

MHA Labs Skill Building Practice Guide

MHA Labs is the manifestation of a grassroots movement of teachers, afterschool instructors, and workforce developers who work collectively to amplify the Essential SEL/Soft Skills of youth and young adults. We believe every youth possesses extraordinary skills power and promise and it is our collective responsibility to nurture inclusive skills development. We also believe it is our professional and moral duty to challenge systems of discrimination that limit youth recognition and opportunity.

EXPLORE THE MHA LABS BUILDING BLOCKS

Embrace a skills framework that allows you to build collective impact on skill building!

MHA Labs engaged over 125 teachers, afterschool instructors, workforce developers, researchers, parents, and teens to co-design an inclusive, essential skills framework. One that could be equitably applied to all learners of all ages and abilities across all contexts.



PERSONAL MINDSET

- » Needs minimal supervision to complete tasks.
- » Attempts to complete tasks independently before asking for help.
- » Follows rules/directions as required by the task/situation.
- » Maintains focus on tasks despite internal (e.g., emotional) and/or external distractions.
- » Avoids actions that have produced undesirable consequences or results in the past.
- » Strives to overcome barriers/set-backs, seeking assistance when needed.
- » Adapts approach in response to new conditions or others' actions.



COMMUNICATION

- » Organizes information that serves the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
- » Uses and adjusts communication strategies as needed based on the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
- » Signals listening according to the rules/norms of the context and audience.
- » Seeks input to gauge others' understanding of the message.
- » Asks questions to deepen and/or clarify one's understanding when listening to others.



PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

- » Sets and prioritizes goals that reflect a self-awareness of one's capabilities, interests, emotions, and/or needs.
- » Breaks goals into actionable steps.
- » Accurately estimates level of effort and establishes realistic timelines.
- » Manages time to complete tasks on schedule.
- » Applies existing/newly acquired knowledge, skills, and/or strategies that one determines to be useful for achieving goals.
- » Monitors progress and own performance, adjusting approach as necessary.
- » Demonstrates a belief that one's own actions are associated with goal attainment.



COLLABORATION

- » Completes tasks as they have been assigned or agreed upon by the group.
- » Helps team members complete tasks, as needed.
- » Encourages the ideas, opinions, and contributions of others, leveraging individual strengths.
- » Provides feedback in a manner that is sensitive to others' situation/feelings.
- » Clarifies areas of disagreement/conflict that need to be addressed to achieve a common goal.
- » Seeks to obtain resolution of disagreements/conflicts to achieve a common goal.



SOCIAL AWARENESS

- » Recognizes the consequences of one's actions.
- » Balances own needs with the needs of others.
- » Takes into consideration others' situations/feelings.
- » Develops and implements strategies for navigating in different contexts (i.e., manages different patterns of behavior, rules, and norms).



PROBLEM SOLVING

- » Defines problems by considering all potential parts and related causes.
- » Gathers and organizes relevant information about a problem from multiple sources.
- » Generates potential solutions to a problem, seeking and leveraging diverse perspectives.
- » Identifies alternative ideas/processes that are more effective than the ones previously used/suggested.
- » Evaluates the advantages and disadvantages associated with each potential solution identified for a problem.
- » Selects and implements best solution based on evaluation of advantages and disadvantages of each potential solution.

JOURNEY THROUGH THE REFRAME METHOD

Take your youth on a powerful skill building journey with the REFRAME Method!

MHA Labs launched in 2011 as a skill building design community dedicated to understanding how skill building can be integrated under real world conditions. For over a decade, MHA Labs partners freely experimented with implementing the Building Blocks, successfully addressing various facets of skill development. REFRAME is a culmination of these best practices designed in a practical sequence that can infuse any activity with skill building power. REFRAME is literally the easy art of taking any activity and reframing it to be a skill builder.

