Graphic facilitation

Guide, 2017

Disclaimer

This publication ....

Contents

Intro

This guide has been created on the basis of the experiences collected during the international conference CONNECTOR, the 4th edition, held between 3 and 8 July, in Bucharest. This was an event that aimed to bring together education professionals interested in creating an interactive learning area and exchanging best practices at European level. The event is organized by the National Agency for Community Programmes in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (ANPCDEFP) with the support of the Erasmus+ programme.

For a week, 84 professionals from different fields of education (school, VET, youth, adults) from 18 countries were accompanied by a team of trainers in exploring eight non-formal education methods: forum theater, improvisational theater, debate, graphic facilitation, photovoice, living library, non-violent communication, socio-educational animation.

The novelty brought by this edition of Connector consisted in the involvement of a group of education experts, who attended the eight workshops and who had the task of transforming the learning experiences that they noticed into accessible guides for the learning facilitators throughout Europe. In order to create the guides, besides the Connector direct experience, each expert consulted a lot of materials and came into contact with experienced people in delivering that method.

What you now have in front of you is the guide for **graphic facilitation**. It aims at representing a gateway to this method and a tool to accompany the first steps of the education professionals who would like to include it within their portfolio. Although it contains elements related to the acquiring working skills, the guide does not aim to replace a training program or the contact with the community of practitioners who created and developed it.

Depending on how much time you have and your learning style, we invite you to build your own strategy to address the contents below. In the guide, we tried to structure the information starting from the questions "*what*?" (Chapter 1), "*who*?" (Chapter 2) and "*how*?" (Chapter 3). If you want to get a quick idea on the method, we suggest you start by reading the next chapter (*What is the Graphic facilitation*? - 5 min.), Then go directly to the last chapter (*Resources*) and browse the video resources. You can then, depending on your interest and time resources, return to the guide and make your own strategy to go through it.

(The guide is dedicated to participants in the graphic facilitation group within CONNECTOR 2017 and to the trainer Răzvan Olaru, who managed together to set in motion a dynamic process of learning and sharing experiences that is reflected in these

pages) - created in the context of the event (there will be only one common introductory note for all guides).
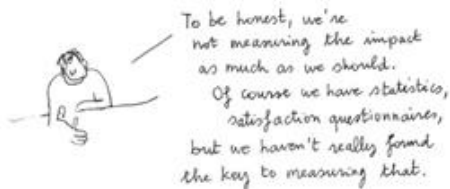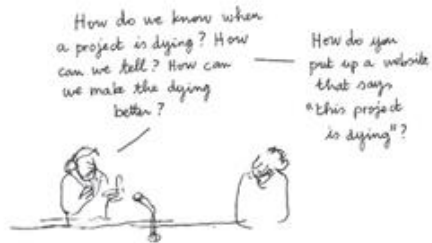
1. What is graphic facilitation?
Seeking information, you will find two meanings in which the concept of „graphic facilitation" is used.

The first one is very broad and includes any use of visual language elements to facilitate learning, communication or decision-making. It is often used as an umbrella concept for a multitude of practices, methods and techniques. Of these, we can note four forms, among which there is the one that we will refer now to as the graphic facilitation itself:

- Visual note taking: it is the practice of using visual language elements to organize the information received in different contexts for personal use. ilustrație
- Graphic facilitation: it is a process in which a trained person organizes the key information of a meeting in progress, in a visual manner, accessible to all the participants.
- Visual recording: a person with graphic illustration skills records what other people say in different contexts (eg. conferences, public meetings, meetings).
- Visual coaching: it is a method that uses the graphic illustration to support individual endeavors, such as personal development and decision-making. ilustrație

Internet searches using the term "*graphic facilitation*" will return results related in particular to graphic performance. The phenomenon is due to the existence of a market for these services that is mainly oriented towards the business environment. The educational applications of graphic facilitation are still little visible in the informational space and the present guide aims to emphasize precisely this feature.

Graphic facilitation is a form of visual communication based on symbols, which calls for synthesis and essentialization to create and transmit accessible messages to the target group. The elements that define it are related to a set of skills held by the facilitator, the previous preparation of the meeting (eg., identifying the participants' characteristics, developing the templates to be used during the meeting), the use of standard graphic language elements (the "visual alphabet") and the circulation of the final product to the group of participants. That's why, not everyone who draws in front of a room with people is a graphic facilitator.

Graphical facilitation is not an art and its practice does not require artistic talent. Through an appropriate training, anyone can incorporate it into its portfolio of educational methods.

