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Training Technique -2

How to prepare & conduct an interactive session

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How to prepare for & conduct an Interactive Session

Learning Outcomes:-

Knowledge acquired through this module will allow the participants to:-

- Explain stages involved in preparing an Interactive session
- Set objective of a session
- Prepare an Interactive session to fulfil the objective.
- Run an interactive session

Confucius said:-

" I hear and I forget,

I see and I remember

I do and I understand."

Lectures have been used since ancient times as a convenient method of communicating information to a large number of people. Convenience, however, is different from efficiency. Lectures are somewhat like primitive steam engines in that they provide a means of delivery, but one that is not particularly efficient as it proceed on the assumption that the audience are empty vessels to be filled up with knowledge. This is especially true when a lecture is being used to communicate information that people need for performing-on-the-job. With modern technology, we can improve the efficiency of a steam engine considerably to make it a viable option for motive power. The same applies to lectures, because they too can be transformed by making use of a better understanding of how adults learn and by using visual aids.

First we shall concentrate on how to prepare an interactive session. Then we shall discuss how to conduct an interactive session using lecture to initiate the session.

STAGES INVOLVED IN PREPARING AN INTERACTIVE SESSION

We list the process below which we shall follow. We recommend that you prepare the session by developing each of these stages in turn, although you may find that you have to go back to modify earlier stages as you work through the process.

Objective of a session

Entry Behaviour

The Learning Event

Deciding the Content

Planning the Sequence

Planning for Maximum Recall

Structuring the Session Use of Visual Aids

Performance Assessment

Review

Feedback

THE OBJECTIVE OF A INTERACTIVE SEESION

When you are organising an interactive session your purpose is to enable trainees to utilise the knowledge you will share with them, which they require to perform on-the-job. The objective is a logical starting point for it. Use the session as a means of communicating information and to sharing knowledge only. This means that you need to specify two things in the objective – what the trainees can do after the session and how they are going to check that they can. In setting objective, you should phrase them in achievable and measurable terms, such as ‘state’, ‘describe’, ‘list’, ‘explain’ and so on.

ENTRY BEHAVIOUR

Much of the success or failure of your session will depend on the trainees. Consideration of their entry behaviour will enable you to plan a session that is effective for them, enabling the trainees to achieve the objective and preparing them for further learning events. The following points about entry behaviour need to be considered:

- The trainees' existing knowledge and previous learning experience. Remember that no adult is an empty vessel to be passively filled up. Awareness of existing knowledge will help you decide where your session will start, and the assumptions you can make about previous learning. Awareness of previous learning experiences will also alert you to the trainees' likely attitude and willingness to learn.
- Individual differences between trainees. If your session is to be given only to one trainee, you can match your session to the trainee. You would sense the trainee's response to your explanation and adjust accordingly. As the learning group grows in number and individual differences in entry behaviour arise, it becomes more difficult to adjust your session to suit everyone's entry behaviour. Prior knowledge of the trainees should enable you to prepare a suitable and, therefore, a more effective session.

Acceptability of the Information

Acceptance or rejection of the information you are providing in your session is likely to be between two extremes. The information may be accepted if you have explained to the trainees the reason why they need the information and it is new, interesting and does not conflict with their existing knowledge or opinion. Occasionally you may find yourself, possibly unwittingly, focussing more on trainees rejecting or questioning or not responding to your information. This is likely to occur when you are dealing with contentious information, going 'over' or 'under' their heads, or making the session difficult to understand by using a poor structure, inappropriate lecturing technique, or poor visual aids. The essential point to consider is that you are going to deal with a group of trainees, possibly unknown to you, whose approach to learning may not be in accord with your assumptions. The likelihood of acceptance or rejection may depend on your sensitivity to their entry behaviour.

The maturity of the trainees will affect the way you discuss the subject and may also influence how you assess achievement. An assessment measure for younger trainees might be by means of a written test; the same test given to older trainees might be threatening and harmful to their willingness to learn.

