

Reflection Activities

Reflection activities play an important role in helping us to analyze, understand, and gain meaning from instructional technology training. The following list of reflection activities is divided into activities to be used at the beginning, middle, and end of a learning experience. There are many general activities that could be used throughout the training as well.

□ **Ice Breakers and Introductions**

Pre-exposure: Create original ice-breaker activities that expose participants to content that will be learned later. Post it during the learning phase, and then review it at the conclusion of the training. Our neural pathways become more efficient with repetition because myelination occurs, a process which adds a fatty coating to the axons.

Storytelling: Tell a fascinating story or give a true-life example to create a strong emotional connection from the start. Affecting the emotional side of our brains alerts and prepares the cognitive parts of the brain to store new information.

Movement: Start the training experience with some type of fun physical movement or stretching, with music playing in the background. (Physical activity triggers the release of BDNF, a natural substance that boosts learning by helping neurons to communicate faster. Also, motor memory appears to have unlimited storage, requires minimal review, and needs little intrinsic motivation.)

Horror & Success Stories: In partners, trios, or small groups, participants share horror and/or success stories related to course content. Ask them to generate amusing titles and record a few bullets of information for the story. As the day's agenda is reviewed, ask participants to note the topic(s) for which each story is relevant. The stories can be interjected throughout the duration

"Though we know how critical meaning is to the learning process, most learners are drowning in information and starved for meaning." (Eric Jensen, 1998)

Reflection activities provide productive processing time, which is essential if we expect learners to make meaning out of new information.

of the course during transitions, after breaks, or for topic introductions.

Name Tag Switch: Ask everyone to write up to five self-descriptive phrases on a nametag, like “sleepy head, hunter, workout queen, shopaholic” along with one big learning goal for the day. Collect and redistribute at random. Give the group time to locate the owner of the mysterious nametag.

Tough Questions: As participants arrive, form small groups and ask each group to identify one or more “tough questions” they want answered before the end of the training. Ask the groups to write only one question per index card or post-it note. Invite participants to review the cards throughout the day and ensure that all questions have been answered to their satisfaction before leaving.

Animal Sounds: Write the same name of an animal on two different index cards. For example, write “dog” on two different index cards. Continue until you have enough cards for everyone in the room. Shuffle the deck and distribute the cards, asking participants to keep the animal name hidden from view. At the appointed time, direct everyone to travel around the room imitating the sound of their animal until they can locate someone else making the same sound. When they find their animal partner, they should be seated.

Stand up, Stand Up for Chocolate! Get the group up and moving by announcing, “All those who love chocolate (or can’t live without pizza or like rock & roll), please stand in front of the marker board.” Once you have established about 4 or 5 groups, let participants meet each other and share interests.

□ **Informal Learning Style & Personality Assessments**

(Participants use this handout, [The Learner Profile](#), to record their responses to the activities listed below.)

<http://www.ncwiseowl.org/kscope/techknowpark/Kiosk/Profile.html>

Aliens and Multiple Intelligences: Each participant receives or views a set of 8 trading cards, with each card representing one of eight multiple intelligences (Howard Gardner). Participants select the trading card with an Alien description that best describes the way they work, play, and interact with others.

<http://www.ncwiseowl.org/kscope/techknowpark/LoopCoaster/eSmartz1.html>

Crack Your Learning Code: Participants use the online activity, “Crack Your Learning Code,” to promote discussion of the different personality types (as defined by Myers and Briggs, and more recently by Keirsey and Bates and others) and how they impact the teaching and learning process.
<http://www.ncwiseowl.org/kscope/techknowpark/Secret/Welcome.html>

Meet Your Mode: Participants can use this checklist of behaviors to heighten awareness of the variety of ways students learn best.
www.ncwiseowl.org/kscope/techknowpark/Secret/ModeSheet.html

□ **Group Assumptions, Learning Goals, and Prior Knowledge**

Oops and Wows: Participants create 3 columns to state what they hope will be the outcome of the training.

Column 1: OOPS (What outcome would they be disappointed with?)

Column 2: OK (What outcome would be okay?)

Column 3: WOW (What outcome would they be very happy with?)

