YFU Best Practices

Small group work to brainstorm ideas or solve a specific problem

"Gallery Walk" or stations to analyze information and put forth ideas

Open-ended questions to encourage conversations and peer-to-peer learning

Compare and contrast different ideas; examples and non-examples

Activate prior knowledge using pictures, quotes, questions, videos, cartoons, etc.

Large group discussion; "Fishbowl"

Think-Pair-Share

Use mistakes as learning opportunities

Scenarios, case studies, simulations, role-play

Ask participants to share their experiences

Use awards or prizes to motivate

K-W-L Chart to pre-assess and post-assess (Know, Want to Know, Learned)

Oral cues to direct learning: "Now, we are going to move on to objective two."

Use actual YFU tools, webpages, forms, and documents

Ice-breakers, name games, physical activities for fun

Association strategies: Acronyms, associate ideas with physical actions, visuals, song

Popcorn-style discussion (with a ball or stuffed toy)

Use humor: cartoons, videos, funny stories

Summarizing strategies: In two sentences, summarize the main idea.

Creative Grouping

Graphics to organize information; pictures to share information

The following strategies and talking point suggestions are aligned with the YFU evaluation framework. Tweak these examples to match your style and weave these into sessions to keep participants on track and engaged.

Area 2: Objectives and reinforcing objectives throughout the sessions

Criteria: 2.b Connects objectives and provides context & 2.c Wrap Up reinforces learning

- Throughout sessions, direct learning and highlight how specific activities are connected to the objectives. Prompt participants to make the link between the activities and the objectives: *"Why are we doing this? How is this relevant to our objectives?"*
- Review objectives at the end of the session:
  - *"Here is the list of objectives we outlined at the start of this conversation. Let's review to see if we covered them all."*
  - Ask participants if they feel confident in their knowledge/skill of each objective, or if they still have any uncertainty. Use thumbs ups, thumbs down to quickly assess if objectives were met.

Area 3: Time Management

Criteria: 3.a Monitors time and makes adjustments as needed and 3.c Sessions start and end on time

Be intentional:

- Know in advance how long each section should take. Clock when each section should end.
- Watch the time: wear a watch or have a phone/clock in clear view
- Inform participants of any time constraints.
  - Breaks: tell them how much time they have and when to return. *"It's now 9:42. This is a 10 minute break, so be back in your seats ready to go at 9:52."*

Be ready to adjust:

- Know your priorities (based on the objectives)
  - What activity can you cut or shorten to stay on track?
    - Instead of a Think-Pair-Share activity (8 minutes), do a group share and ask for a volunteer to come to the "board" and write down responses (3-4 minutes)
    - If you have two activities to address/practice one objective, choose one and cut the other (making sure all essential content is delivered)

Criteria: 3.b Strategies for reducing distractions

Managing overly-enthusiastic contributors:

- If you notice one or two participants who always want to answer a question or provide their "two cents", you can gradually reduce this (so others can participate) by doing the following (if they are raising hands):

1. Call on them a couple of times

2. Acknowledge their raised hand but give them a "wait a moment" signal and look around the room for others. Wait a beat, then return to them if no one else jumps in.

3. Say "I know you have great ideas. Let's hear from a couple of others first."

4. If they are still dominating the conversation, at the break pull them aside.

- *"You're doing a great job, thanks for all of your sharing! I'd really like to encourage others to participate as well, so if you don't mind I'd like you to be my "expert". I'll call on you if no one else knows the answer or is willing to speak. Is that okay with you?"*

Area 4: Presence

Criteria: 4.c Prepared: Trainer knows the content and the activities and can speak freely, (notes are fine, but don't read directly from the curriculum).

Be Prepared

- Know what you are going to say and how you are going to say it.
- Be very familiar with the "learning activity", practice the activity, and have a clear picture in your mind of what is supposed to happen**.**
- Take your own notes and reminders based on the curriculum; use your own language.

