Overview

Goal

The first step in instructional design is to clarify the goal of your training. This is a simple two-step procedure:

1. Clarify what matters to your program.
2. Describe how your training will contribute directly to your program.

Learning Objectives

The next step is to write learning objectives for the training. These objectives state how the training will change the learners. Objectives describe what learners will be able to do as a result of your training.

Learning Activities

Each learning objective requires you to design learning activities to accomplish that objective. Learners complete learning activities in order to learn. There are usually three types of activities required: the learner absorbs knowledge by reading, listening or watching; the learner does practice or discovery activities to deepen learning; and learners complete activities designed to connect what they are learning with their background knowledge, lives and work.
Identify Goal

Training design starts with the goal. Before you design your training you need to know what your training will accomplish.

Rather than listing the things you will accomplish for learners, think about what you will do for your program. What does your program hope to accomplish.

Ask yourself:

- What matters to my program?
- For your program, what is the single most important measure of success?

Make your list:

Keep your goal in mind as you make other decisions. Write this goal on your training action plan. As you work on developing or conducting training, keep asking yourself, “How am I helping achieve this goal?”

Ask yourself:

- How will my training help accomplish the goal of my program? Make a list.

Write a goal you may use for your training.

Objectives will help you to create a bridge connecting your goal and the learning you want to take place during your training.
**Set Learning Objectives**

Good objectives are a mission-critical, must-have, make-or-break requirement for effective training. Everything stems from objectives. Good objectives focus efforts, reduce false starts, cut waste, dictate learning activities.

**What makes a good learning objective?**

Good learning objectives are clear, precise and worthy.

**Clear:** Learning objectives should be clear to everyone involved. The objectives must tell leadership of your program what you intend to accomplish. Each objective must communicate “what’s in it for me” to the learner.

**Precise:** Each learning objective must be specific enough that we can measure its accomplishment.

**Worthy:** Your learning objectives must directly contribute to accomplishing the underlying program goal.

Some complex methodologies for writing objectives list hundreds of different types of objectives. We will look at three types of primary objectives.

**Primary objectives**

By experiencing this training, the learner will be able to:

- Do procedure X to accomplish Y
- Create or design an X that does Y
- Decide X, given Y

Objectives are the ultimate reasons for learning. Primary objectives are *performance* objectives – they prescribe things people will be able to do as a result of your training.

Objectives should be stated in terms of performance – what the learner will be able to do.

*Write objectives you may use for your training.*
Select Learning Activities

Activities are necessary to provoke the learning experience. Used in combination, learning activities can accomplish difficult learning objectives.

Learning activities exercise skills, thought processes, attitudes and behaviors. Mere action is not a learning activity.

People learn by considering, researching, analyzing, evaluating, organizing, synthesizing, discussing, testing, deciding and applying ideas.

The goal of activities is to provoke the exact mental experiences that lead to learning.

What kinds of activities do you need?

To accomplish learning objectives you will need activities. In planning your training you will want to have activities from the following three types:

- **Absorb**
- **Do**
- **Connect**

One type has the learner *absorb knowledge* by reading, watching or listening. In the absorb activity the learner is physically passive, but mentally active.

A second type of activity has learners *do something* with what they are learning. It might have learners practice a procedure, play a game or answer questions. Each learner practices, explores and discovers.

The third type of activity has learners *connect what they are learning* to their work, their lives, or their prior learning. Connect activities are aimed at making it easier to apply learning when it is needed later.
Absorb-type activities

Absorb activities inform and inspire. These activities enable motivated learners to obtain crucial, up-to-date information they need to do their job or to further their learning.

Absorb activities usually consist of information and the actions learners take to extract and comprehend knowledge from that information. In absorb activities learner might be physically passive yet mentally active – actively perceiving, processing, consolidating, considering and judging the information.

In absorb activities it’s the content (really the trainer) that is in control. The learner absorbs some of the knowledge offered by content.

Absorb activities are ideal:

- For learners who need a little information
- For updating or extending current knowledge
- For preparing learners for other activities, setting the context or introducing principles
- For follow-up of do activities – for processing
- For highly motivated learners

There are four common types of absorb activities:

1. Presentations
2. Sharing stories
3. Readings
4. Field trips

Presentations

Presentations supply needed information in a clear, well-organized, logical sequence. Presentations convey information and demonstrate procedures and behavior in a straight forward flow of experiences.

Presentations have sequential structure that often consists of introduction, the body section, and a summary. Introduction includes explanation of value to the learner and instructions of how to experience it. The body section presents individual segments, each illustrating one step, explaining one concept, answering one question or making one point. Summary is a concise recap of the point made in the individual segments.

Types of presentations include:

- PowerPoint
- Physical demonstration
- Informational Videos
- Discussions (interviews, debates, panel presentations, small group/large group discussions)
Sharing stories

Story-telling activities relate individual human experiences. They make information real and personal. Use story-sharing activities to directly relate what you are teaching. Share stories to:

- Demonstrate the applicability or importance of what is being taught.
- Give concrete instances of the subject matter.
- Humanize the subject by showing its effects on people the learner cares about.
- Encourage and motivate learners to overcome difficulties.

Types of stories include:

- Hero stories
- Love stories
- Disaster stories
- Tragedies
- Discovery stories and many more

Readings

Use reading activities to present complex and difficult information in a stable form for careful study by the learner. Use reading activities when learners:

- Need deeper knowledge of the subject
- Are skillful readers and motivated enough to read on their own

Types of documents include:

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Field trips

Field trips take us to educational examples and intriguing displays. The essential aspect of the field trip is not walking from example to example, but in examining examples and seeing relationships among them.

