Guide to Online Facilitation

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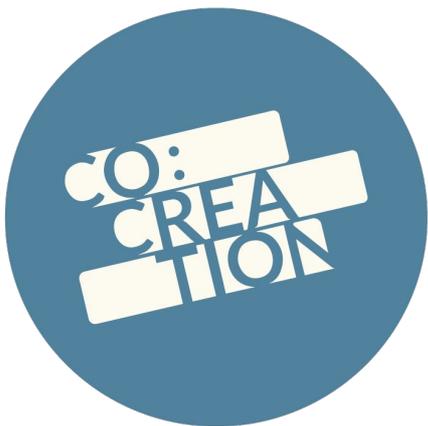
Introduction

Have you ever wondered if tactile art workshops could be conducted online? Are there ways to make such workshops as effective as in-person ones?

This guide is a compilation of what we have experienced and learnt through the conducting of this series of online tactile art workshops and we hope that the tips and tricks here will be useful for you in your next facilitation.

Chapter 1: Into the Unknown

Get to know more about the benefits and features of an online space.

Chapter 2: Let's Get Phy-gital!

Be introduced to physical and digital tools you can incorporate while conceptualising online art programmes.

Chapter 3: Set the Stage

Learn about the ideal technical setup for facilitating an online art programme.

Chapter 4: The Present Presenter

Understand the importance of tuning in in an online space.

Chapter 5: Moving Forward, Looking Back

Learn to engage in a reflective practice after every round of facilitation.

Chapter 1: Into the Unknown

Emergence of online facilitation

Before the existence of online video conferencing apps and more specifically before the COVID-19 pandemic, art programmes were mostly conducted in-person. Especially with tactile forms of art-making, it was once difficult for us to imagine how art programmes could even happen without it being conducted face-to-face.

However, because of technological advancements, it is becoming increasingly feasible to hold art programmes online. Many previously untapped potentials of online platforms are starting to surface.

This guide is hopeful that online art facilitation is here to stay and will continue to reach out more effectively to different types of learners.

Benefits of online facilitation

★   More participants can participate at any one time
★   More alternative ways of participation
★   More convenience for you and the participants

From our experience conducting the series of online workshops, we noticed that the fundamental components of planning for art programmes such as the setting the objectives and getting ready materials for the programme is similar for both online and on-site programmes.

Some components, however, are unique to online facilitation that have to be deliberately addressed and looked into. Here are two experiences that participants and online facilitators will experience in an online programme:

What will happen	What you should do
Online facilitators appear as a flat moving image and their presence can easily fade into the background	Be intentional with establishing your presence in the classroom
Online facilitators are not able to have a clear view of what is happening on the ground	Be intentional with syncing up with your participants

Every stage from conceptualisation to facilitation is important for a successful workshop. In Chapter 2, you will find some tips on how to conceptualise an online art programme. In Chapter 3, you will get to learn an effective way of setting up and getting ready for online facilitation. In Chapter 4, we will introduce tips to establish presence and be in sync with your participants, which is particularly important in an online space.

Chapter 2: Let's Get Phy-gital!

In this chapter, we will introduce how you can go about conceptualising your next programme. We will also be introducing to you some physical materials and digital tools (hence, "phy-gital") that will be useful to guide your participants in their learning.

An online art programme, like any other programmes, should ideally allow participants to learn a thing or two about art and art-making. To allow that to happen, the intentional inclusion of concepts and ways that would highlight these components within the programme is necessary.

Here is a template you can use to start brainstorming for your next art programme:

Questions to ask yourself throughout:
- What is the participants' age group?
- Are my learning materials suitable and accessible to my participants (e.g. sufficient visual aids, optimal font and font size)?
- Do my participants have prior experience in art and art-making?
- How will the technical setup be like for my participants (more on the next page)?

Components		Methods and Activities (e.g. How are you planning to weave them into the session?)
Knowledge	(e.g. What are some theories, artists, and terms you would like your participants to know about?)	
Skills	(e.g. What would your participants be able to learn how to do by the end of the session?)	
Attitudes	(e.g. What mindset would you want your participants to continue even after the session?)	

Incorporating Phy-gital Tools

PHYSICAL

Material kits

The provision of a material kit would ensure that all participants can engage in the art activities in a similar fashion and learn accordingly to the intentions of the programme.

Here are some pointers to keep in mind when preparing an art kit for your participants:
- Keep materials **minimal** to prevent confusion
- Have materials that are **easily identifiable**
- **Categorise** and pack the materials according to activity (for programmes with multiple activities within)
- Inform participants **in advance** to prepare materials that are needed, but not provided in the kit

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DIGITAL

Technical set up in the classroom

There are a few ways a classroom can be set up for an online programme:

- Logging in with their own devices from a physical classroom
- Logging in with their own devices from their own spaces (e.g. individually from home or their own studios)
- Tuning in to a single projector in class

Understanding the format allows you an idea of how the classroom or spaces of your participants would be like. This helps you to know when to include elements in your facilitation that would enhance the experience of participants.