When you explore and/or use graphic facilitation, you will cross a range of neighboring fields, such as mind mapping, rich picture, storytelling, graphic novel or comic strip. Depending on the proposed goals, you can integrate in your practice support elements from these areas.

Why and how graphic facilitation works?

The human mind is built to receive visual information, the eye receptors being responsible for a significant part of the information we take from the environment. Over time, a number of models have been developed in an attempt to explain the way in which we receive and visually encode information. At the beginning of the 70s, it was proposed the dual encoding theory (Paivio, 1971[1]), which states that human cognition is unique in that it developed the ability to simultaneously process verbal information and non-verbal stimuli, this having implications for how these two processing systems work and interact. One of the effects described on the basis of this theory is that of picture superiority effect, more precisely, the fact that, compared to words, images have an advantage in terms of encoding and accessing information. The explanation lies in the double encoding of images - visually and verbally – as compared to the single encoding of the verbal stimuli.

The ability to analyze and interpret images develops through a process called visual literacy. It can be acquired through exercises that use different types of visual aids (images, maps, movies, drawings, etc.).

Graphic facilitation aims at visual transmission of ideas, neglecting the artistic component of the drawing, in favor of a simple and fast technique. It produces images the

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[1]Paivio, A. (1971). Imagery and Verbal Processes. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

participants can easily assign a common meaning. In order to achieve this aim, it calls upon on a large-scale easy to recognize symbols and, when it comes to providing elements for which there are no already-recognized symbols, the main mechanism to which it calls is represented by simplification and essentialization.

When using symbols, you should keep in mind that they are dependent on the contexts in which they were created (eg road signs, color significance, noble coats of arms, company logos) and are in constant evolution. When preparing a session where you will use symbols, it is advisable to analyze their use within the practices of the group you are addressing, in order to choose the right symbols in the respective context.

The first theorists of graphic design (Sibbet, ...[2]) highlighted the fact that, by creating artifacts and common representations, graphic facilitation acted as a "visual memory" of a group.

In what contexts can it be used?

Graphic facilitation is a very versatile tool that can be adapted and used in various contexts. Depending on the distribution of roles between facilitators and participants, we can distinguish two types of sessions:

- a type in which the facilitator is an expert on the topic and uses the graphic facilitation to present certain elements and the relationship between them. This corresponds to the **teaching-learning processes**;
- a type in which the participants are experts and the facilitator helps to build a common understanding of the topic. This corresponds to **the processes dedicated to consultation and exploration**.

A multitude of learning processes (eg. workshops, lectures, video lectures) can benefit the graphic facilitation, as long as they consider its specificity and resources. In this case, those interested in acquiring graphic facilitation skills are teachers and trainers, both in formal and non-formal contexts.

If they are carried out into groups that come from the same organization or have different affiliations, the exploratory endeavors are divided into *internal* or *public*. Both of them aim to solve problems for which the participants are credited with expertise. Whether it is the developing of a new product in a company or a debate about creating new parking places in a neighborhood, a graphic facilitator can make a contribution to managing the process.

Projects supported by the Erasmus+ Programme can incorporate graphical facilitation both in processes of learning and of exploration-planning. Youth projects and, generally,

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[2] Sibbet, D. *Visual Meetings: How Graphics, Sticky Notes and Idea Mapping Can Transform Group Productivity,* 2010

those aiming to non-formal learning, are the most obvious candidates for using graphic facilitation, but not the only ones. Other examples may be: its inclusion in teacher training programs, facilitating project meetings, evaluating products and activities, etc.

Objectives of graphic facilitation

Graphic facilitation represents a method that is suitable to a wide variety of contexts and objectives. Depending on when it is used in a process, the goals you can pursue by using graphic facilitation aid are:

- transmitting knowledge;
- exploring a field;
- defining a theme;
- defining actions;
- monitoring the implementation of a process;
- evaluation of results;
- collecting feedback;
- planning for some changes.

In practice, what makes the difference is the template used to lead the session. If the participants are led towards a certain result (eg. a history lesson), the template will be more direct. If participants have to be encouraged to bring their contribution (eg. design of a new product), the template will only be a neutral framework in which information is collected.

Benefits of using graphic facilitation

Why use graphic facilitation? Because it comes with a wealth of potential benefits, both at individual and group level. Even though, at present, scientific studies that emphasize the extent to which participation in graphics facilitation sessions reap certain benefits are limited, some theoretical models and empirical evidence that we have make plausible these benefits.

