

The background of the page is a painting of a man and a woman standing in front of a church. The man, on the right, is bald, wearing glasses, a white shirt, a blue tie, and a dark suit jacket. He is holding a large tuning fork. The woman, on the left, has reddish-brown hair and is wearing a dark, patterned dress with a white collar. The church behind them has a prominent Gothic-style window. The overall tone is slightly faded and artistic.

# The Official Guide to Collabinart®

*Experience Collaboration through Interpretive Art™*

*A how-to guide for planning, preparing, and delivering  
a fun and engaging team experience that lets everyone  
discover the power and benefits of*

## Collaboration.

*July 2019*

[www.Collabinart.com](http://www.Collabinart.com)

## What Is Collabintart®?

Collabintart® is a freely-licensed, empirical training and team-building framework. This guide is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Collabintart uses exact reproductions of famous, painted artworks in the public domain and freely licensed by museums or individuals. Collabintart participants (called **Exponents** – people who interpret or *expound*) work individually, then collectively in small cohorts, to interpret these artworks. Through Collabintart, participants experience the power and benefits of active listening and collaborating with other people.

Collabintart is an empirical *framework*. There are a set of core values and a few, basic rules for every Collabintart experience. Collabintart experience planners (called **Docents**) can adapt Collabintart in many innovative ways to create the most effective training experience possible for their unique goals and circumstances.

Collabintart relies on empiricism and continuous improvement principles.

## Why Use Collabintart?

The primary purpose for using Collabintart is to give people a fun, positive, memorable, and shared experience that develops their collaboration skills. When people have such an experience, they can remember that experience – and what they learned – *forever*.

Through Collabintart, people experience the power, benefits, and value of collaboration. Collaboration is the best way to solve the world’s most difficult and complex problems. In Collabintart, the complex problem people will solve is interpreting a famous work of art.

Collabintart’s *Docents* can introduce *Exponents* to a wide array of tools and techniques for effective collaboration, consensus-building, and conflict resolution. Collabintart is a lightweight framework for introducing teams to these tools and techniques and allowing them to practice building collaboration skills within a safe space.

## When to Use Collabintart

Use Collabintart at any time on a team’s journey of working together. Collabintart is an especially great experience for newly-formed teams.

Use Collabintart with experienced, mature teams, too. It’s nearly always a good time to give people a fun and memorable collaboration experience.

Choose to use Collabintart only once, or regularly use Collabintart to create team bonding and practice advanced collaboration, facilitation, and active listening skills.

## No Art Appreciation Prerequisites

No one – not even *Docents* – needs any prior art appreciation training to use Collabinart. Art appreciation training is valuable, but it is not a prerequisite.

Everyone can look at a painting, pick out factual details, and synthesize those details into a meaningful interpretation about that artwork. Toddlers and school children do this. All Collabinart participants can certainly do this, too.

## Collabinart's Core Values

Collabinart has four core values that are part of any Collabinart experience. These core values emphasize the necessary ingredients for creating holistic solutions to complex problems. The core values are expressed as a set of contrasts (like in the [Agile Manifesto](#)). They are:

- **Working Collectively**  
*over working individually*
- **Asking and Listening**  
*over telling and persuading*
- **Being Open-minded**  
*over being self-assured*
- **Collaborating**  
*over commanding*

## Collabinart's Rules

Collabinart has only a few rules. These rules reflect and reinforce Collabinart's core values. The rules are:

- **No smartphones!** Don't use electronic devices during the Collabinart experience.
- **Everyone contributes** – individually at first, then collectively within cohorts.
- **Support your assertions** – using observable facts, evidence and good reasoning.
- **Don't use "OR"** – make all your assertions definitive (but be open to changing them).

Avoid using electronic devices like smartphones during the Collabinart experience. They are a distraction. Moreover, it doesn't matter when a painting was made, who made it, or how art historians interpret these famous artworks. Their interpretations aren't relevant. What's relevant is how *you* and *your cohort members* view and interpret art, and how you'll work together to create a unified and harmonized interpretation for a singular piece of art.

Everyone participates and contributes towards a unified, team-based, artwork interpretation. This is done, firstly, by asking each person to create their own, individual interpretation for a

displayed work of art. By working individually at first, then collaboratively within a cohort later, Collabinart's *Exponents* will discover the divergent, creative, and expansive ways that people perceive our world.

*Exponents* ground their assertions on how to interpret a work of art using observable facts, evidence and sound reasoning. *Exponents* synthesize observable facts into coherent interpretations. Quite naturally, this allows for many, varied, individual interpretations about the same piece of art – variations which cohorts will reconcile to create a unified, team-based interpretation.

*Exponents* cannot use assertions that include the word, "or." When *Exponents*, working within their respective cohorts, include the word "or" in their team-based interpretations, they avoid converging divergent opinions, and their resulting interpretations are too vague and can lack coherence. Using "or" won't force *Exponents* to converge, unify, and harmonize their different perspectives. So, don't use "or" when making any assertions.

