

Tips for Learner Participation

- Quoting from sources as examples:
 - “She says, ‘Yes. Say more about that,’ and nods her head and says, ‘Right, right, and how do you feel about that?’ I guess she just invites us to talk and then keeps us talking. More important, she listens to what we say and shows respect for our ideas as well as our feelings.”
 - “His sessions sound like a cross between an interview and a counseling session with a ‘shrink’ He doesn’t offer a single fact or opinion of his own. Instead, he gets us to talk about the subject by offering provocative comments, stories and questions. Finally, he summarizes what we’ve said.”
 - “She walks over to you and watches you intently while you are talking, at close range, as though just the two of you were having a conversation. She leans toward you while she nods and says ‘yes’ or ‘right.’”
 - “He reaches toward us with his hand open and palm up. Sometimes he beckons with it as though asking us to keep talking. He signals to the one who’s talking and keeps the others from butting in.”
- The wallflower and the motor mouth
 - The **wallflower** is a learner who resists participating. Whether this person is trained to be quiet or simply is a shy, introverted person, he/she is more likely to speak up when there is no threat of embarrassment. You as a presenter can reduce this threat in several ways:
 - Before asking a question, watch the learner’s face to see if it registers a clear understanding of what is going on.
 - Always ask questions with no “wrong” answers; after another learner has said something concise and accurate, ask the wallflower if she/he agrees.
 - Always express approval of inputs, especially those of wallflowers.
 - Utilize small group activities.
 - Generate questions within small groups. Wallflowers may be more comfortable in a small group than in the larger group.
 - Provide incentives for contributing to learning, especially within the small groups; make it possible for the peers in the group to reward the wallflower.
 - The **motor mouth** is a learner who over-participates, from simple aggressiveness and/or excessive enthusiasm. There is a risk of developing an adversarial relationship between the motor mouth and the presenter. Avoid ridicule as a presenter. Even though the other learners usually lose patience with the motor mouth before the presenter does, they will resent berating of any of their colleagues. You may try the following:
 - Use body language, moving about the room so that you do not directly face him/her.
 - At the same time, use some of the techniques intended to draw other learners out.
 - If that does not work, try holding out your palm at him/her in the classic policeman’s “stop” signal when he/she tries to interrupt.
 - Use incentives that may involve others and thus make it difficult for one person to dominate.
 - Build a praise bridge to another participant: Offer praise by saying, “We appreciate your responses.” Then add, “Now, let’s hear from someone else.”