At the individual level, the stimulation offered by the graphic facilitation is able to increase the interest of the participants, help focus attention and facilitate reconnection to the thread of the discussion when the person takes a short break. In the same time, the existence of a visual product makes it possible to capture the whole process at a glance.

The use of this process supports a leap from the understanding at individual level to one at group level. On one hand, the potential level for misunderstanding and confusion is

reduced, and on the other hand it allows participants to have direct feedback on how their ideas are perceived and understood by others.

At group level, graphic facilitation helps creating a group-wide visual memory that can be stored, distributed and reused by both individuals and groups. Graphic facilitation can support the improvement of relationships within the group, by integrating the contribution of each participant, who is thus valued.

In educational contexts, the graphic facilitation may help those with a predilection for visual information in the acquisition and integration of new knowledge.

2. Who can deliver the method?

The use of graphic facilitation relates to the acquisition of a set of skills and anyone who acquires them can use it. The method is developed and promoted by a community of practitioners, but it is not a field subject to rules, standards or certification systems.

Although drawing confers a specific character to the method, it is only one of the necessary skills. What is generally called artistic talent does not represent an essential factor for the training as a graphic facilitator. Any person who can draw lines and circles meets the minimum criteria to train in the use of the method.

The key factor affecting access to the status of graphic facilitator is a constant exercise, along with personal skills, such as listening and communication. An element often overlooked is the resistance to effort required to complete a session.

If you aim at using graphic facilitation in your practice, you need to consider acquiring two groups of skills:

Technical

- knowing the tools required for drawing;
- mounting the drawing support;
- elementary drawing skills (simple lines and shapes);
- notions regarding the use of colors to highlight the content;
- building a portfolio of symbols;
- developing your own graphical language.

Conceptual

- filtering and essentializing the information to be transmitted;
- transforming certain concepts and metaphors into images and symbols;

- the use of appropriate titles/subtitles/texts;
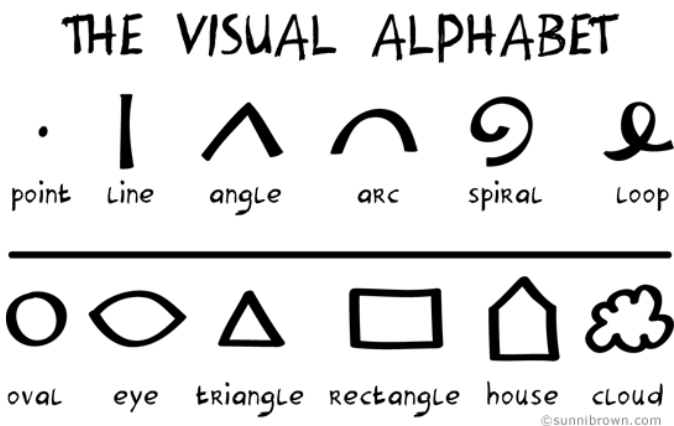- creating templates for different types of contexts.

At international level, there are available training programs offered by practitioners or companies, based on their own experience. Among them, there are a number of elements of convergence, but also peculiarities related to individual preferences and the context in which the experience has been acquired. In the Resources chapter you will find some examples.

Graphic facilitator training

In order to be able to use graphic facilitation, you need to get acquainted and acquire dexterity in using a series of visual elements. They represent the "bricks" with which you will build future learning sessions with a graphical feature. Below, we have detailed these elements, divided into three categories, depending on complexity (basic, advanced and complex elements).

a) Basic elements

Several practitioners proposed what, in their view, is a **visual alphabet**, that is, a series of graphical elements on the basis of which any visual representations necessary for graphical support can be built. An example is the one proposed by Sunni Brown[3]:

THE VISUAL ALPHABET

point   line   angle   arc   spiral   loop

oval   eye   triangle   rectangle   house   cloud

©sunnibrown.com

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[3]sunnibrownink.com

Another basic element is the **quadrants**, which you can use to help participants follow the thread of information, highlight an item or organize the drawing space. The Internet is a good source of inspiration for diversifying the quadrants you use. ilustraţie[4]

The use of **human figures** helps to create a connection between the participants and the graphic representations resulting from the sessions. They are simplified and stylized representations that do not aim to recreate the idea of a character. There are a number of choices to draw human figures. It is important to choose one that you feel it represents your style and is easy to draw in a short time. ilustraţie[5]

Human figures are divided into several categories depending on the element on which they are based:

