



AAMW Business Skills Olympics – Facilitator’s Guide

Goal

The goals of the Business Skills Olympics are to introduce 11th and 12th grade students to the world of business, to teach them valuable skills in problem solving and to help them learn to work collaboratively. The teams will work in groups with facilitators to solve real business problems (case studies).

Student Requirements

High School juniors and seniors will attend after accepting formal invitations from their schools. This event is planned as a Department of Education field trip. Participating students will have field trip permission, a faculty advisor and transportation to and from the competition.

The main job of the facilitator is to keep discussion moving forward, making sure the team you'll be working with stays on topic and on task. This is generally somewhat of a challenge in any corporate environment; for AAMW's Business Skills Olympics, it may be more so because you'll be working with adolescent students who probably have little experience (if any) with group discussion and analysis exercises. You'll therefore have to offer a bit more direct guidance to the participants than you would ordinarily in a corporate meeting.

It's likely that you'll find the same kind of group and interpersonal dynamics in this situation as you would in any corporate environment. Of the ten or so students on each team one or two of them will be highly vocal, with strong leadership qualities and equally strong opinions that they will not be shy about expressing. These students will attempt to dominate the group discussion and may need to be reined in without stifling their enthusiasm. One or two will be at the opposite end of the spectrum; introspective, reticent, and relatively non-participative. These students will have to be drawn out. The remainder will be somewhere in the middle.

Generally speaking, the discussion and analysis of the cases will consist of the following components:

1. Review the major characters and facts of the case.
2. What are the issues each of the characters and their organizations are facing.
3. What actions, if any, have each of the characters taken to address their issues.
4. The students' opinions on the actions taken by each character.
5. What are the ongoing or long-term issues faced by the characters and their organizations.



6. The students' recommendations as to how those issues should be met.

The following are some suggestions for how to facilitate the group discussion in order to provide the students with a positive experience and make the Business Skills Olympics as successful as possible.

1. In advance of the event

a. Thoroughly read and be familiar with the case study you'll be facilitating. The students are expected to come to the event prepared; you should be too. You'll destroy your credibility if you're not knowledgeable about the material.

b. Prepare three or four questions you'd like the students to consider about the case, questions that are a little more case-specific within the components as outlined above. Since multiple teams will be working on the same case, the facilitators of each case should get together in advance to coordinate on these questions and ensure that all teams are considering the same questions.

2. During the group discussion

a. Start by introducing yourself and have each team member introduce themselves. Even if they all know each other already, they each need to introduce themselves to you. It is very important that each student sits up, looks directly at you and speaks clearly. This is a major part of the event experience. And it is important that the students understand the significance of this part of the process, it's an opportunity to get each individual to say something out loud. People are more likely to participate once they've found their voice for the first time.

b. Briefly review your role as facilitator, telling the students you're there to help guide the discussion only. The students themselves own the discussion, the analysis, and the subsequent presentation. Get the rules straight up front. Go over the goals of the discussion; review the components as outlined above, the questions you'd like the students to consider, and remind them that the result of the discussion will be a presentation to the larger group.

c. Have the students elect a scribe, a timekeeper, and a spokesperson. The role of the scribe is to jot down notes on the important points made as the discussion progresses; it is a difficult role because the scribe will be doing double duty as a participant. The timekeeper should call out the time every fifteen minutes, which will help to make sure the discussion doesn't bog down, and enough time is left over to prepare the presentation. The spokesperson will be the student who will start the presentation of the team's findings to the audience. It's all right if the team decides to have all team members present their solution.

Remind the students that the team will only have up to 5 minutes to present their solution.



d. Once you've gotten the team organized, reviewed the overall goals of the discussion, and gotten things moving, your basic role is one of monitoring and guiding. At this point the less you say the better; the students should take ownership of the discussion and keep things moving along themselves. You should simply make sure they're staying on task, that they're considering all the various components of the case, and that they're using their time effectively and productively. Step in only if the discussion bogs down or if they're spending too much time on one aspect of the case.

e. The case may have additional data and a variety of other referential types of information. The students will be informed prior to the event that they're responsible for reading and comprehending all aspects of the case (remember that these are Harvard Business School cases, meant for master's degree candidates). You may find an eager student or two on your team who wants to talk about or analyze data outside of the case, limit tangent discussions.

f. General helpful hints:

i. Keep sidebar conversations to a minimum. There should only be one person speaking at a time, and all team members should listen and consider each other's remarks. It's important that they respect each other.

ii. Make sure no one dominates the discussion and try to draw out any students who are holding back.

iii. Remember that your responsibility as a facilitator is to the whole group, not to individuals.

iv. Expect differences of opinion; if handled well, they can contribute to creative solutions.

v. Be suspicious of agreements reached too easily; test to make sure there really is agreement on essential points.