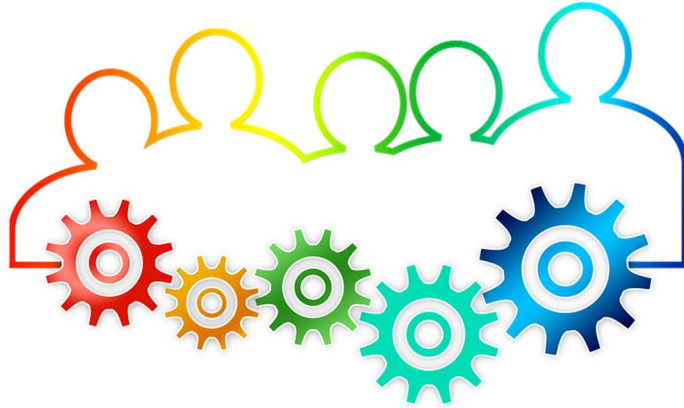


A Structure for Effective Check-Ins

by Andrew Boa

While facilitating a day-long or week-long learning event, setting aside some time for a “check-in” can give participants the pause they need to process and prepare for what’s next. It allows them to reflect, re-energize, and reconnect before jumping back into a challenging sequence of learning tasks or agenda items.



Yet too often, check-ins drift away from their intended purpose. One stray comment can derail the dialogue into a series of seemingly endless rabbit trails. This has led some facilitators to abandon the practice of formal check-ins altogether.

The solution is *not* to stop checking in. We can’t dismiss the importance of taking a moment to re-center in the middle of a long learning event or meeting. An effective check-in invites participants to evaluate how they are doing mentally, emotionally, relationally, and physically, both for their own sake and for the sake of the group. It can help them achieve their maximum level of engagement and learning by freeing them from what may be restricting or hindering them to explore or share fully.

The following is a simple structure you can use to check-in with participants between long learning tasks or agenda items, or at the beginning or end of a difficult day.

1. **Share** one word that captures how you are feeling right now. For example: *Restless.*
2. **Summarize** why you chose this word, and what that means for your learning and our time together today. For example: *I’ve been exposed to some intriguing ideas today, but I’m anxious to see if they will actually work in my own context. I’m also a little restless due to sitting for so long.*
3. **Conclude** your update with one of the following statements:
 - *I would like to be encouraged.*
 - *I would like to be challenged.*
 - *I would like to be encouraged and challenged.*
 - *I’ll pass.*
4. **Receive** encouragements or challenges others have for you.

This process creates an environment where each member has an opportunity to self-reflect, share honestly, and invite input from others. Leaders gain valuable feedback, and participants are given permission to speak comforting or uncomfortable truths as needed. This practice also promotes accountability as people follow up on challenges to see if they have been completed. In this way, check-ins can catalyze groups to gain momentum into greater learning.

Effective check-ins are:

- **Safe, not stressful.** Fully listen to each person's check-in. Let your total attention be an act of love and acceptance. Don't let people give advice during this time.
- **Transparent, but not too long.** Authentic sharing takes time. But especially in a large group, check-ins can swallow up the majority of your meeting if left without limits. The structure above provides parameters for purposeful, succinct sharing.
- **Short, but not shallow.** If check-ins *are* kept short, it might be difficult to go below the surface level. Think of the check-in as a summary of emotions and experiences related to your learning process.
- **Encouraging.** If the person checking in would like to be encouraged, offer words of affirmation and support. Notice any signs of improvement you have observed. The more specific the encouragement, the better.
- **Challenging.** If the person checking in would like to be challenged, offer a challenge. Make sure it's both measurable and doable, and record it so that you can follow up later if appropriate. Then, give the person permission to accept or reject your challenge.

When you put these principles into practice, you'll create an environment for learning where participants feel acknowledged, heard, supported, and challenged. You'll receive real-time information about the emotions and experiences of the learners in the room, both individually and corporately. Ultimately, pausing for a check-in prepares participants and facilitators alike to re-engage more energetically and attentively in the tasks ahead!

What type of check-ins have you found helpful in your work?

Andrew A. Boa (MA, [Wheaton College Graduate School](#)) is the author of [Redeemed Sexuality](#) (2017). He lives in California with his wife and young daughter.