

Effective Training Session Design and Implementation
Train the Trainers Workshop
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Chapel Hill, NC

The following pages briefly outline major principles of adult learning, and basic information on perception and retention of information and their implications for the design of training sessions, either plenary or small breakout groups. It is provided to assist you in the design of any session or sessions you may be participating in as faculty. Please read and consider it prior to designing such a session.

Principles of Adult Learning, Perception, and Retention of Information and Their Implications for Training Session Design

1. Learning Theories

- A. Pedagogy – traditional educational theory focused on the teacher as the source of information or knowledge that is provided to the learner.
- B. Andragogy – a learner-centered theory that is based on the principle that the teacher is a facilitator who acts as a conduit for the learners, who are capable of, and responsible for, their own discovery and learning.

2. Characteristics of Adult Learners and Principles of Adult Learning

A. Characteristics of Adult Learners

- i. Have many other responsibilities besides training
- ii. Are self directed (generally want a learner-centered approach)
 - 1. Want input into their training
 - 2. Want facilitation of their learning – not being talked down to or controlled
 - 3. Are interested in actively participating in their learning experience. See, Stolovich, H., Keeps, E., “Telling Ain’t Training,” (Amer. Soc. for Trg. and Dev. 2002).¹
- iii. Bring a lifetime of experience to the learning situation which they can use to teach each other and in comprehending, analyzing, synthesizing and applying information
- iv. Are interested in learning that is practical, useful, and susceptible to immediate application
- v. Have a preference for REAL exercises that are similar to or involve their daily work tasks, rather than artificial or far-fetched exercises²

¹ More and more research is showing active learning to be a critical component of effective training and education. Different types of active learning (e.g., discussion, problem solving, exercises) result in better and longer retention of information, better comprehension and application of material, better learner attitudes, and better thinking and writing. See, Prince, M., “Does Active Learning Work? A Review of the Research,” 93(3) J. Engr. Educ. 223 (2004); Hake, R., “Interactive-Engagement vs. Traditional Methods” A Six-Thousand-Student Survey of Mechanics Test Data for Introductory Physics Courses, 66(1) Amer. J. of Physics 64 (1998); Gallagher, S., “Problem-Based Learning: Where Did It Come From, What Does It Do, and Where Is It Going?” 20(4) J. for Educ. of the Gifted 332 (Summer 1997).

² See note 1.

B. Principles of Adult Learning

- i. Learner centered rather than content or teacher centered; The teacher plays the role of a facilitator of learning; The learning is a collaborative experience
- ii. Learners are more invested in training and learning is enhanced when the learners see a need and practical use for the training and have influenced the content and design of the learning experience
- iii. Learners have different dominant learning styles, though experiential learning is the predominant one
- iv. Substantial learning takes place through experiential, active exercises, and participation³

3. Learning Styles – all people use all three styles, but one is usually dominant.

- A. Auditory – learns best from hearing and orally repeating information.
- B. Visual – learns best visually; for example, by reading or viewing images or demonstrations.
- C. Kinesthetic or Experiential – learns best experientially; for example, by engaging in active exercises.

4. Perception and Retention

A. Perception

- i. People are predisposed to, and generally do, structure and organize experiences as simply, precisely, symmetrically, and thoroughly as possible. This is referred to as the law of preciseness. Learning follows the law of preciseness.

B. Influences on Rates of Retention and Implications for Session Design

- i. Organization/Structure – law of preciseness and short attention span suggest the importance of the use of organizing themes/principles, a clear, logical order (general to specific), and attention blocks (short periods of time on clearly labeled subtopics, with clear transitions from one to the other).

³ See note 1.

- ii. Techniques Used – Information on retention rates and learning styles suggest the importance of the use of purposeful, effective audio visuals, **interactive, participatory training methods**, and techniques that teach to all of the three learning styles (audio, visual, and experiential).
- iii. Principle of Primacy and Recency – Important to begin and end with important points
- iv. Repetition – Enhances retention – important to use, but not overuse to the point of boredom
- v. Language – vivid language (word pictures), and catchy or easily remembered phrases (e.g., trilogies [blood, sweat, and tears] enhance retention

Tips for Effective Presentations

I. General Organization of Presentation

A. Introduction

- i. Topic and Purpose - Objectives and why it is important or participants should be interested
- ii. Hook and Theme – Grab them at the outset and use a unifying theme
- iii. Plan – Identify briefly what you will cover and how (process or methodology to be used, including active engagement)

B. Body of Presentation

i. Content of Body

- 1. Five to Seven Main Points Directed at Learning Objectives – Use attention blocks and clear transitions from point to point – Do not try to cover too much material so that the presentation is evenly paced.
- 2. Clear and concrete language and examples
- 3. Consistent with Participants' Level of Knowledge and Experience
- 4. Focused on and Consistent with Theme
- 5. Integrated with Rest of Conference as Appropriate

ii. Organization of Body

1. **Actively Engage** the Audience (e.g., discussions, small group activities, exercises)
2. Appropriate Length
3. General to Specific
4. Logical Order
5. Attention Blocks and Clear Transitions

C. Conclusion

- i. Summarize Points
- ii. Reinforce Theme
- iii. Call for Performance Transfer – The Transfer or Use of the Training in Job Performance

D. Presentation Techniques

- i. Hook and Theme
- ii. Respect Your Audience – Convey information in courteous manner and with an appropriate sense of decorum
- iii. Attention Blocks and Clear Transitions
- iv. Use of Voice, Language, and Body – Volume, silence, vivid and catchy language and body movement can all be used to obtain, maintain, or refocus attention and emphasize points
- v. Engaging the Audience – Ask the audience or particular participants questions, engage in exercises or skills practice activities, always allow time for questions, etc.
- vi. Effective Use of Audio Visual Aids – see E below

E. The Importance and Effective Use of Audio-Visual (AV) Aids

- i. Importance of AV Aids – To supplement presentation, emphasize points, persuade and enhance retention
- ii. Effective Use of AV Aids

- a. Valid Teaching Point That Supplements or Emphasizes Major Points of Presentation – Outline, image or bulleted list that makes major point or clearly demonstrates a point and is expanded upon in presentation. Generally, (there are limited exceptions), do not use lengthy passages and do not read from the screen
- b. Use Aid that Effectively Displays Information and Point to be Made
- c. Size Appropriate for Room and Audience – Generally, use at least 22-24 point font
- d. Simplicity – Neither too much information nor too much “activity” on one slide.
- e. Reference to Image and Effective Timing of Image Use – Consider when the most effective time to reveal the image is in reference to its discussion. Often, it is most effective to reveal a list of items one item at a time, so that each item can be discussed without participants being distracted by the others on the screen. Also, generally, if there will be lecture or discussion for more than a minute or so after the image or text is displayed, it is best to remove the image, replacing it with a blank (black) screen, so that participants are not distracted by the image and the focus is back on you as the presenter
- f. Effective Use of Color – Use sparingly, but to highlight or contrast information
- g. Preparation – Consider Logistical Details, practice, and test before the presentation begins