REFRAME Steps To Skills Power

1	R	Reveal Targeted Skills	Reveal the key skill(s) that youth will need to develop and demonstrate to be successful your program or class. Targeted skills are the ones that are directly responsible for creating outcomes. While all skills may be present, certain skills will be most critical to success based on your activity design and curriculum.
2	E	Establish Performance Evidence	Describe what it will look like for youth to successfully master and demonstrate target skills. These are your performance expectations. Use clear, easy to understand observational language. Add skill adjectives to clarify and expand a youth's skills power vocabulary. This can be a simple checklist or a full rubric.
3	F	Focus on Activity Design	Review your existing program/class activities to verify that you are truly giving all participants enough opportunities to learn, practice and master the targeted skill. It typically takes at least 4-5 times of practice to achieve basic mastery. It helps to tag activities with their targeted skills. Be sure that you are differentiating for Diverse Learners so that they can also be recognized for mastery.
4	R	Reinforce Expectations	Design an opening or set of orientation activities that will explain, clarify and reinforce your targeted skills and performance expectations. This should ideally be an interactive modeling activity accompanied by a reference handout.
5	A	Assess Using Feedback	Feedback is most effective when delivered in real time and directly connects to your established performance evidence and expectations. Reflect on your daily program/class schedule to see where and when you can engage in feedback. Empower youth peers to be part of feedback strategies. Consider having one-on-one feedback sessions at the midpoint of your program/class cycle for deeper skills reflection.
6	M	Magnify Recognition	Determine best strategy for recognizing youth who met or exceeded performance expectations. Where feedback is neutral, recognition is the opportunity for positive reinforcement of successful skill performance. Youth need this stage for effective confidence building.
7	E	Explore Meaning Making	Create a set of activities for meaning making where participants identify how their newly acquire skills relate and benefit other areas of their life. Meaning making is not reflecting on performance in the program/class which is part of feedback.

REFRAME EXAMPLE

This example is for a Web Development Program/Class where students are building “Get out the Vote” Websites. Youth will build a website and test the website with a group of 10 students, 10 teachers, and 10 community members.

Reveal Targeted Skills

This is a 6-week project. The first 2 weeks are learning web page design which relies on personal mindset skills, but I wanted youth to really understand the power of website content, so I am targeting two interrelated communication skills as my REFRAME strategy.

- **Communication:** Organizes information that serves the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
- **Communication:** Uses and adjusts communication strategies as needed based on the purpose of the message, context, and audience.

Establish Performance Evidence

- **Precise:** Homepage content clearly defines the site’s purpose in only 3-4 sentences. At least 90% of test users should be able to accurately recognize this in less than 1 minute.
- **Specific:** Clearly defines the intended target audience: At least 90% of test users should be able to accurately recognize this in less than 1 minute.
- **Persuasive:** There are at least 3 different places on the website that explain the importance of voting. At least 80% of test users can repeat at least one of the persuasive arguments.
- **Logical:** There are clear directions on how to register to vote and how to look up where your polling location is. 90% of test users can repeat how to register and can identify their polling location.

Focus on Activity Design

Both communication skills are critical to the following 4 activity units:

- Activity Unit 3 on Developing Your Homepage Purpose Statements
- Activity Unit 4 on Researching and Developing Your Target Audience
- Activity Unit 5 on Persuasive Writing
- Activity Unit 6 on Instructional Writing

Reinforce Expectations

I have dedicated a session before I start Activity Unit 3 to model these skills. My youth have been complaining about school food options, so I am using this as my modeling example. I am going to break them into 3 teams. One team will write a purpose and audience statement. One will write 3 persuasive arguments for better food. And one will outline the steps for changing the food options. Each team will present, and then their peers will rate their performance using a handout of my performance evidence. Then they will give feedback.

Assess Using Feedback

I am going to integrate three feedback strategies:

- I have designed my sessions to be mainly hands on activity work to free me to give real time feedback as I observe their practice.
- I have built in weekly peer feedback sessions.
- I have built in one-on-one midpoint feedback sessions to really reflect on performance to date and to plan for the second half.

Magnify Recognition

I am going to integrate two recognition strategies:

- Weekly: I have a google sheet set up for each youth. Each week I will go in and recognize one skill strength I observed that week. This sheet will have a tab for peer feedback too.
- Capstone: My youth come from across the city, so they were split into teams based on geography. Each team will schedule a community presentation inviting people from their website’s target audience. They will present their website and then each youth will do a presentation of learning on their own skills growth to be celebrated by their parents/guardians and community members.