Your credibility to the trainees, or your perceived status as the provider of information. Are you likely to be accepted as an 'expert'? They might expose your credibility generally during a session and prior information about entry behaviour should enable you to avoid the worst of the pitfalls awaiting the unwary, insensitive session.

Flexibility

Try to build into your session some degree of flexibility. This is difficult with a large group of trainees, but often encouraging when some interaction is possible. Trainees appreciate relevant anecdotes and similar means of adding variety and interest. Mature trainees may want to participate by sharing experiences, discussing interesting points in relation to their work, and generally wishing to be treated as equals. The more formalised and structured the session becomes, the more difficult you will find it to adapt and cater for these situations, most of which you should encourage. Where possible allow time to check entry behaviour by encouraging trainees to participate and express themselves.

THE LEARNING EVENT

The learning event is the 'live' occasion when you are conducting your session and communicating to your trainees. You will help their learning if they know:

- Where they are going
- How they are going to get there.

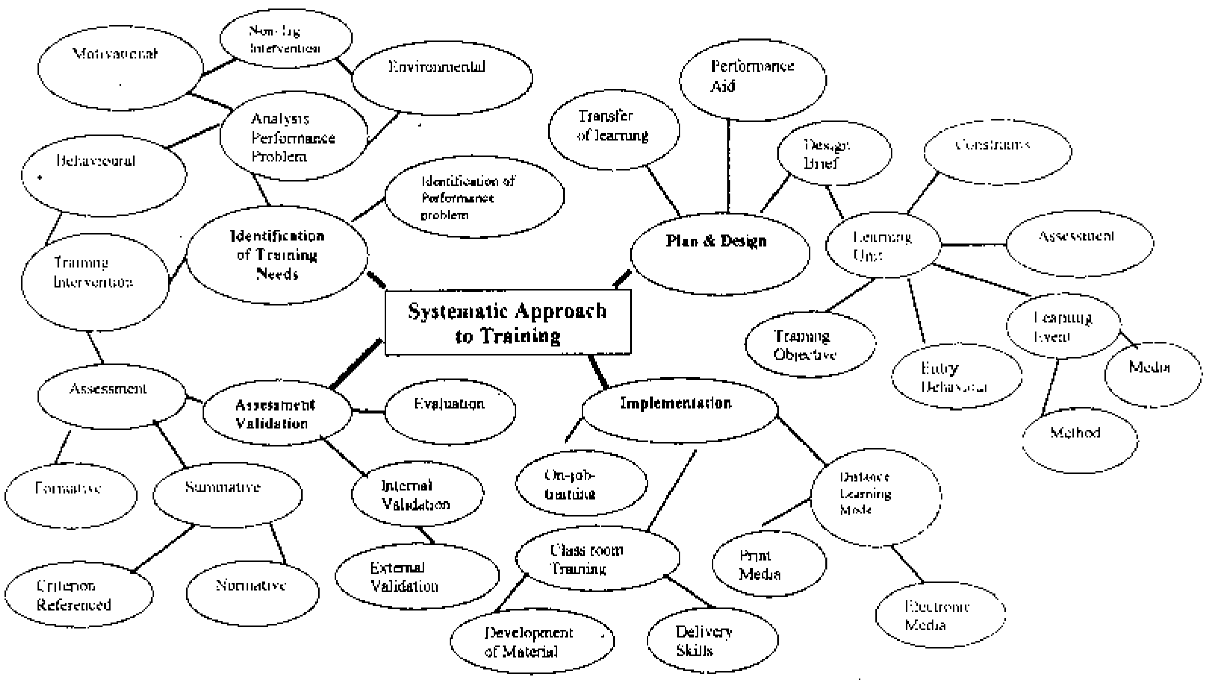
The first point has been covered because the objective of the session tells them where the session is going and what they are expected to achieve when they get there. The second point, how they are going to get there, is dealt with by considering the following aspects of the learning event you are preparing:

