# PIPs Facilitation Notes

*Collated from* [*Notes from EDS Session on Facilitation 29 June*](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1oOLM5weRubU74u_u7eYkhEjk1wB2reuL3tl_TdZpH0A/edit#heading=h.m4yx0zdushly)*) and sections of the PIPs Members' Handbook which address facilitation ( “PIPs Members’ Handbook, Ray Mutch, Sept 2013, version 10.3”* [*https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ABtAUce-x7GpfkB2XfdSxhiSsUn\_Cw7E/view*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ABtAUce-x7GpfkB2XfdSxhiSsUn_Cw7E/view)*:*

*PiPs – MHBv10.3 [Sep13] 49 08/09/2013. Sections: 2.2.2 Facilitation, 4.2.10 Facilitating Enquiry (p49), Facilitation p96). Notes and collation by Ben Clark 04-09-2022.*

*N.B. This only addresses the ‘facilitator’ role within the context of a PIPs enquiry, it does not address any of the ‘organisational’ roles such as finding venues, emails/communicating with the group, setting topics / stimulus etc.*

## What is facilitation?

An open dialogue can be helped by facilitation. The word, “facilitate” comes from the Latin for “make easy”. Facilitation describes a process of guidance, usually for a group - so that the members of that group stand every chance of gaining something valuable - often in the form of information, understanding, proficiency and confidence, or some other such positive outcome. Facilitation is about supporting, guiding and encouraging a group in achieving its objectives by enabling the group to move through a process together. Facilitation:

* Helps the thinking in a group.
* Creates space for communication within the group.
* Is based on collaboration rather than hierarchy
* Is flexible in the group agenda (as this will be determined by the group’s input)

## Status of the facilitator in PIPs

The context of PIPs is different to some other uses of facilitation – i.e. quite different to a business meeting or political forum in which a decision is being worked towards. The task of a facilitator can be a testing one, yet it is essential that we all continuously strive in our commitment to adhere to the guidelines for dialogue, so that together we ensure high standards of practice in PiPs.

At PIPs, the facilitators are volunteers. Each facilitator will have their own facilitation style and will develop their skill which comes with practice. Unfortunately, it is not something which you can just follow a set of instructions to do. Facilitators have to be able to experiment in order to learn and work out what works best. Nevertheless, some advice is collated below which should be helpful for new facilitators - and to us all as we continually develop our skills. It can also serve as a checklist or prompt to remind us what to do.

You can develop your skills as a facilitator by:

* Practice
* Observing other facilitators
* Re-reading the below and other sources about facilitation.
* Ask for feedback at the end of a session: Judge afterwards how successful the session has been.
* Buddy with neighbouring groups to learn and feed back.

Who should be the facilitator?:

* Ideally, the facilitator should not also be the presenter of stimulus.
* Ideally, a PIPs group should rotate the facilitation role so that different people are able to contribute to the conversation, facilitators can learn from observing each other and participants can improve the way they engage in dialogue having taken the meta-position of the facilitator.
* The facilitator, ideally, shouldn't take part in the discussion.
* A new member to the group, who has not been to a PIPs enquiry before, should not be asked to be the facilitator.

## Why have a facilitator?

A facilitator at PIPs enquiries can help the group by:

1. Enabling everyone to be able to contribute.
2. Ensuring the guidelines for good dialogue are adhered to.
3. Maintaining focus helps the group progress their philosophical understanding and discipline.
4. Encouraging the group to think critically and employ the features of philosophical discipline (clarity, justification, creative thinking, fair mindedness), helping people to construct and test their understandings.

## Things to do at the beginning of an enquiry

Aa a facilitator you can set the tone and expectations for an enquiry before it begins by:

1. Discuss broad dialogue guidelines with participants and get them to agree to try applying them. Ensure the guidelines are accessible (e.g. printed out on the table, posted on a wall) where they can be referred to during the dialogue.
2. Tell the group that this is what you will be shepherding the conversation along these guidelines. Ask the group to support you in this role, for the good of the group.
3. Try to make people relaxed and foster a convivial environment. (How?)
4. Ask people for their names, perhaps say something about themselves.
5. Consider using ice breaker or novelty item (e.g. pass the parcel, or a word game)
6. Explain what the meeting is for and how it will proceed / terms of engagement:
   1. How people will get to speak, how you can interject, how turns will be taken, Talking stick, raised hands, list of names etc.
   2. If you want so, suggest a limit (e.g. 2 or 3 minutes) for each contribution.
   3. Suggest people write points down so they don't forget – they might not be able to give their thoughts straight away.
7. Ask if anyone would be willing to take notes of the arguments and philosophical ideas presented.
8. Make sure new people have the opportunity to speak.
9. Start the enquiry by asking each of the participants for their first thoughts, giving everyone this chance. Ask them to give their own first reflections on the subject, rather than deeping a line of enquiry raised by another participant at this point (there’s chance for that later).