Explore Meaning Making

As a final week project, each youth will create a portfolio/resume webpage to target the employers and colleges they are seeking as their post secondary next step.

FEEDBACK FORMULA

Quick Start Your Feedback Practice

Providing timely feedback is vital to skills development—yet too few people do it. Why? Fear to give it and fear to receive it. People are extremely reluctant to give feedback for fear of being negative. People are extremely defensive receiving feedback for fear of failure. MHA Labs feedback formula was designed to completely neutralize this negative spiral.

Whether or not a youth meets/exceeds a performance expectation, the feedback you give should be non-judgmental and developmental. MHA Labs developed a simple conversation formula to promote skill-building feedback and minimize the tendency to use judgmental language. Skill-building feedback incorporates 5 elements that expand on a typical feedback conversation. The flow is activity context, performance expectation, observed evidence, feedback conversation, and practice suggestions. Incorporating this method into your own personal communication style can transform your skill-building practice.



Let's practice the Feedback Formula using our Web Development REFRAME example:

Situation that needs feedback: The team responsible for writing the content on persuasive reasons to vote got only 50% retention when testing the content on their peers.

Instead of replying... The group didn't find your content very persuasive, so I need to go back and review the lesson on persuasion and redo it.

Now try the Skill-Building Feedback method... Yesterday when you presented your persuasive content (**activity context**), the goal was that 80% of the group would be able to remember at least one argument (**performance expectation**). We tallied the results and 50% of the class could retain at least one argument and let me share the results with you (**observed evidence**). What are your initial thoughts on the results? Which argument did seem to be retained most? What elements about that one make it strong? (**feedback conversation ensues...**) How about tomorrow we set aside some time for you to interview people who couldn't retain anything and get their insights. What else do you all suggest as a good next step. (**practice suggestion**)

Don't forget to give strengths-based feedback when youth meet or exceed expectations!!!

Strengths intensify performance:

Typically youth success is communicated as "good job" praise or a letter grade. Successful youth need to know their exact skill strengths and how they can be applied to intensify performance.

Strengths drive growth:

Our strengths can be often be applied to to address growth areas or performance issues. Over time, youth learn to automatically use their own strengths to solve problems.

Strengths foster self esteem:

Too many youth who perform poorly in academics believe they are failures. You can now legitimately acknowledge their essential skills strengths to increase self esteem and create a positive skill-building relationship.

Strengths cultivate happiness:

Most people are conditioned to focus only on what is not working. This can have a negative effect on personal well-being and motivation. Starting with strengths creates a positive culture for both you and youth.

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MHA Labs Skill-Building Feedback Structure

ACTIVITY CONTEXT

PERFORMANCE EXPECTATION

OBSERVED EVIDENCE

FEEDBACK CONVERSATION

PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS

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3	F	Focus on Activity Design	Review your existing program/class activities to verify that you are truly giving all participants enough opportunities to learn, practice and master the targeted skill. It typically takes at least 4-5 times of practice to achieve basic mastery. It helps to tag activities with their targeted skills. Be sure that you are differentiating for Diverse Learners so that they can also be recognized for mastery.
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REFRAME EXAMPLE

This example is for a Web Development Program/Class where students are building “Get out the Vote” Websites. Youth will build a website and test the website with a group of 10 students, 10 teachers, and 10 community members.