Props and Promises: Set out a box full of toys, everyday objects, quotes, children’s books, and other items. Ask participants to select an item that helps them visualize what they hope to accomplish as a result of the training.

Pair and Share: The facilitator picks a topic and divides participants into groups to discuss it. The topic should allow participants to draw from their experiences and backgrounds.

Assumptions Challenge: The goal of this activity is to surface group assumptions about a topic(s). Participants list assumptions on 3x5 index cards anonymously. Small groups gather to consider the following 2 questions for each assumption: What informs the assumption (e.g. data, values, beliefs?), and can the assumption be generalized to other things? At the end of the training, return to the list to see if assumptions have been changed.

□ **Team Building**

Affirmations: On note cards, write something nice about someone. Read aloud at the end of the training session. Put names on cards and everyone takes ONE card or rotate the cards so everyone can make a comment on every individual's card.

Gordian Knot (Jensen, 1998): Teams of six or more stand in a circle, approximately two feet apart. One participant reaches out with one hand and grabs the hand of a person directly across from them. Continue until everyone is holding hands to form a giant human knot. At this point, the group must untie themselves without releasing hands.

Team Development Wheel: Participants place a mark on the circumference of the "Team Development Wheel" to represent their assessment of the present status of the team.

Quotes and Sayings: Provide a variety of sayings. Participants pick one or more that seem to reflect where they are now and what they are experiencing as part of their group or team.

"Wanted" Posters: Participants create a "wanted" poster, without his or her name on it, that describes likes, dislikes, hobbies, height, eye color, and more. Hang on the wall and let everyone guess who's who.

□ **Transitions, Bridge-Builders, State Changers**

Around the Room and Back Again: Have each participant write down one example or one new application of a topic or teaching strategy identified by the facilitator. Individuals move around the room and share their example with others. As you move, collect as many items as possible to add to your list. Group discussions can then be used to build the lists further and generate strong knowledge.

Making Change: Make transitions an easy proposition by providing a simple, fast, first step.

Art Journal: keep an artistic journal throughout the learning experience to draw what they are feeling.

Synectics: "Synectics provide an opportunity for creative thinking and help to build analogies around any number of possible topics. It is a freeing activity for many in that it allows us to process

information differently and collectively. It can serve as a learning scaffold in a variety of situations, particularly with new groups.”

- Prepare a list of visual clues. These can be postcards, toys, everyday objects, or index cards with photos glued to them.
- Let participants choose cards themselves, or distribute randomly. Participants compare and contrast their item to the topic you have chosen. For example: How is _____ like a GPS?

Energizers: If the body is tired, the mind is too. Use energizers that are directly linked to workshop content. Keep the “energizer” brief, make sure the activity is not threatening, and allow participants to “pass” or rotate the game to the next person.

Energizer Examples: Use musical chairs as a review game; do cross laterals (see next item); create sound effects with musical instruments; toss a ball or beanbag; try on silly hats; mime; leave the room for a 5 minute stroll; drink water; create a chant or jingle; do deep breathing exercises.

Cross Laterals: Use cross laterals to stimulate both sides of the brain. One example of a cross lateral is to pat your head with your right hand and rub your belly in a counter clockwise direction. (Eric Jensen, 1998)

Case Study: Provide participants with case studies that provide relevant background information. After participants read a case, distribute debriefing questions and divide participants into small groups for discussion.

Mental Maps: Participants draw illustrations or flowcharts that explain their understanding of a topic, and then pair-share to discuss.

Now That You Mention It: This paired verbal fluency activity gives participants an opportunity to recall learning, make connections, and discover questions. A key part of this is the timing and how the directions are framed. It is critical that the talking/listening does not dissolve into a conversation. While one person is talking, the other is listening. Have Person A report learnings to Person B (as if they were not in the room) for 1 minute. Then switch roles (Person B reports to Person A, also for 1 minute. Repeat the process again, for 45 seconds, asking participants not to repeat

anything that has been said. Repeat the cycle a third time, with only 30 seconds for each participant to talk/listen.

Each Teach: Distribute two articles, two sections of a chapter or two handouts. Working as partners, Person A reads section 1 while Person B is reading section 2. Person A explains material to Person B, highlighting key themes and learning. Person B explains the material in like manner.