## During the dialogue

As a facilitator, you can aid the enquiry by:

1. Ensure that all participants have a chance to speak:
   1. Be sensitive to what's going on – who wants to speak etc. Try to be aware of people who are fidgeting and of twitching fingers, perhaps they are ready to speak and are getting impatient, remind them that you are recording those people who have expressed a desire to speak and you are bringing people into the discussion in a fair handed way, whilst allowing for a degree of spontaneity.
   2. Be sensitive to those who may be nervous and those who struggle to make their point as well as those who cannot make their point because others are butting in or whispering on the sidelines.
   3. Ask new / quiet people if they would like to contribute.
   4. Let people know when they are due to speak next (it’s X’s turn now then Y and your after Y), or if it’s a quick point consider letting them contribute more immediately.
   5. Balance of the loud and the quiet: Ask people who've spoken a lot to hold their thoughts so that someone else can have a turn. Be prepared to gently challenge people who may be dominating or misrepresenting others.
   6. Ask people to wait their turn if they are interrupting inappropriately.
   7. Be prepared to encourage both spontaneous intuitive responses and considered statements and arguments.
   8. Avoid monologues, ask people to round up what they are saying if it is beyond 2-3 minutes.
   9. Avoid extensive back-and-forth exchanges between two participants.
   10. Ask people to talk respectfully if necessary and remind people of the rules of engagement.
2. Shepherd the conversation along the guidelines for dialogue:
   1. Let people talk, giving them gentle reminders as necessary. Of course, to the extent all participants are brief, mindful, and curious about what each other has to say, little formal facilitation or gimmicks are necessary to ensure healthy dialogue.
   2. Remind people of the aspirations about having a philosophical conversation.
3. Put the interests of the group to the fore:
   1. Listen carefully to what is being said.
   2. Consider the extent to which you get involved: too much input can dominate and stifle the group, too little might leave it inert or in disarray.
   3. Do not seek to get overly involved with the group’s activity; resist the urge, and the invitation, to get involved directly in the enquiry - look instead for ways to guide and empower the group.
      1. You should not be commenting after every comment.
      2. Try to de-emphasise the role of the facilitator, managing by exception (when problems arise).
   4. Observe and steer the group as it practices, looking for and thinking about areas where your expertise, support and guidance might be useful to the group.
   5. Draw out opinions and ideas of the group members, rather than give your opinions. Be neutral and never take sides.
   6. Do not take a tutor role (you should not be ‘teaching’ or ‘hobbyhorsing’).
   7. Focus on *how* people participate, not just on *what* gets ‘achieved’.
4. **Focus:** try to ensure that the enquiry is focused:
   1. Take time to clarify the focus question or core issue for the enquiry group at the outset.
   2. Encourage focus if the comments drift away from the topic. Remind the group throughout the enquiry of the question at hand.
   3. Direct / steer the conversation, occasionally, when necessary. Prioritise, highlight and return to remarks that stick close to the focus and build on emerging understandings during the enquiry.
   4. Maintain the focus until such time as the group or facilitator point to opportunities for progress via some other question or issue.
   5. Consider whether the enquiry is aiming for deep linear progression or lateral exploration, and whether it is helpful to ask questions to ‘widen’ or ‘deepen’ the enquiry.
   6. Record new questions and points of interest: bracket them off for later on in the enquiry or for future enquiries.
   7. Try to maintain the common ground.
5. **Encourage and Empower:** encourage enquiry participants to employ the features of philosophical discipline as listed below; and help them to become more confident and competent in practising this discipline. This can be done by explicitly or implicitly reference to the principles (clarity, justification, creative thinking, fair mindedness) or by raising questions.
   1. Encourage the group to: analyse, evaluate, reflect, reason and express ideas with clarity.
   2. Ask the group for: agreements and disagreements, for examples and counterexamples, connections, analogies and thought experiments.
   3. **Clarify** what is meant by the questions we raise and by the statements that we make.
   4. **Justify** any statement for which we cannot immediately discern whether it is true or false. When this happens we seek to establish the extent of the statements probability or approximation to truth. So, we ask; ‘How good is the reasoning or evidence that supports or justifies a given statement or position?’
   5. Assess the **strengths and weaknesses** of models, explanations, definitions and so on presented to us. Assess the extent to which they may be too strong [(only men write great poetry (forced to rule out great female poets)] or too weak [(everything that is flat is a table (forced to rule in beds)]. When we become aware of an account being too strong or too weak it is a sign that it requires some modification.
   6. Practise alternative or **creative thinking**
      1. Tolerate and consider the views of others (even if they seem strange to us) since they are often essential to generating a full account.
      2. Actively seek to generate alternative, perhaps contradictory, viewpoints and scenarios because they can serve to rebut or refute any mistaken claims that are made or operated with.
      3. Use analogies, examples, thought experiments, etc. to make complex or subtle meanings clearer.
   7. Try to be **fair-minded:**
      1. treat each other in a kind and respectful manner.
      2. work towards constructing and working with only the ‘best evidence’ and ‘reasoning’—leading to only the best explanations and arguments.
      3. try to avoid confusion, and avoid ambiguity in our language use
      4. work hard when we challenge a position to ensure that we do not misconstrue or misrepresent the position that we challenge.
      5. challenge first the strongest forms of arguments and explanations before moving to challenge weaker forms. (A position cannot be fairly refuted or rebutted by undermining a weaker variation of that position, especially if the stronger form is left intact.)
   8. Encourage people who use **anecdotes or analogies** to explain how such things connect to the enquiry’s focus and why they might have or lead to more general significance.
6. **Collaboration:** encourage people to work together and build better understandings and greater respect for each other’s ideas, feelings and social dignity. In order for a group to work well together each person has to be both willing and able to demonstrate sensitivity and respect for each other.
7. Periodically summarise points already made (or ask a note taker - if there is one, to do so).

## At the end of the dialogue

Ask for feedback at the end of a session from the participants.

Reflect on how successful the session has been and how closely you aligned to the above ideas. What did you do well, which you should continue doing? What did you struggle with? What could you approach differently in the future?