## Collabinart's Game Objective

Collabinart can be gamified. Gamifying Collabinart may increase participant enjoyment of the Collabinart experience.

The default Collabinart game objective is, for each cohort, to:

**Create a unified, harmonized, team-based interpretation for a work of art, that is grounded in observable facts, uses sound reasoning, and is supported by all cohort members.**

Importantly, the Collabinart experience may be time-bound but it is never a race.

*Exponents* gain collaboration skills when, firstly, they listen and understand how other *Exponents* synthesize facts and use sound reasoning to create their own, individual interpretations for a selected artwork. Then, *Exponents* (working in small cohorts of, ideally, three-to-five people) use consensus-building and conflict-resolution techniques to generate a unified, harmonized, team-based interpretation for the same artwork.

All *Exponents* must support their cohort's interpretation for a work of art. This doesn't mean that every cohort member must *agree* with *every* aspect of their team-based interpretation, but they should feel supportive of all the substantive assertions made within the cohort's unified, team-based interpretation.

## CollabInart's Two Key Questions

CollabInart simplifies art interpretation to answer Two Key Questions (which can be progressively elaborated into many underlying questions). The Two Key Questions are:

- *What Do You See?*
- *How Do You See It?*

### What Do You See?

To answer this question, *Exponents* – first individually, then collectively within their cohorts – select facts about what they see in an artwork that everyone views together. Factual details can be anything related to the painting, including the colors used, the foreground and background objects they see, the physical appearance of the portrayed people, the weather conditions, etc. *Exponents* suspend interpreting these factual details until the *Docent* prompts them to answer the second Key Question.

### How Do You See It?

To answer this second Key Question, *Exponents* – first individually, then collectively within their cohorts – use observable facts, evidence and sound reasoning to create an interpretation of what they see. After individually creating an interpretation for the displayed artwork, *Exponents* will collaborate within their respective cohorts to create a unified, harmonized, team-based interpretation for the displayed artwork.

The greatest amount of collaboration will occur when *Exponents* unify and harmonize their individual perspectives when they answer the second Key Question collectively within their respective cohorts.

## CollabInart Roles

There are four roles in CollabInart: *Curator*, *Docent*, *Exponent*, and *Doyen*.

### The Curator

The CollabInart *Curator* is responsible to choose the artwork to be interpreted by all CollabInart participants. Multiple people can act as *Curators* for a single CollabInart experience. The *Curator* is responsible to choose artworks for interpretation that, in the eyes of the *Docent* and *Exponents*, exhibit these attributes:

- Appropriate
- Inoffensive
- Intriguing
- Engaging
- Complex

Anyone can be a *Curator*. Usually, the *Docent* fulfills the role of the *Curator* for teams unfamiliar with Collabinart.

### The *Docent*

The *Docent* is the one who facilitates and leads a guided tour through the Collabinart experience. The *Docent* prepares for this role by understanding who the *Exponents* are and what their desired learning outcomes are. The *Docent* works with the *Curator* to assemble the necessary media files to deliver the Collabinart experience.

If the *Docent* is not also the *Curator*, then the *Docent* obtains image files from the *Curator* for all the artworks to be interpreted during the Collabinart experience.

The *Docent* has the final say on what works of art will be part of the Collabinart experience.

### The *Exponents*

*Exponents* are all the Collabinart participants who will interpret, or *expound*, upon the artwork which the *Curator* has selected, and which the *Docent* displays at the proper time. *Exponents* work individually, then collectively within their respective cohorts, to interpret outstanding works of art.

### The *Doyens*

*Doyens* are knowledgeable persons who are uniquely skilled in team-building, facilitation and coaching. *Doyens* serve the *Docent* and *Exponents* through observation, raising awareness, probing, sharing insights, guiding conversations, and fostering collaboration among the *Exponents*. *Doyens* do not interpret the artworks, rather, they facilitate the unified, harmonized, team-based interpretations by the *Exponents*.

*Doyens* are an *optional* role in the Collabinart experience.

## Choosing Collabinart Artwork

### Ensure the Legal Right to Use Digital Images

According to a landmark 1999 federal district court ruling, *The Bridgeman Art Library, Ltd., Plaintiff v. Corel Corporation*, “exact reproductions of public domain artworks are not protected by copyright.” This ruling opens legal access to a wide world of artworks in the public domain for use with Collabinart.

Some museums, like the [National Gallery of Art](#), have an “Open Access” policy which gives everyone the legal right to use “digital images of works of art that the Gallery believes to be in the public domain. Images of these works are now available free of charge for any use, commercial or non-commercial. Users do not need to contact the Gallery for authorization to use these images.”

Wherever a *Curator* chooses to obtain artwork for the Collabinart experience, they should respect all applicable copyright laws governing the use of any digital image files they plan to use.

