



The Eleven Steps, in Detail

Every step from the first decision at your desk to the end of the debrief, with what you do, how long it takes, and the mistake that costs the most.

College and high school.

Eleven steps, in the order you do them. The first seven are decisions you make at your desk, the eighth is what you send the students, and the last three happen in the room. Each one below says what you actually do, roughly how long it takes, and the mistake that costs the most.

The timings assume a class of twelve to twenty-five and a single period of about a hundred minutes, which is the shape most people start with. Everything here scales up; nothing here requires a competitive team, a conference, or a budget.

Step 1. Identify the objectives

Ten minutes, and it saves hours later.

Write down in one sentence what you want the session to accomplish. Make it something a student could visibly fail at. “Every student speaks once, in role, with something at stake” is an objective. “Cover the budget process” is not.

This one sentence then settles almost every question that follows: how long the session runs, how many roles there are, what the agenda says. If you skip it, you will make those decisions one at a time and they will not agree with each other.

The mistake that costs the most: Making it coverage. A session built to cover material loses to a lecture on efficiency grounds every time, and the research agrees. What a simulation buys is retention, interest, and the experience of having to say something difficult to someone’s face.

Step 2. Decide the format: which body, and what it is doing

An afternoon, most of it reading.

Pick the real body (a Council configuration, a Security Council, a committee, a trial court, a town board) and then pick the one question it has to settle. The question matters more than the body.

A usable question has two properties. It genuinely divides people, so that a student can hold a position another student has a reason to fight. And the body actually has the power to decide it, so that the vote at the end means something.

The mistake that costs the most: A question everyone in the room already agrees about, or one the body cannot act on. Either one produces a polite ninety minutes in which nothing is at stake.

Step 3. Decide the duration

One decision, made now rather than later.

One class period, two, three, or a full day. What each length buys is different in kind, not in amount:

- **One period** buys every student speaking once, in role, with a consequence.
- **Two days** buy revision. A written product submitted between the days comes back changed, so students meet their own words as text and find that language they chose under time pressure now constrains them.
- **Three days** buy coalitions under changed conditions, and real failure. A day-two development aimed at the day-one coalition teaches the difference between a position and an interest.

If you are extending a session, extend it this way. Do not extend it by adding more agenda.

The mistake that costs the most: Adding agenda instead of adding a kind of learning, which produces a long version of the same day.

Step 4. Decide the structure: one body or several

Five minutes, and for a first attempt the answer is one.

One body in one room is almost always the right choice for a first session and for anything under two days. The reason is specific. When everyone is in one room working one agenda, a finance minister cannot take a position that his own environment minister has to pay for, and that collision is the thing students remember.

Split into several bodies in separate corners and most students spend the session in a conversation nobody else hears. If you do run several bodies, give them one question that forces them to deal with each other, and bring them together for the closing act.

The mistake that costs the most: Parallel sessions that never meet. It looks like more is happening and less is.

Step 5. Decide the roles

Ten minutes with a sheet of paper.

Write the roles down the left side of a page and the agenda items across the top, then mark every cell where that role has a *scheduled* reason to speak: a question put to it by name, an opening or closing statement, a required answer to someone else, a vote.

Nobody below two. A role with one turn in a hundred minutes is decoration, and the student holding it knows that by the twenty-minute mark. If a role cannot reach two, add a question that reaches it, or cut the role and give its students to another one.

The cheapest fix is almost always a new question inside an existing agenda item, not a new item. A blank grid and a worked example are in the companion handout, The Speaking-Turn Grid.

The mistake that costs the most: A role nobody gave anything to do. It is the commonest defect in a first design and the easiest to catch.

Step 6. Assign the roles

Twenty minutes.

Decide whether students choose or you assign, and assign if you can. Assigning lets you spread the demanding roles deliberately, and that matters: students given high-power roles report more understanding and find the exercise more worthwhile than students in low-power roles. In anything longer than one day, rotate the chair and the floor-managing roles rather than handing them out once.

Tell students their role in writing, with the role's position on each agenda item, and not just its name.

The mistake that costs the most: Letting the same four confident students take the chairs. You will have built the participation gap into the design on purpose.