Reveal Targeted Skills	<p>This is a 6-week project. The first 2 weeks are learning web page design which relies on personal mindset skills, but I wanted youth to really understand the power of website content, so I am targeting two interrelated communication skills as my REFRAME strategy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication: Organizes information that serves the purpose of the message, context, and audience.• Communication: Uses and adjusts communication strategies as needed based on the purpose of the message, context, and audience.
Establish Performance Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Precise: Homepage content clearly defines the site's purpose in only 3-4 sentences. At least 90% of test users should be able to accurately recognize this in less than 1 minute.• Specific: Clearly defines the intended target audience: At least 90% of test users should be able to accurately recognize this in less than 1 minute.• Persuasive: There are at least 3 different places on the website that explain the importance of voting. At least 80% of test users can repeat at least one of the persuasive arguments.• Logical: There are clear directions on how to register to vote and how to look up where your polling location is. 90% of test users can repeat how to register and can identify their polling location.
Focus on Activity Design	<p>Both communication skills are critical to the following 4 activity units:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activity Unit 3 on Developing Your Homepage Purpose Statements• Activity Unit 4 on Researching and Developing Your Target Audience• Activity Unit 5 on Persuasive Writing• Activity Unit 6 on Instructional Writing
Reinforce Expectations	<p>I have dedicated a session before I start Activity Unit 3 to model these skills. My youth have been complaining about school food options, so I am using this as my modeling example. I am going to break them into 3 teams. One team will write a purpose and audience statement. One will write 3 persuasive arguments for better food. And one will outline the steps for changing the food options. Each team will present, and then their peers will rate their performance using a handout of my performance evidence. Then they will give feedback.</p>
Assess Using Feedback	<p>I am going to integrate three feedback strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have designed my sessions to be mainly hands on activity work to free me to give real time feedback as I observe their practice.• I have built in weekly peer feedback sessions.• I have built in one-on-one midpoint feedback sessions to really reflect on performance to date and to plan for the second half.
Magnify Recognition	<p>I am going to integrate two recognition strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly: I have a google sheet set up for each youth. Each week I will go in and recognize one skill strength I observed that week. This sheet will have a tab for peer feedback too.• Capstone: My youth come from across the city, so they were split into teams based on geography. Each team will schedule a community presentation inviting people from their website's target audience. They will present their website and then each youth will do a presentation of learning on their own skills growth to be celebrated by their parents/guardians and community members.
Explore Meaning Making	<p>As a final week project, each youth will create a portfolio/resume webpage to target the employers and colleges they are seeking as their post secondary next step.</p>

REFRAME WORKSHEET

Name:

Program/Class:

Reveal Targeted Skill:

Review activities and identify the key skill(s) that youth will need to develop and demonstrate to be successful.

Targeted Skill: *Building Block Name + Skill Definition*

Establish Performance Evidence:

What does successful performance of this skill look like? Create a checklist of skills performance outcomes that are easy for youth to recognize and understand.

Skills Performance Checklist: *Skill Adjective + Evidence*

Focus on Activity Design:

Write down every activity where this skill is targeted? If it does not appear in at least 4-5 activities, you may need to pick a different targeted skill or add more practice activities.

Activity Design: *List each activity where this skill is being used. Write down any additions you would like to make to enhance skill building.*

TIP: Make a handout and wall board of your targeted skill and performance checklist so that youth are empowered to track their own performance, give peer feedback, and celebrate success.

Reinforce Expectations:

What interactive modeling activity will you use to introduce the targeted skill and performance evidence?

Reinforcing Introductory Activity:

Assess Using Feedback:

How will you incorporate real time feedback? How will you incorporate peer feedback? Do you have time to conduct midpoint one-on-one deeper reflection and feedback?

Feedback Planning:

Magnify Recognition:

Describe at least two recognition strategies that will ensure youth build confidence and fully understand their skill strengths?

Recognition Activities:

Explore Meaning Making:

Describe the activity you will use to create meaning making? This is when youth apply the targeted skill to an area OUTSIDE your program/class context.

Meaning Making Activity:

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SKILLS TARGETING WORKSHEET

Every activity or lesson has a core set of 1-3 skills that drive performance and successful outcomes. When you first start to use the REFRAME method, it is easiest to focus on one skill that is already targeted in 4-5 activities. This gives a youth multiple opportunities to practice the skill and improve with feedback and recognition.