Area 5: Delivery and Engagement- also see BEST PRACTICES list

Criteria: 5.e Activities: Activities are appropriate and help participants achieve objectives; group work is meaningful and trainer uses a variety of group work techniques.

Creative grouping strategies

- Why grouping?
    - Dynamic activity (moving around the room)
    - Meet new people, exposure to new perspectives
    - Create strategic partners (to group people you want working together **or** separate those you don't want working together)
- Strategies:
    - Counting off (if you have 15 and you need 5 groups, count 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3…)
    - Group by ability/experience (if you have "experts", make sure there is one in each group)
    - Line up according to [birthday, height, age, etc]. Then partner/group by proximity.
    - **Self-selection:** allow participants to choose their own groups (most adults will likely choose whomever is nearby, most teens will run to their friends)
    - **Pay attention!:** when groups are working, circulate and listen (group work, is not a break for the facilitators). You can do the following:

- write down interesting ideas you hear and invite that group/person to share in general feedback
- be available to answer questions but don't interrupt unless they invite you (it's their discussion time)
- ensure groups are on task; if not, ask a question: "Gary, what did you think about the second example?" When he responds to you gesture to the group and walk away
- Grouping "Activities":
  - **Assign roles:** for example, "recorder" (writes answers), a "facilitator" (making sure everyone contributes), and a "reporter" (shares feedback with the group at large), "devil's advocate" (always shares counter-argument or constructive criticism – USE WISELY),"timekeeper" and others as needed. **Everyone participates.**
  - **"Double" grouping**: Put participants in groups, groups complete task, then ask that within each group, they individually assign themselves a letter: "A, B, C, D". Now, re-assemble new groups by letter ("A's together, B's together" etc) and each new group has one representative from the old groups to report on findings. [See illustration]

  - **"Speed Dating":** A way to do quick partner sharing. Useful for opinion activities and for groups who do not know one another (meet and greet).

    - Two lines facing each other: side A and side B. Pose the question, each side has one minute to share. Then, participant at the end of side A rotates to the other end, each participant moves up one space. New partner, new question. Repeat with side A – Side B never moves.
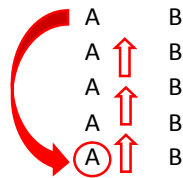
Criteria: 5.f Flexibility: Trainer pays attention to how participants respond to topics and the "mood" in the room; trainer responds effectively to keep participants engaged (sometime this means taking an unplanned break, or changing an activity).

Readiness to adapt

- Pay attention to the tone of the group: if they are quiet, you'll need to implement some more dynamic work. Conversely, if they are too "chatty" you may need to do more focused activities.
  - For quiet groups:
    - Find ways to reduce your talking (the less YOU talk, the more THEY do)

- Don't do "All Call" style discussion (you asking questions to the group at large), use pair or group work; this requires participants to engage with one another.
- Bring a "Scribe" to the front to ask the question to the group and write their responses (or a "Facilitator" if there's no board). This takes the focus off of you. This is a good role for an experienced participant or a participant who is particularly "chatty" (put them in charge of getting others' opinions)
- Don't be afraid of "Wait Time." This is the 5-10 seconds it might take your group to consider your question and respond thoughtfully. A little silence is OK – don't rush to fill the gaps.
  - For loud or "unruly" groups:
    - Give them opportunities to talk, move, share but BALANCE with individual work (write your ideas for 2 minutes then share with your neighbor)

Have a back-up plan:

- If you planned for a highly active group and they are quiet, flip your script and do partner/group work. If you planned for quiet work and they are not paying attention, throw a physical activity in – make them get up, even if it's just for a "stretch break" or a quick mingling activity. Give participants 3 minutes to work out the energy then come back.
- Have one or two quick and easy "Ice-breakers" or games to give participants a break For example: "Speed Dating" with "Would you rather…?" (live in a hot or cold place, have no money or have no friends, give up sugar or give up salt, etc)
- Don't be afraid to ask for their input. *"It seems that you're not connecting with this [presentation/activity/discussion/etc]. What's not working for you? How can we make it better?"* If you do this, be ready to find a solution or compromise to address their concerns.

