

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***I already know the course content. Why do I need to train in the online version of the course?***

All facilitators of PLS online courses must take the online version of the course regardless of their experience with teaching the course on-site and/or their knowledge of the course content. The learning activities and interactions within the online version of the course differ greatly from those of the on-site version despite the common course outcomes. As you can imagine, experiencing the different interface for the course is a valuable experience. A certified instructor of the PLS face-to-face course is exempt from repeating redundant tasks that are in the online version of the course. It is expected that the trainee will participate in all other course interactions and assignments.

### ***I already facilitate online courses for another entity. Why must I participate and be certified in the Facilitator Skills Training?***

Teachers can choose from many online courses to further their education. The quality of available learning experiences varies greatly. PLS chooses to distinguish itself from all other online providers by ensuring that all participants in PLS online courses are engaged in the best learning experiences available in the market. This includes interfacing with course facilitators who are highly skilled in the nuances of excellent online facilitation.

Participation in the Facilitator Skills Training is based on the premise that there are very specific technical, communication, and facilitation knowledge and skills that we expect all of our facilitators to begin to master prior to facilitating a PLS online course. We believe that it is imperative that our facilitators create a community of learners and that the skills to create that community are taught and modeled in the FST. Our experience has been that experienced online facilitators do not necessarily come to us with that expertise.

We acknowledge the need to differentiate the FST to better meet the needs of online facilitator candidates. We also hope to build an effective pre-assessment that may help us to prescribe the most appropriate training. However, at this time, that option is not available. Based on our current resources, the FST is required. At some point in the future, we may be in a position to revisit this requirement.

### ***What technical requirements do I have to meet to facilitate online?***

- Reliable computer
- High-speed Internet access
- Virus protection software installed on your computer
- **Preferred Operating Systems:** Windows 2000, Windows XP, or Mac OS 10.3
- **Preferred Browsers:** Blackboard does not operate properly when using AOL. For an optimal experience, use Internet Explorer 6.1 (PC), Internet Explorer 5.2 (Mac), or Safari 1.2 (Mac). Mozilla Firefox 2.0 works well for both PCs and Macs.

Updated versions of Web browsers are free from the following Web sites:

Firefox: <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>

Apple Safari: <http://www.apple.com/safari/>

Internet Explorer: <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads/default.msp>

If using Internet Explorer 6.0, security settings must be set to accept cookies and allow popups.

If using Internet Explorer 7.0, please add **pls.blackboard.com** to your list of trusted Web sites by going to: Tools > Internet Options > Privacy tab > Sites

- **Required Software:** Microsoft Word
- **Required Web Browser Plug-In:** Adobe Acrobat or Adobe Reader

This plug-in is required to view any of the PDFs within a course.

Adobe Reader may be downloaded for free at the following Web site:

Adobe: <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

***How many hours a week should I expect to be online?***

You should plan on spending 2 hours or more per day online for a class of 15 participants. Some days you may only be online for less than an hour and other days you may spend 4-6 hours online reading discussions, grading assignments, and posting comments. It is expected that you log into the online class at least every 24 hours to check messages and make sure everything is going well in the course. It's necessary to inform your participants if you will be away from the class for over 24 hours. If you will not be able to access the course for 48 hours, you should contact Michele Gill (866-764-7782) who will have another facilitator monitor your class.

***How much do online facilitators get paid?***

Facilitating online PLS courses pays \$155 per participant.

***How much does training cost?***

There is no cost for training unless the candidate is taking the course for credit. For some course trainings, the trainee must purchase their own materials.

***How many participants are in a class?***

The minimum number of participants per class is 9 and the maximum is 15. In some cases a facilitator may have the option to teach a course with fewer than 9 participants.

***What technical skills do I need to have to be an online facilitator?***

You should have intermediate computer skills. You are expected to be proficient with email, sending and receiving attachments, and familiar with basic Internet navigation. You will become experienced with the Blackboard navigation system when you take an online course as a participant, and you will learn the essential behind-the-scenes operations when you take the Facilitator Skills Training course.

***How much technical support would I be expected to give to participants?***

Although technical support is available through Blackboard 24/7, you will be the first person your participants will turn to if they have a problem. For that reason you should be comfortable with the Blackboard navigation system. You should also be familiar with the type of information available through the Blackboard Support tab, which is part of every course.

***I enjoy communicating, but I don't type very well. Can I still be an online facilitator?***

Because all interactions happen through typed communication, being proficient at typing is a necessary skill for online facilitating.

***Will I only communicate with participants in writing?***

Almost all interactions transpire asynchronously online through written communication; therefore all online facilitators are expected to be proficient writers utilizing proper grammar, sentence structure and spelling. In addition to communicating online, facilitators make

introductory phone calls to all participants before the class begins. Additional phone calls may be necessary to help and support some participants.

***What is the format of PLS online courses?***

PLS courses are offered via the Blackboard learning management system. Courses are nine-weeks long with 24/7 access. They are facilitator-led with assignments due on a weekly basis (Monday at midnight Eastern Time). There are no scheduled meeting times or synchronous discussions, so participants may work at any time they choose. As a facilitator, you check into the course at least once a day to read and respond to participants' postings and assignments.

***How is the online version of the course different from the on-site version?***

The course outcomes (as stated in the syllabus) are the same for both online and on-site courses with the same title. While much of the content and knowledge is the same, learning activities will vary between the on-site and online versions of a course.

***How much interaction is there between the facilitator and participants?***

The facilitator oversees the course for the entire nine-week period. Facilitators connect with participants with a welcome email and phone call prior to the start date and maintain daily interaction within the course through class discussions, private messages, and individual feedback on assignments.

***What kind of assignments are participants expected to complete? How are they given to the facilitator?***

Assignments are referred to as "learning activities." All learning activities are sent using the Blackboard navigation system. Some are posted to a class discussion area for all participants to read and reply. Facilitators read all of the discussions and responses that are posted in this area, often adding comments that guide participants toward deeper insights and awareness. Other learning activities are submitted only for the facilitator to read and grade. Grades are posted by midnight on Thursday.

***How many hours are participants expected to be online per week?***

Participants should plan to spend approximately 6-8 hours per week online. Some learning activities, such as readings from a text, are completed off-line.