### Use Representational Art (not Abstract Art)

Broadly speaking, there are two types of art: **representational** and **abstract**. Representational art imparts meaning through images that are closely tied to the real world. Seventeenth century Renaissance art is an example of representational art. Images like Leonardo DaVinci's world-renowned *Mona Lisa* are immediately recognizable, and people have little difficulty interpreting what they see in the *Mona Lisa*.

Abstract art, however, imparts meaning through images that may not be closely tied to the real world or may not be tied to the real world at all. It is usually easier for people to interpret representational art instead of abstract art.

Therefore, to maximize participant involvement and engagement, Collabinart generally relies upon representational art instead of abstract art. However, this guideline does not prevent a *Curator*, with the *Docent's* consent, from choosing abstract art for the Collabinart experience. But the choice to use abstract art should be grounded in a good understanding of the who the *Exponents* are and knowing that they have both the requisite skill and desire to interpret abstract art. One attribute of all Collabinart artwork is that it is *appropriate*.

### Use Artwork That Portrays People

Generally, choosing representational artwork that portrays two or more people in the painting are preferable over landscape paintings without any discernible people. Similarly, avoid choosing paintings with too many people in them, as they may be too overwhelming for *Exponents* to analyze.

*Genre* paintings are a type of painting that is especially well-suited to use with Collabinart. *Genre* paintings depict everyday life in everyday situations. *Genre* paintings are intriguing, and most people easily engage with this style of representational art. Most of the paintings available for downloading on this website are *genre* paintings.

## Other Guidelines

### Limit Number of Participants

*Docents* can use Collabinart with just a few *Exponents*, or with a much larger group. With larger groups, however, there won't be enough time for every cohort to share their artwork interpretations with all Collabinart participants.

## Collocation v. Remote Delivery

Collabinart is a team-building experience. It is best for *Exponents* to be collocated during the experience. While *Exponents* can be remotely located, their overall experience will be sub-optimal from the collocated group.

## Activity Length

A *Docent* should plan the Collabinart experience for at least one hour, *especially* when *Exponents* are unfamiliar with Collabinart. A *Docent* should familiarize *Exponents* with Collabinart's values, rules, game objective, and Two Key Questions. This may allow for evaluating only two artworks within an hour. Planning the Collabinart experience for less than one hour may crimp the collaboration experience, so this is not recommended.

Be aware that, for some people, interpreting art and collaborating with others can be exhausting mental work. A *Docent* who uses Collabinart for more than 90 minutes should consider taking a short break mid-way to give everyone time to mentally recharge.

A *Docent* should use good judgment when running Collabinart for more than two, consecutive hours. Avoid extending the experience to the point where people are too weary to be engaged. It is *much better* to finish Collabinart earlier than what your *Exponents* want, and have them wanting to continue the experience, rather than extending the experience to where everyone becomes disinterested and/or disengaged.

## A Final Word on the Collabinart Framework

Collabinart is a [freely-licensed](#), empirical training and team-building framework. Collabinart's simple values, rules and roles provide a foundation for infusing amazing art into team development and training strategies.

Feel free to adapt the Collabinart experience described in this guide to create new, innovative ways of using art to build collaboration, consensus-building, and conflict-resolution skills. As you do so, please share your experiences, so others can benefit from them, too.

### For more information

Download the latest "[Official Guide to Collabinart](#)" and obtain more supporting materials from the Collabinart website: [www.Collabinart.com](http://www.Collabinart.com).

For questions about Collabinart, send an email to: [william@collabinart.com](mailto:william@collabinart.com)

## History of Collabinart

In 2017, I was asked to present to a group of 40 data analyst professionals on the subject of “Agile.” I could have used a PowerPoint presentation on Scrum, but I knew that watching someone talk to PowerPoint slides for 90 minutes is *boring*. I also know that people enjoy fun, engaging, hands-on activities and immersive experiences that are relevant to their work.

So, I fused my love of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century European artwork with my love for Agile and created “Collabinart” – *Collaboration through Interpretive Art*. Collaboration is critical for teams working on complex problems with uncertain solutions.

The Collabinart experience was a huge success. All but one data professional noted in the anonymous, post-experience survey that they enjoyed the Collabinart experience. I sensed that this was a repeatable experience that, with a little tweaking, could be improved for the next group of Collabinart participants.

Over the next year, I refined Collabinart and used the Collabinart experience with IT professionals, software developers, business analysts, functional managers and directors, and college students. Each time I guide the experience as a *Docent*, I learn something new about how people view famous artworks, like *American Gothic* and *Nighthawk*.

Art interpretation has a magical way of highlighting the diversity of human perspective. Collabinart is a powerful way to harness those diverse perspectives to create something deeper, richer, and more meaningful than what any one person could do on their own. These are the same skills and outcomes we need to solve today’s biggest, most complex challenges.

My hope is that you and your teams will enjoy using Collabinart for your own team-building and training purposes, and that you find the same enjoyment and success using Collabinart as I have had.

– William W. Davis

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