- *Deciding the content*
- *Planning the sequence*
- *Planning for maximum recall*
- *Structuring the Session*
- *Use of Visual Aids*
- *Preparing Session' Notes*

DECIDING THE CONTENT

The objective for your session, should give a clear idea of information you need to communicate. However, in such a short statement it will have left unstated the many small items of information that might or might not be included. A useful technique to identify these items is the use of the 'spray diagram'. The diagram is started by stating the central theme of the objective, say ‘Systematic Approach to Training’. Around this central theme subsidiary elements are added until the diagram looks something like Figure 1.

Figure 1: Spray Diagram

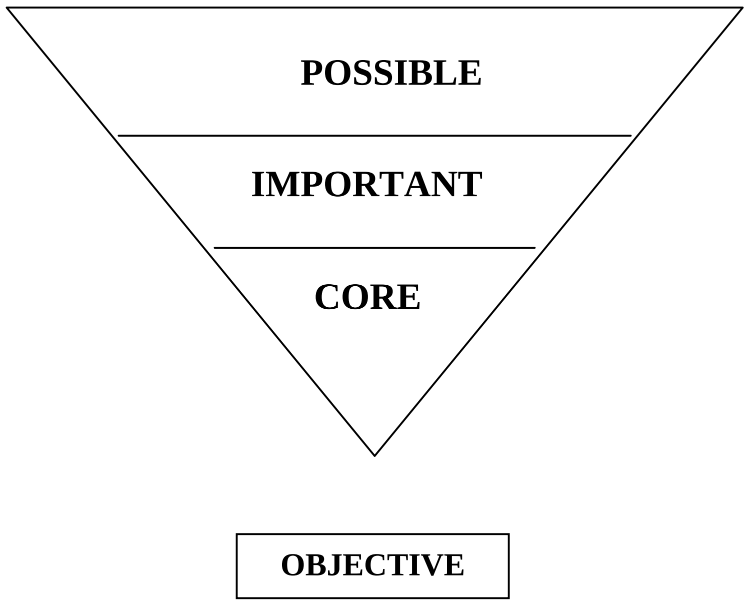


The diagram is far from complete and more subsidiary elements or 'balloons' can be added, each adding a small contribution to the content that might or might not be included in a session on ‘Systematic Approach to Training’. There is no real end to this process and the spray diagram can continue to be expanded until we have included all conceivable items of information. We can then edit the content shown on the spray diagram, by:

- Saying all the items on the diagram **'possible'** be included in your session.
- Reducing these 'could' be items to ones that **'important'** be included.
- Reducing these 'should' items still further to ones that **'core'** be included.

The 'must' items form the content of your session and study of them may lead you to revise the draft objective. We illustrate the process in Figure 2

Figure 2: Deciding Content



PLANNING THE SEQUENCE

Having a logical sequence is important, so we must be careful. What seems logical to the trainer may not seem so to the trainee.

Therefore, we need to consider what is logical from a trainee's point of view - not from the point of view of an expert, a theorist, a practitioner or a researcher. Some guidelines to bear in mind when planning is that people learn by progressing from the:

- **Known to the unknown**
- **Simple to the complex**
- **Concrete to the abstract**

- **Observation to the theory**
- **General to the particular**

So why not change the sequence? Start by looking at the situation from the trainees' point of view - find something to 'switch them on', to justify learning the theory. The sequence shown in Figure 3 takes account of the trainees' entry behaviour and uses a logical build up, free from unnecessary detail.

Figure 3: Sequence

OUR ENERGY

⇩

WHAT IS OUR SOURCE?