Step 7. Identify a moderator or leader

Ten minutes, plus a briefing.

Somebody has to chair: recognize speakers, hold the clock, rule on procedure, and decide when the room moves on. There are two real options and the trade is clean.

You chair

The clock holds and nothing stalls, but you cannot watch the room while you are running it, and your voice shapes every exchange. Reasonable for a first session, and for a high school class meeting this format for the first time.

A student chairs

Much better for that student, who gets the most demanding job in the room, and the session becomes visibly theirs rather than yours. The cost is the clock, which will slip.

The usual compromise is the one worth starting with: a student chairs, and you sit at the side keeping the time and the speaking order. If a student chairs, brief them separately a day ahead, hand them the speaking order in writing, and agree in advance on the signal you will use when they need to move on.

The mistake that costs the most: Appointing a chair on the day with no briefing. The session then spends its first twenty minutes teaching procedure.

Step 8. Prepare the students

About five days before, and one document.

Send one document that contains all of this:

- The agenda, in order, with the time on each item.
- Each student's role and its position on each item.
- **The actual questions you will ask**, with a sentence saying plainly that these are the real ones and there is no hidden set. Students who suspect a hidden set prepare for the wrong thing.
- The three floor rules and the time limit, so they are not news on the day.
- **One sourced fact per question.** A position, a figure, or a sentence from a real source, with one line saying where it came from.
- A note naming anything artificial about the setup, with the reason. The EU has no body in which the European Council and three Council configurations sit together; say so. Students who notice should find that you noticed first.

The sourced-fact requirement is the cheapest item in this whole list and does the most work. It turns preparing from reading into retrieval, it gives a quiet student something concrete to say the moment they are recognized, and it makes an unsupported assertion visible to the room.

The mistake that costs the most: Sending the role sheets and holding the questions back. The preparation window is then worth almost nothing.

Step 9. Hold the simulation

The period itself.

Open in ten minutes or less: the agenda, the three rules, the clock. The format is already in the document they have, so do not explain it again.

Put a ten-minute suspension in the middle and make people leave their chairs. Say plainly that a student who stays seated has wasted it. This is also your repair mechanism: a student who cannot speak to a room can almost always speak to one other person, and they come back with something to say.

End with a real act the room can watch succeed or fail. A vote, a verdict, a ruling, a roll call, conclusions adopted by consensus where one refusal holds the whole document. It is also the best single artifact of the day for assessment.

A minute-by-minute running order, the three floor rules written out to read aloud, and two lines worth having ready are in the companion handout, Running Order, Floor Rules, and the Day-Of Check.

The mistake that costs the most: Ending with you summarizing. A summary is not an outcome and the room can tell.

Step 10. Guide it if you have to, but stand back

The hardest step in the list, and the one most worth getting right.

The temptation is to help, and helping is what ruins it. The failure is documented rather than suspected: an analysis of thirty-six airline crew debriefs found instructors talking more than the

crews and rarely allowing silence, and when real sessions were coded into four interaction patterns, only one had participants referring to each other at all. The others ran through the instructor like spokes on a wheel.

Intervene for three things:

- A factual error that will mislead the whole room if it stands.
- A student being criticized as a person rather than as a position.
- A genuine stall, where nobody will speak next.

Everything else, let it be awkward. A silence of eight seconds feels unbearable from the front of the room and is usually a student deciding to speak. If a delegation really has stalled, go to the suspension early rather than filling the gap yourself.

The mistake that costs the most: Answering your own question. Once you have done it twice the room learns that waiting is cheaper than speaking.

Step 11. Hold the debrief

Fifteen minutes at an absolute minimum.

The debrief is time taken during class in which the instructor and students jointly reflect on the simulation exercise and the outcomes of that activity. It is not the leftover time at the end.

When the period runs short, protect the suspension and the debrief. Cut an agenda item, cut a role out of an item, shorten the opening. Do not cut the two things that are not content. In the best study available, simulation plus in-class debriefing beat every other condition on an unannounced quiz three months later, with simulation alone second and no simulation trailing both.

The mistake that costs the most: Treating it as optional. It is the intervention, not the wrap-up.

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