For example, QR codes or shortened URL links to various digital tools would be good to provide in the slides for the single projector format, so that participants who have their own mobile phones or devices can easily access them.

Digital tools

Speaking of digital tools, there are a myriad of options to incorporate into an art programme to facilitate questions, discussions, and reflections. Here are two that we have tried out:

Kahoot	Padlet
This tool is great for checking in on what participants have learnt from the session. It can also be administered at the beginning of the session as a fun way to gather a baseline understanding of what the participants already know about a certain technique.	This tool is great for facilitating questions that participants might have, and also reflections before, during or post-programme. The ability to post images and videos opens up an option for participants to have their very own "online exhibition"!

Digital tools are important to incorporate in online programmes to give participants more channels to engage with the facilitator and amongst themselves. They can also be good extensions in on-site programmes to facilitate conversations with participants who prefer to use text or visuals to respond, or prefer to respond outside of a certain time frame.

Chapter 3: Set the Stage

No matter the technical set up or audio-visual set up within the classroom, the physical set-up on your end as the facilitator would be more or less the same, and a setup that you would have full control over. This section will focus on the devices that you can use for an effective delivery of the programme. These devices and tips support the programme in more ways than just visual and audio clarity of the facilitator.
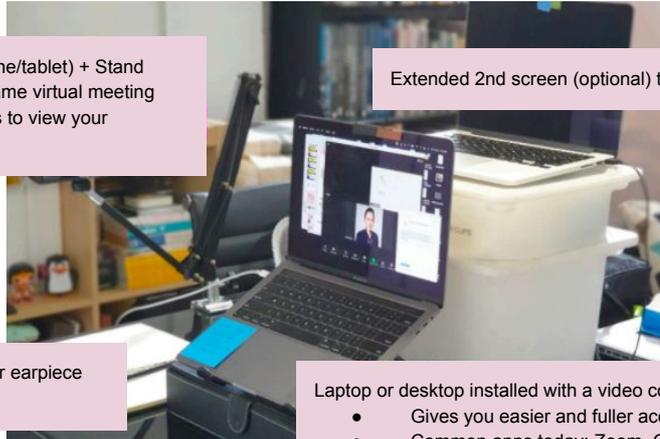
Top-down demo-camera (phone/tablet) + Stand
- Logged into the same virtual meeting
- Allows participants to view your demonstrations

Extended 2nd screen (optional) to have a clearer view of all participants

- External headphone or earpiece
- External microphone

Laptop or desktop installed with a video communications app
- Gives you easier and fuller access to the functions of the apps
- Common apps today: Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Webex

Conducive environment checklist

Sound:
- ❏ Ensure that there is minimal background noise
- ❏ Ensure that there will be no interruptions from others throughout the session
- ❏ Ensure there is no wind blowing towards your microphone
- ❏ Mute all other applications (Whatsapp, Messenger, Telegram, Shopee notifications, etc.)
- ❏ Put your mobile phone/s to silent mode

Camera:
- ❏ Ensure that camera or web camera is set at eye level or slightly above eye level
- ❏ Ensure that camera is not pointed upwards or downwards at an angle
- ❏ If needed, elevate your device with books or a stand
- ❏ Ensure that your space is well-lit
- ❏ Have a clean background or ensure that the background in your video is clutter and interruption-free

Demo-camera:
- ❏ Do not connect the audio of your demo-camera
- ❏ Have a clean and clutter free demonstration surface, only show materials related to the workshop
- ❏ Have standby materials nearby
- ❏ Try to use a surface that is plain with neutral colours (black, white, grey or wood)
- ❏ Adjust the demo-camera to be parallel to the demonstration surface
- ❏ Ensure that demonstration surface is well-lit

Digital assets (e.g. slides, videos, digital engagement tools):
- ❏ Be familiar with the digital tools
- ❏ Test & check all digital assets before the programme, especially the sound of video files
- ❏ Close all other apps that are on the same device
- ❏ Ensure that the shared screen is clear of files and folders that are private and confidential

Devices:
- ❏ Make sure that all devices are fully charged the day before the programme
- ❏ *Optional - Have a charged powerbank ready if you feel that your devices might not last the whole programme

Having an ideal setup is a key aspect in ensuring a smooth run of an online art programme. However, remember that tools are only as good as their users! The next chapter will bring this preparation a large step forward by unleashing its potential through effective facilitation.

Chapter 4: The Present Presenter

The quality of facilitation is a huge contributor to the success of any programme. It is the main factor that ensures the effective transfer of the knowledge and skills intended for the participants, following a well-designed programme and having an ideal set-up for facilitation. This section highlights how we can best work with and around the peculiar characteristics of online facilitation, with references to what we would commonly experience in on-site facilitation.