Museum Tour: This is a good way to cover a lot of territory very quickly, particularly with an experienced group. Individually, participants generate information about a topic, recording one item per 3x5 index card. In small groups, they share, categorize, and generate categories for all the cards. They can make a display of their work to share. At this point, you can debrief and discover how these learnings can inform the day's activities or their group interaction.

Unfinished Business: If there is time to review and follow-up, always leave some thought unfinished or some task incomplete. Unfinished tasks are recalled better than completed ones. (Eric Jensen, 1998)

□ **Summarizing Information**

Dance to the Music: Think for one minute about a topic. Move around the room until the music stops, and then exchange thoughts.

Four Minutes to Discovery: Take one minute for each of the following four questions. 1) What did I already know about this? 2) What are the key topics we covered? 3) How would I prioritize the key topics? 4) What resources are available?

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Journal Writing: It is always beneficial to ask participants to write for 15 minutes about what they learned.

Crayola Fun: Use brightly colored highlighter pens and post-it notes to mark information.

Mental Maps: Participants draw illustrations or flowcharts that explain their understanding of a topic, and then pair-share to discuss.

Arts and Crafts: Design and create a poster or other creative teaching tool that can be used with students.

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□ **Applying the Knowledge**

"3-2-1": Participants respond individually on cards to the following prompt:

3 specific new tools or strategies that I might use

2 specific things I learned or were reminded about my own teaching/learning styles

1 area where I'd like to focus tomorrow or 1 question that I have

Around the Room and Back Again: Have each participant write down one example or one new application of a topic or teaching strategy identified by the facilitator. Individuals move around the room and share their example with others. As you move, collect as many items as possible to add to your list. Group discussions can then be used to build the lists further and generate strong knowledge.

Case Study: Provide participants with case studies that provide relevant background information. After participants read a case, distribute debriefing questions and divide participants into small groups for discussion.

Professional Literature: Participants read, skim or study professional literature to draw conclusions for their own teaching and learning strategies, to suggest alternatives, or to solve problems.

- **Thinking Creatively, Comparing, Contrasting, Categorizing Synectics**: "Synectics provide an opportunity for creative thinking and help to build analogies around any number of possible topics. It is a freeing activity for many in that it allows us to process information differently and collectively. It can serve as a learning scaffold in a variety of situations, particularly with new groups."
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MUYOM: Make Up Your Own Mind by completing these thoughts—

- "I believe..."
- "I disagree with..."
- "I predict..."
- "I wonder why..."
- "I noticed..."
- "I felt..."
- "The real truth is..."
- "I don't understand..."
- "What if..."

M&Ms, Skittles or JellyBeans: Distribute candy to participants. Have a list of reflection questions prepared and linked to a color of the candy. Each participant answers a question based on the color of the candy they received.

Continuum: Create a continuum representing different views of the issue under discussion. Ask participants to stand at a point on the continuum and explain why they chose to stand there.

Writing in the Round: Prior to a break in the training, provide a writing prompt or question that pulls together several key concepts from the training. Two participants begin the process by taking one or two minutes to write a response to the prompt. The "response

story" is passed around until everyone has had a chance to contribute.

Role Play and Skits: Provide opportunities for participants in small groups to assume different roles or create skits.

Scrapbooking: Save items throughout the process, and then use these to make a group scrapbook at the end.

□ **Evaluating the Learning Experience**

"3-2-1": Participants respond individually on cards to the following prompt:

3 specific new tools or strategies that I might use

2 specific things I learned or were reminded about my own teaching/learning styles

1 area where I'd like to focus tomorrow or 1 question that I have

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Participants answer, "What was good/bad/ugly (upsetting) about what we did today?" Alternative question: "What worked, didn't work, was really uncomfortable?"

Minute Papers: Participants take one minute to jot down one thing they learned and one question they still have. This is good to do before a break or lunch so facilitator can clarify misunderstandings and address questions at the next gathering.

Rubric Reflection: Refer back to the rubric, if one is provided, to evaluate performance.

Really Quick Resume: Create a brief resume listing the skills developed or improved through their experience.

Check it at the Door: Participants check their learning against a list of goals they established at the beginning of the training.

Word Up: Choose one word that best describes their service experience. Make a mini-poster based around this word.

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Sources

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