Directions:

- Reflect on your current program or class set of activities. Then use the Building Block Framework to identify which skills are most targeted in your program/class. Targeted means the skill is critical to at least 4-5 activities.
- Write these targeted skills in the chart below.
- Next write down each activity the skill appears in. This step verifies that the skill truly appears 4-5 times and helps as a friendly reminder for where each skill lives. This final list is called your "Skills Power Profile."
- Then pick one skill (or two that are truly interrelated) to practice using the REFRAME Method.
- Copy the information for this skill into your REFRAME planner.

Building Block	Skill Definition	Activity Location
	<input type="checkbox"/> REFRAME	
	<input type="checkbox"/> REFRAME	
	<input type="checkbox"/> REFRAME	
	<input type="checkbox"/> REFRAME	
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- » Balances own needs with the needs of others.
- » Takes into consideration others' situations/feelings.
- » Develops and implements strategies for navigating in different contexts (i.e., manages different patterns of behavior, rules, and norms).



PROBLEM SOLVING

- » Defines problems by considering all potential parts and related causes.
- » Gathers and organizes relevant information about a problem from multiple sources.
- » Generates potential solutions to a problem, seeking and leveraging diverse perspectives.
- » Identifies alternative ideas/processes that are more effective than the ones previously used/suggested.
- » Evaluates the advantages and disadvantages associated with each potential solution identified for a problem.
- » Selects and implements best solution based on evaluation of advantages and disadvantages of each potential solution.

FEEDBACK FORMULA

Quick Start Your Feedback Practice

Providing timely feedback is vital to skills development—yet too few people do it. Why? Fear to give it and fear to receive it. People are extremely reluctant to give feedback for fear of being negative. People are extremely defensive receiving feedback for fear of failure. MHA Labs feedback formula was designed to completely neutralize this negative spiral.

Whether or not a youth meets/exceeds a performance expectation, the feedback you give should be non-judgmental and developmental. MHA Labs developed a simple conversation formula to promote skill-building feedback and minimize the tendency to use judgmental language. Skill-building feedback incorporates 5 elements that expand on a typical feedback conversation. The flow is activity context, performance expectation, observed evidence, feedback conversation, and practice suggestions. Incorporating this method into your own personal communication style can transform your skill-building practice.



Let's practice the Feedback Formula using our Web Development REFRAME example:

Situation that needs feedback: The team responsible for writing the content on persuasive reasons to vote got only 50% retention when testing the content on their peers.

Instead of replying... The group didn't find your content very persuasive, so I need to go back and review the lesson on persuasion and redo it.

Now try the Skill-Building Feedback method... Yesterday when you presented your persuasive content (**activity context**), the goal was that 80% of the group would be able to remember at least one argument (**performance expectation**). We tallied the results and 50% of the class could retain at least one argument and let me share the results with you (**observed evidence**). What are your initial thoughts on the results? Which argument did seem to be retained most? What elements about that one make it strong? (**feedback conversation ensues...**) How about tomorrow we set aside some time for you to interview people who couldn't retain anything and get their insights. What else do you all suggest as a good next step. (**practice suggestion**)

Don't forget to give strengths-based feedback when youth meet or exceed expectations!!!

Strengths intensify performance:

Typically youth success is communicated as "good job" praise or a letter grade. Successful youth need to know their exact skill strengths and how they can be applied to intensify performance.

Strengths drive growth:

Our strengths can be often be applied to to address growth areas or performance issues. Over time, youth learn to automatically use their own strengths to solve problems.

Strengths foster self esteem:

Too many youth who perform poorly in academics believe they are failures. You can now legitimately acknowledge their essential skills strengths to increase self esteem and create a positive skill-building relationship.

Strengths cultivate happiness:

Most people are conditioned to focus only on what is not working. This can have a negative effect on personal well-being and motivation. Starting with strengths creates a positive culture for both you and youth.

FEEDBACK FORMULA WORKSHEET

At / During / With...

(ACTIVITY CONTEXT)

The expectation was...
I had hoped...

(PERFORMANCE EXPECTATION)

What I observed
was...

(OBSERVED EVIDENCE)

How did...?
What did...?
Describe your
process...

(FEEDBACK CONVERSATION)

Next time,
let's try...

(PRACTICE SUGGESTIONS)