⇩

HOW THEY HAVE BEEN PRODUCED

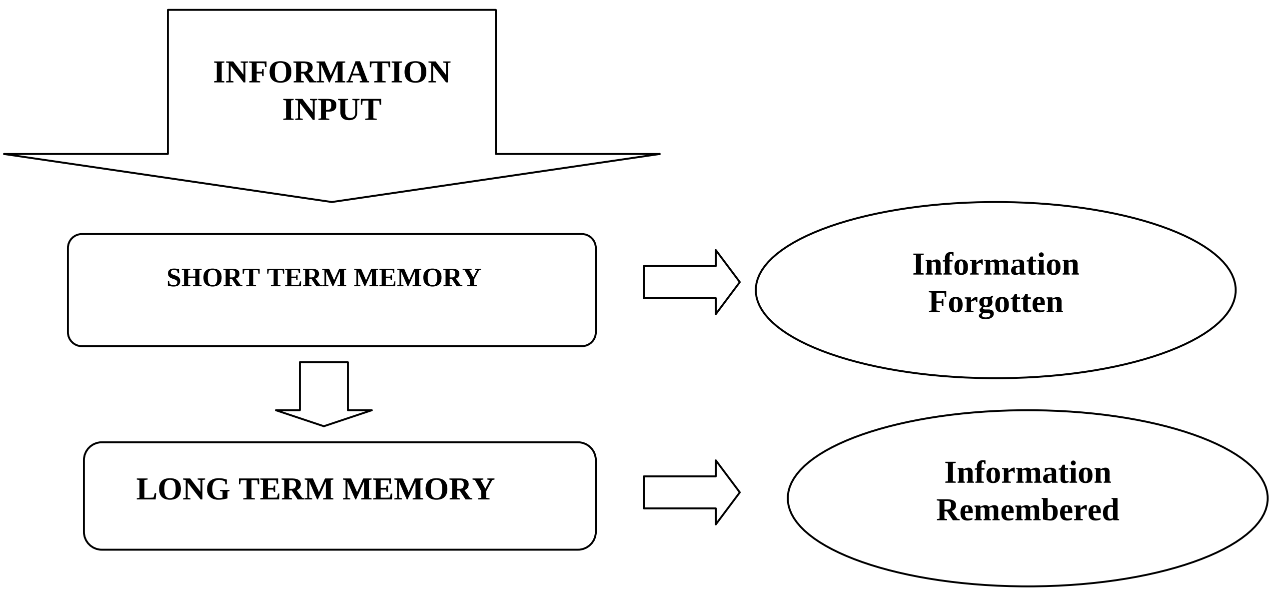
⇩

HOW DOES PHOTOSYNTHESIS TAKE PLACE

PLANNING FOR MAXIMUM RECALL

The purpose of a session is to provide an opportunity for the trainees to acquire information. The objective defines what information they should acquire and later recall - the 'core' items in the content. The problem is to relate the information to the capacity of the trainees to remember it, and to devise ways of helping them to recall it.

Figure 4: Planning for Recall



The communication process in the session uses the trainee's senses of sight and hearing. This input of information is then stored in the trainee's short-term memory, which has a limited capacity and can retain information for perhaps 5-30 seconds. Some information will be passed to the long-term memory, although most of it will be forgotten as illustrated in Fig. 4.

To increase the amount remembered, make full use of the trainee's sensory inputs by:

- Emphasising major points, repeating where possible.
- Using visual aids to provide the second medium of communication for the same points

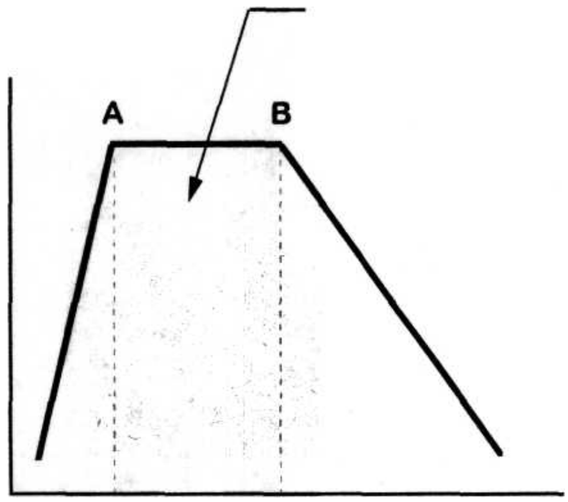
Decide whether the recall of information can be achieved using:

- The trainee's long-term memory. This means that the trainee can recall from memory the information you provided.
- Notes, handouts, and similar sources of information. The trainee can recall information by referring to handouts etc.