*Make a list of absorb type activities you may use in your training.*
Do-type activities

If absorb activities are the nouns, then do activities are the verbs of learning. They put people in action. They elevate people from passive reading, listening and watching to active seeking, selecting and creating knowledge. Doing begets learning.

While absorb activities provide information, do activities transform that information into knowledge and skills. In do activities learners discover, parse, decode, analyze, verify, combine, organize, discuss, debate, evaluate, condense, refine, elaborate, and most importantly, apply knowledge.

Use do activities to:

- Provide safe, encouraging practice to prepare learners to apply learning in the real world
- Motivate learners by activating curiosity for material learners might otherwise consider boring
- Prepare for absorb activities by showing learners how little they know about the subject and making clear the value of information they are to absorb.
- Enable learning by exploration and discovery.

Learners should spend 50 to 90% of their time in do activities.

Common types of do activities include:

- Practice activities
- Discovery activities
- Games and simulations

Practice activities

Practice helps learners strengthen and refine skills, knowledge and attitudes by applying them and receiving feedback. Practice tasks do not teach new information. They give learners an opportunity to exercise newly acquired abilities.

Drill-and-practice activities are the repeated application of a series of similar simple tasks.

Hands-on activities allow learners to perform tasks with real tools but with guidance.

Guided analysis activities lead learners through an analysis task with step-by-step instructions.

Teamwork activities require learners to perform a complex distributed task. They help develop collaborative skills.
Discovery activities

Much of what we learn is by discovery. We conduct experiments or just try things out. We delve into things that arouse our curiosity.

Discovery activities do not present ideas, but lead learners to discover ideas on their own. They transform trial-and-error into trial-and-AHA!

Types of discovery activities

**Case studies** where learners analyze a complex, real event or situation to understand its underlying causes and concepts. They then draw conclusions or make recommendations.

**Role-playing scenarios** where learners interact with others in situations to infer the best practices, behaviors and strategies. Role-playing scenarios are good for soft skills.

Games and simulations

Games for learning can be fun, but they should always be purposeful. Games and simulations allow learners to practice skills, apply knowledge and infer principles – all while playing. They may provide a complete model of a real-world system or just a rapid-fire series of questions and answers.

The most important ingredient is the learner. In the game or simulation, the learner has a **goal**. The goal is typically a task the learner is learning to perform. The learner operates inside a simulation **environment**. The environment presents the learner with **choices**. The learner must **decide** among choices and take **action**. The learner’s actions have consequences or **outcomes**.

*Make a list of do-type activities you may use in your training.*
Connect-type activities

Connect activities help learners close the gap between learning and the rest of their lives. They prepare learners to apply learning in situations they encounter at work, in later learning efforts, and in their personal lives.

Connect activities integrate what we are learning with what we know. Often simple and subtle, connect activities are too often neglected by trainers who leave learners to make connections on their own.

Connect activities bridge gaps. They do not so much add new knowledge or skills as tie together previously learned skills and knowledge. In doing so, they add higher-level knowledge and skills.

When to feature connect activities?

Connect activities aim squarely at increasing application of learning. So use connect activities when:

- Application is crucial. The success of the individual or program depends on learners applying knowledge and skills.
- Application is not adequate. Perhaps learning is applied, but not in enough depth or not by enough people.
- You teach a general subject. Broad principles and concepts can be applied in varied situations.
- Learners doubt applicability of material.
- Learners cannot make connections by themselves. Sometimes it takes extraordinary efforts to see the connection between abstract subject and daily life.

Connect activities require only about 10% of the learners’ time. Sometimes rhetorical questions may be all you need.

Common types of connect activities

There are four common types of connect activities:

- Ponder activities
- Job aids
- Research activities
- Original work

Ponder activities

Ponder activities require learners to think deeply and broadly about what they are learning. They focus attention on the subject and invite learners to adopt a new perspective regarding the subject.

Types of ponder activities

Rhetorical questions ask thought-provoking questions to direct attention to an aspect of the subject.

Reflection promotes relaxed, open consideration of the subject.
Types of ponder activities, continued

Cite-example activities require learners to identify real-world instances of the concept or category.

Evaluations ask learners to judge the importance or value of an item under study.

Summary activities require learners to identify and recap important principles, concepts, facts, tips and other items of learning.

Brainstorming activities collect suggestions for solutions to a problem from a group of learners.

Job aids

Job aids help learners apply knowledge and skills to real-world tasks they encounter on the job – or anywhere else in life. Job aids are as much a category of tools as a specific learning activity.

Types of job aids

Checklists record the essential steps in a procedure or components of a system.

Reference summaries recap crucial information in a field.

Glossaries define key terms, abbreviations and symbols of a field.

Research activities

In our complex world, research is a basic skill. Rote memorization of facts will not do. There is too much too learn. Research activities teach learners to gather, analyze and report on information.

Types of research activities

Scavenger hunts challenge learners to identify reliable sources of information to answer questions and enable tasks.

In guided research learners consult various sources of information and opinions on a topic and then summarize their findings.

Make a list of connect-type activities you may use in your training.
Original work activities are the ultimate final exam – they require learners to apply learning to their own work. Learners must solve a real-world problem and submit their solutions for critique by an instructor or by fellow learners.

Original-work activities encourage learners to begin applying learning to current projects.

**Types of original work activities**

**Decision activities** require learners to submit decisions made at critical junctures in a real project.

**Work document activities** require learners to create a document that would be a part of actual work.

**Journal activities** provide a way for learners to collect decisions into an ongoing document that they can review and take away at the end of the learning.

**Comparison activities** allow learners to compare their work to that of other learners.

**Group critique activities** require learners or small teams to submit their work for review by fellow learners.

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**Summary**

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