- "U" turned, to which a circle is added above;
- people drawn using lines;
- "tornado" people;
- "star" people;
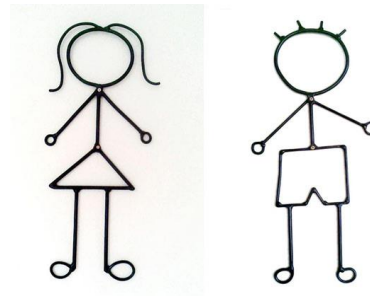
[4]https://ro.pinterest.com/hilari_mateo/graphical-facilitation-containers/

[5]http://cliparting.com/free-stick-figure-clip-art-30986/

- „rectangle" people;

Finally, to convey certain ideas and concepts, they can be written directly, using the **alphabet**. The graphic facilitator must know how to discern when a short text can help understand the message or when it can create an anchor for the participants. ilustraţie[6]

When using letters, the critical element is legibility. It is important that the text is readable from a distance and the letters should not be confused with each other. Often, it takes a conscious effort of the facilitator to change his writing style into an accessible one.

Every practitioner has his/her own approach. Here are three short clips exploring other approaches:

[Brandy Agerbeck introduces The Essential 8](#)

[Learning Graphic Facilitation - 7 Elements by Bigger Picture](#)

[INTRODUCTIONS: Graphic Facilitation as a Tool for Learning](#)

b) Advanced elements

Once you acquired some ease in using basic elements, you can use them to create **symbols** for different concepts that you use frequently. They must be easily understandable for the participants. When you introduce a symbol, make sure everyone assigns the same meaning to it. ilustraţie

Idea

Becoming

Surprise

A step further on the scale of complexity is the **metaphor**. The mechanism behind it is the equation of one term to another, a process by which a transfer of properties occurs between the two. ilustraţie

Knowledgebase

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[6]https://xgraffiti.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/112.jpg

Tangible conversation

Brainstorming

Over time, the graphic facilitator develops a portfolio of symbols and metaphors – *a pictionary* – to be used easily during sessions. If the time available during the workshop is very limited, consider the option of drawing the various symbols and metaphors in advance and cut them, so that to simply glue them when needed.

c) Complex elements

The template represents the element that links the entire session. Whether you just design it before the session or sketch it out, it will help you shape the discussion. It should mark the main stages of the process that you will facilitate. For example, a template for a SWOT analysis will include separate sections for each of the four elements and a template for an agenda will list the possible moments it will include at the end.

First, you have to choose the theme and title of the template. Consider what colors you could use to highlight the title, which quadrant would be better suited and where it would be best to position (in the center to emphasize its importance? in the upper part because we start to get information from there? to one side so that to have room to detail a path?).

In creating a template, Bas Bakker[7] describes nine steps needed to reach a quality product. Each of them answers a specific question. ilustraţie

1. Start: *Why do we do it?*
2. Goals: *What is the purpose?*
3. Content: *What are the essential ingredients?*
4. First Design: *What are the visual concepts we will use?*
5. Delete: *What elements can you delete from conceptualization?*
6. Conceptualization: *What are the essential elements of drawing?*
7. Testing: *Does it work?*
8. Final version: *How can it be improved?*

Examples of templates ilustraţie

In order to start your way to becoming graphic facilitators you do not have to wait until you find a course somewhere near where you live or online. You can use the "Exercise Room", which you find below, to train in using different elements.

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[7]Bas Bakker, *How to design visual templates in 99 examples,* 2016.

Exercise room

Start by preparing the **necessary materials**. They mainly consist of white sheets and drawing tools - markers are the most appropriate. Make sure you have the necessary **personal space**. The third element to keep in mind is the **time**. Any time you can devote to the exercises is valuable, but it is good if you can allocate some longer intervals (30-90 minutes) at the beginning. To help you during speed-based exercises, use a clock timer - most mobile phones have this feature.

