

That's too high-level.

Let's move on.

Why: Specifics reduce defensiveness and reveal where misunderstandings live.

2. When People Jump to Solutions Too Fast

Goal: Slow the group down.

What to say

Let's pause on solutions for a moment.

What problem are we actually trying to solve?

What need is underneath that idea?

What *not* to say

That won't work.

We've already tried that.

Let's just decide.

Why: Fast solutions often solve the wrong problem.

3. When Tension or Defensiveness Shows Up

Goal: Name it without blame.

What to say

I'm noticing some tension here, let's pause.

It sounds like there's frustration on multiple sides.

Before we move on, let's identify where we are not aligning.

What *not* to say

Let's keep this professional.

Everyone just needs to calm down.

This is getting unproductive.

Why: Unnamed tension derails meetings; naming it gives it somewhere to go.

4. When People Talk Past Each Other

Goal: Create shared understanding.

What to say

Can someone reflect back what they just heard?

Let me check that I'm hearing this right...

Are we responding to the same issue or different ones?

What *not* to say

You're not listening.

That's not what they said.

This is going nowhere.

Why: Misalignment often sounds like disagreement.

5. When One Voice Dominates the Room

Goal: Rebalance participation.

What to say

Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet.
I'm going to pause and open this up.
I'm curious about how this is landing with others.

What *not* to say

Let's let them finish.
They're just passionate.
We don't have time to hear from everyone.

Why: Equity of voice improves the quality of decisions.

6. When Power Dynamics Are Affecting the Conversation

Goal: Make power discussable.

What to say

There are different levels of authority and accountability in the room.
How might our roles be shaping this conversation?
What feels risky to say right now?

What *not* to say

We're all equal here.
Let's ignore titles.
That's just how it is.

Why: Ignoring power doesn't neutralize it, it drives it underground.

7. When the Group Is Stuck or Going in Circles

Goal: Shift the frame.

What to say

What's one thing we *do* agree on?
What decision are we actually trying to make today?
What would 'good enough' look like?

What *not* to say

We're stuck.
This always happens.
Let's just vote.

Why: Stuck usually means unclear, not unmotivated.

8. When Emotions Are High

Goal: Acknowledge without escalating.

What to say

This clearly matters a lot.
I hear how important this is to you.
Let's pause and come back to the purpose.

What *not* to say

Don't take it personally.
Facts over feelings.
We need to be rational.

Why: Feelings don't disappear when ignored.

9. When You Need to Interrupt

Goal: Protect the process.

What to say

I'm going to pause us for a moment.
Let me jump in to help us stay on track.
I want to check something before we continue.

What *not* to say

Hold on, you're wrong.
We're running out of time.
Let's move on.

Why: Purposeful interruption builds trust; unmanaged interruption erodes it.

10. When It's Time to Close

Goal: Make progress visible.

What to say

What are we aligned on? / What decisions did we land on?

What's still unresolved?

What's the next step, and who owns it, and what is the timeline?

What *not* to say

We'll figure it out later.

Good discussion.

Let's take this offline.

Why: Meetings end better with commitments, not just insights.

Reminders for Facilitators

- ✓ Your goal is to protect the process, not determine the content.
- ✓ If you're talking more than the group, you're probably doing too much.
- ✓ If the group is confused, you're probably doing too little.