Criteria: 5.h Open-Ended Questions- Trainer uses open-ended questions to encourage peer-to–peer learning and acknowledge participants' skills.

Use some of these questions to promote peer-to-peer learning:

- *Tell me more about that.*
- *What did you learn from that experience?*
- *What would you have done differently?*
- *That sounds challenging. Does the group have any advice or suggestions?*
- *Does anyone have another example of this?*

Criteria: 5.g Values participants- Trainer encourages all participants and creates a positive learning environment. And 5.i Validate and encourage responses: Trainer encourages participation and validates participant comments, observations, and responses to questions. Trainer uses positive techniques to correct misinformation and clarify misconceptions.

Keeping participants on track

Off-topic questions: Always acknowledge the participant's willingness to speak up! Don't ever make someone feel bad for asking a question, even if it's totally unrelated. Possible responses:

- *"Great question! We're going to discuss that later in the session, so please remember to ask again."*
- *"Interesting idea! Why don't you and I discuss that during the break?"*
- *"Thanks for your question! We need to stay on topic right now, but after the session I can help you with that question."*

Side conversations:

- Instead of calling attention to the conversers, quietly walk behind them (if possible) and put your hand on their shoulders. This will alert them to your awareness of their conversation without embarrassing them.

Checking comprehension

- You want to be certain people are connecting with the material and understanding the content
    - Invite questions and leave openings for questions, but don't assume all will ask if they don't understand.
        - Never ask "Do you understand?" They will nod and you'll never know the truth.
        - Ask content specific questions of the group to make sure they've "gotten" the material. Use open-ended questions: *"Can someone explain the three key steps to filling out a host family application?"*
        - See if they can identify the objective(s) relevant to the activity/task

Area 6. Disposition and Setting the Tone

Criteria: 6.a Uses names

Get to know your participants

- Take time to identify individually with each participant (if the group is not TOO big). All participants should have a name-tag, so learn something about each of them to help you personalize.
    - Ask an unusual introductory question: something other than "where are you from/what do you do?"
        - E.g. "Would you rather …?" questions (be able to fly, or be able to disappear)

Criteria: 6. c Enthusiasm: Trainer shows enthusiasm; he/she enjoys training others and participants can see this. And 6. d Lively and fun: Trainer is interesting and uses humor and fun to keep participants excited about learning.

Keep energy high and make sure your body language and expressions show that you enjoy training. When using humor be mindful of:

- Sarcasm- not a good idea, there are many different understandings of sarcasm and sarcasm can be interpreted as offensive.
- Keep jokes professional.
- Always speak highly of YFU volunteers, staff, students, and families.

*Criteria: 6. e **Neutral and Non-Judgmental:** Trainer validates participants' experiences and respects individuals' rights to their own opinion.*

- Never say "no" or "that's/you're wrong"
- Instead, acknowledge all contributions with phrases such as "Good thought/idea," "interesting perspective," "I hadn't thought of that," "keep looking/thinking"
- If you know you're entering into sensitive territory, set **ground rules:**
  - no interrupting
  - no personal attacks
  - set time limits if necessary
  - Use "I feel" instead of "you are" language – personal experience vs. accusations
- If you have two strong or differing opinions, diffuse with acknowledgment:
  - "Clearly you're very passionate about this topic, and that's awesome!"
  - "Thank you for sharing your views."
- Use clarifying statements: "What I heard you say was…."
- Wrap up with "What did we discover in this conversation? How did we move the discussion forward?"

*And 6. f **Culturally-Sensitive:** Trainer is aware and appreciates that beliefs and perspectives are shaped by culture and each participant's culture shapes his/her own perspective.*

- First recall (and possibly acknowledge aloud) that beliefs/perspectives are colored by personal experiences. This can create a safe space for sharing.
- If cultural differences are creating conflict, do a quick review of the "iceberg" concept – what are the things that shape our culture **beyond** our country of origin?