Basic exercises

Task	Variations	Extensions
On an A3 sheet, draw **continuous and dotted lines** in different directions. Time: 3-5 min.	Change the drawing speed. Draw as fast as you can for 30 seconds.	
On an A3 sheet, draw **rectangles**. Time: 3-5 min.	Change the drawing speed. Draw rectangles as fast as you can for 30 seconds.	
On an A3 sheet, draw **triangles**. Time: 3-5 min.	Change the drawing speed. Draw triangles as fast as you can for 30 seconds.	
On an A3 sheet, draw **circles**. Time: 3-5 min.	Change the drawing speed. Change the shape: oval, shape of an eye. Draw circles as fast as you can for 30 seconds. Without lifting the marker on the sheet, draw a circle continuously for 1 minute.	
On an A3 sheet, draw **arrows**. Time: 3-5 min.	Change the drawing speed. Change the shape: tridimensional arrows. Draw arrows as fast as you can for 30 seconds.	
On an A3 sheet, draw **clouds**. Time: 3-5 min.	Change the drawing speed. Change the shape. Draw clouds as fast as you can for 30 seconds.	By adding a „small tale" to a cloud, it might represent a *speech bubble*, and a series of clouds with increasing dimensions may indicate the *thought bubble*. ilustrație
On a flipchart sheet write the alphabet (lower and caps cases) and figures as	Write the alphabet (lower and caps cases) and the figures as fast as you can. Time: 30 sec.	When exercising the writing, a related area you can explore is that of calligraphy exercises.

beautiful as you can. Time: 5 min.	Write the alphabet (lower and caps cases) and the figures with regular writing and at regular speed.	
On a sheet of plain paper, write the alphabet twice, at your own pace, using upper and lower cases. Time: 5 min.	Draw each letter with three lines. Draw each letter with its wide sides.	
On an A3 sheet, draw **human figures**. Time: 3-5 min.	Change the drawing speed. Change the shape („star", „tornado", lines, rectangle).	

Advanced exercise

1. On an A3 sheet, using symbols and images, draw yourself. Time: 5 min. Materials: 2 markers of different colors.

2. On one A4 sheet draw 10 elements from the environment. There may be items in the area where you are or you can go out. Time: 30 min.

3. On an A3 sheet, draw several times a sheet of paper. It is generally represented as a rectangle without the upper right corner. ilustraţie

4. On an already made drawing, use colors to highlight.

5. On an A3 sheet, draw "signposts". These are rectangles with different elements indicating direction and a message. ilustraţie

6. Identify and draw symbols for 10 items that are most likely to occur during a session on a particular theme (eg: biology lesson, developing a new pharmaceutical product, train journeys, UNESCO sites).

7. Design and draw graphic symbols for concepts such as: joy, development, exploration, inspiration, convergence, disappearance, productivity.

Complex exercises

Build a template for each of the following contexts:

- taking visual notes,
- project idea,
- the agenda of an event,

- public consultation.

Time: 30 min.

As you design different graphic symbols or find ideas that seem right to you, gather them in a portfolio. Over time, they will help you to build your own visual alphabet.

3. How does it work?

1. *Preparing a session*

The graphic facilitator should be consulted in choosing the room where the session will be held. It should allow participants to sit or move comfortably as needed. Inappropriate space (eg., too small, with insufficient space for displaying the drawing, where not everyone can see the image well) will significantly affect both the process and the results.

Answer the question "*who is the expert on the explored topic? myself or the participants?*" It will guide you through the type of exercises you will propose and which will be reflected through the drawing.

Reflect on the template you will use. Most of the time, it is useful to sketch it before the session, in order to reduce the drawing time and increase the process time. Create a portfolio of 8-10 items that might appear during the session.

If you have access to the participants (eg. via e-mail), you can ask questions that are relevant to the proposed theme: *what image do they relate the topic to? did they work in similar ways? are there certain aspects that they want to reach during the session? what are their expectations at the end?*

Before starting the session, make sure you have the needed materials: paper, markers, scotch, correction fluid, scissors, other workshop-specific materials. It is preferable that the paper used is of a larger size. It must be located in a place that allows all participants to see what is being drawn.

2. *Introduction*

Present to the participants what will happen and the rules of the session*: what types of exercises will be used, how long they will last, how they can express their opinions, what are the results they can expect, what will happen with the products to be created.*

During the warm up exercise suggest the participants to involve themselves in the drawing process (eg *using symbols and images, drawing in 5 minutes a representation*

of one's own person). Such an approach helps to connect participants to what is about to happen.

If you intend to involve the participants during the sessions in exercises that suppose drawing, let them know from the beginning. Explicitly mention the fact that there is no need for talent and encourage them.

3. Implementation

As the workshop is carried out, add items to the template that you imagined and prepared before. The time you have for drawing will be very limited. If the topic discussed is less familiar, you may use an image dictionary if needed.

If a drawing is not clear enough, you can add an explanatory text. In order to be sure that you have the necessary space, it is advisable to first write the text and then just draw a frame around it. As you gain experience and dexterity, you will discover many such practical elements.