These are some considerations that you might want to make during the delivery of the programme, depending on the participants' profiles:

- **Pace**
  Go at the participants' pace and repeat instructions when needed
- **Tone**
  Be authentic towards building a positive connection with your participants and maintain a friendly and respectful tone throughout the session
- **Language**
  Use a language that is suitable for the participants and simplify when needed

Reading the room without being in there

Reading the room is a key feature of any live facilitation, on-site or online. It allows a facilitator to attune and adapt to the learning styles of the participants.

As you might already anticipate, being able to read the room accurately may not be as easy for an online facilitator who is not on the ground with the participants. Technological setups on the ground may not be in our control and even if cameras are set up at every angle of the room for your viewing, it will still be difficult to replicate the experience of being physically present.

However, this does not mean that reading the room is impossible in online facilitation. The next page lists some useful ways to tackle this limitation and even build more engagement during the session.

Your VO-ICE matters in an online space

Using the acronym VO-ICE, here are some tips you can follow to enhance your presence and build safety in the classroom at your next online facilitation:

Verbalise **O**bservations	As mentioned before, online facilitators appear as 2-D figures on a flat screen and their presence can easily fade away. Because of that, participants may feel unguided and lost in a much shorter time as compared to a session where there is an on-site facilitator. You can be the most observant and attentive online facilitator, but there is a need to verbalise these observations to communicate with your participants that you are there with them. **Be Captain Obvious** Verbally acknowledge events that you are seeing on your screen (e.g. focused participants, laughing participants). Doing this seems counterintuitive but such feedback goes a long way in establishing presence no matter how far you and the participants are located from each other. **Make accurate observations** Ensure that your observations are valid ones to accurately synchronise your experiences with the participants. Verbalising that everyone is focused when most of the participants are giving blank looks may be counter-effective in building presence. Remember that you can always check in with participants or other people on the ground to get a more accurate picture.
Inspire	Given the nature of art-making, we seldom are able to anticipate the outcomes of our processes. This might be especially unsettling for participants without prior art-making experience as we are typically more used to an outcome-driven approach in our daily lives. Thus, preempting participants to embrace and sit with the unsettling feelings they might have might inspire participants to work through the possible feelings of uncertainty during the session. You may also like to share some of your own experiences in art-making!
Connect	It is important to encourage participants to stay connected with you throughout the session. Tapping on the functions of the chosen video communication app, communication can happen in these 4 ways: - **Using of reaction buttons or waving into camera** These are typically not done in on-site settings because there is no need to. We found that these mini check-ins helps with engagement and encourages participants to stay focused on the task! They are also simple ways to check if participants have understood the instructions well. - **Speaking through the app** - **Dropping a text message in the app** - **Dropping a text message in the app privately to the facilitator** We found this option to be a popular choice for participants who might be reserved in sharing! Notice which of these methods work best for the participants and open up these options to encourage participation. The connections between participants is something that cannot be dismissed, especially in cases where participants are situated within a room, attending the same programme. As online facilitators cannot be there physically to assist and support the participants, encouraging participants to connect with fellow participants and/or with resources around them might build some independence in how they approach problem-solving.
Exemplify	Sensing from how the participants are progressing based on the feedback that you get from observing, it might be useful to demonstrate how participants can go about making their artwork, or take their exploration to a higher level. Depending on the objectives of the workshop and the profiles of the participants, sample artworks can also be shown, but be sure not to do this prematurely to prevent spoiling the creative experience for your participants!

Chapter 5: Moving Forward, Looking Back

There is much to learn about online facilitation, and our knowledge about it will continue to grow and evolve according to the unique profiles of participants and the digital tools that are available to us. Reflecting on what went well and not-so-well would help us monitor our journeys to become competent online facilitators.

If you have the permission to record your sessions, it might be good to review the recordings post-session and notice how you facilitate the session at different points. It would give you a better idea of what the participants saw during the workshop - which is an angle that you might missed during facilitation.If you do not get to record the session, setting time immediately after the session to reflect would be advisable to ensure that the memories of the session are still fresh.

These are some questions that may help you with your reflection after you have completed facilitating an online workshop:
- Were the objectives of the session met? Which aspects of the session were successful/not successful in transferring the intentions of the programme to the participants?
- Are the assumptions we made during conceptualisation helpful or do they have to be revised?
- Did I stumble at any parts of the facilitation? What helped/could have helped to make the session smoother?
- What did I do that helped with generating interest and participation in the participants?
- Would I do things differently in my next run? Why/why not?

To enhance your learning, you can also consider being a participant yourself in other online art programmes, like the many we offer at Co:Creation Workshop! Building your own learning network and being able to exchange ideas and experiences with other online facilitators would also keep your learning enriching.