There will always be the temptation to allow more time to the drawing so that to give it a more aesthetic dimension. In most cases, you will not have the necessary time and the shift from idea to drawing will have to be almost immediate.

Do not be afraid to ask for clarifications and suggestions for graphic representations from participants. The end product will be all the more useful as they will feel better understood.

At the end of the session, give yourself time to reflect on the process and its results: *is the image a good representation of the explored topic? does it allow the participants to comprise the topic at a glance? will it be used in the future to bring the process forward?*

4. The product and its circulation

Unlike other methods and techniques that facilitate learning, which end with the session, graphic facilitation also has a very important component afterwards.

Ask participants about feedback on the product (*something missing - something unclear - something that should not be?*). Take advantage of any breaks to allow participants to get closer to the drawing and analyze it deeper.

Participants will be able to take pictures of the final drawing with their mobile phone, but it is preferable for the facilitator and organizers to prepare a good quality version that can be distributed to the group. Depending on the technical means available, the drawing can be photographed or scanned. If the size of the drawing is large, multiple images may need to be combined.

An option that can be considered is the use of a video camera to capture how the drawing evolves. During post-processing, time lapse can be used to condense the entire session within 2-3 minutes.

If you find it useful and have some space available, display the drawing.

Evaluation

In order to improve your work and make sure you achieve what you planned, it is important that, at the end of the session and possibly after a certain period of time, evaluate whether and how the proposed goals have been achieved.

Participants are the ones from whom you need to collect direct feedback on what happened and how it impacted them. Do not limit yourself with answers like "*I liked it/did not like it*", but try to highlight concrete elements ("*How did it help you*?", "*Were there were any moments when things were less clear?* ","*What would help you make the experience more effective*?" etc.). Especially during the first contacts with this facilitation technique, participants tend to provide overly positive feedback. In order to more accurately evaluate the results, it is advisable to carry it out again after a while.

Another source of feedback is represented by the indirect beneficiaries who can be questioned about the possible effects they have noted as a result of the graphic facilitation sessions. For example, if we refer to a school context, the parents of the pupils will be asked if they think that certain indicators (eg. motivation to learn, ease of understanding, willingness to participate, a feeling of personal value, a feeling of inadequacy) have changed.

The effects of some sessions in which graphic facilitation has been used should be tracked against the goals (learning, exploration, deliberation).

Critical aspects

The way to becoming a graphic facilitator should be available to anyone, but unfortunately there are some factors limiting it. Many people equate "*drawing*" with "*drawing talent*", which is not true for the role of graphic facilitator. Some people also had normative educational approaches, whose message was that they could not draw "right", which later led to bottlenecks in terms of graphic expression.

During the sessions, consider the possibility of unforeseen effects, either positive or negative, when you directly address the participants. It is more likely that such effects occur when the topic discusses is highly emotional.

Do not be afraid to venture into working methods that have elements in common with graphic facilitation, such as taking visual notes, graphics recording, mind maps, etc. Seek inspiration in cartoons and graphic novels to enrich your visual portfolio.

Graphic facilitation is continuously developed by a community of passionate people. Join this community to benefit from its experience, but also to offer your own experience.

Resources
Websites:

> www.sunnibrown.com
> http://www.masterfulfacilitation.com/subpage/products/free-mini-course
> https://alistapart.com/article/the-miseducation-of-the-doodle
> https://eu.neuland.com/
> http://www.livesketching.com/

Books

Sunni Brown: *The doodle revolution*, 2015
David Sibbet: *Visual Meetings: How Graphics, Sticky Notes and Idea Mapping Can Transform Group Productivity,* 2010.
Bas Bakker: *How to design visual templates in 99 examples*, 2016.
Siiri Taimla, Mark Taylor, Buzz Bury, Tanel Rannale: *Graphic express: First steps to graphic facilitation in youth work*, 2014

> **Drawing ≠ Drawing talent**

Video

Brandy Agerbeck introduces The Essential 8:
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sXsXveYQtc

Learning Graphic Facilitation - 7 Elements by Bigger Picture:
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5DJC6LaOCI

INTRODUCTIONS: Graphic Facilitation as a Tool for Learning:
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF0es60xfkg

Practice community

International Forum of Visual Practitioners
    https://www.ifvp.org/
Graphic facilitation Facebook group:
    https://www.facebook.com/groups/2708716559

Note: all the links used in the guide were working on 01.10.2017.