Notice how this might change the objective: in one instance we require that the trainee recall from memory, whereas in the other, they can refer to handouts.

The trainee's capacity to recall major points of your session may depend upon when you present them. Figure 5 below illustrates in a general way when the maximum level of recall occurs.

Figure 5: Period of Effectiveness



Period of maximum
effectiveness – 20/30 minutes

Level of Recall

Time available

From Figure 14 we can see that the maximum level of recall occurs after some 20 minutes and can be maintained for about 30 minutes. This suggests that:

- The earlier period is less effective because the trainee's mind has to adjust to possibly an unfamiliar environment. The more suitable this is, the easier it becomes to reach (A).
- The period will be shortened if the trainees are in familiar surroundings.
- The period length depends on how we introduce the session: The better this is, the shorter will be the time to reach full learning recall.

The middle period between (A) and (B) is when learning conditions are most favourable. This is when the major points should be presented. Also, we will lengthen the period if:

- Active participation is encouraged.
- Visual aids and demonstrations are used.
- The trainees know we will give them major points in some form of a handout.
- The learning environment is suitable - at a reasonable temperature, with circulation of fresh air and out of direct sunlight.

Mental and physical fatigue affects the later stages of the session after (B). This results in a decline of information retained. (B) provides the time in the session when we should summarise the major points. Other points to note are:

- The session should be kept as short as possible after (B).
- We can introduce another learning method (for example, a discussion or an exercise or a management game) after (B) to maintain active participation and internalise the learning.

If there are facts and explanations that they must remember, some form of a handout would help the trainees. We can regard this as 'post-session' learning. The session starts the process, and subsequent study aids long term memory storage and recall.

STRUCTURING THE SESSION

The key to an effective session style is to break down the session into its component parts ad use a variety of approaches within each component. This is especially critical when a group of trainees will be attending a series of sessions by the same trainer. The three main parts are the **introduction, body and summary.**

The purpose of the **introduction** is to capture the interest and attention of the trainees. It can also serve to make trainees aware of the trainer's expectations and encourage a positive learning climate. A good introduction is critical to the success of a session.

Tips for Creating an Effective Introduction.

- Review of the session objective.
- Ask rhetorical questions
- Ask for a show of hands in response to a general question.
- Ask a series of questions related to the session topic.
- Use an interesting or famous quotation.
- Relate the topic to previously covered content.

- Use a case study or problem-solving activity.
- Use a videotape or other media.
- Use a training film like Jangal Mahal or flim on RTI
- Show an appropriate cartoon with the overhead or slide projector.
- Make a provocative statement to encourage discussion.
- Give a demonstration.
- Use a game or role play.
- Relate the topic to future work experiences.
- Share a personal experience.
- Relate the topic to a real-life experience.

The trainer can then make a smooth transition into the body of the discussion once the attention of the trainees has been captured with an interesting introduction. It contains the core of the information to be transferred to the trainees.

The purpose of the summary is to draw together the critical information presented and ensure that trainees leave the session with a clear understanding of this information. The summary should be brief and address only main points. There are several techniques which can be used to summarise it:

- Ask the trainees for questions. This gives trainees an opportunity to clarify their understanding of the content.
- Ask the questions for the trainees. Several questions which focus on the main points of the content may be used to summarize the content of the session.
- Use a transparency, slide or flipchart to review the summary points.

Delivering Interactive Session

An effective session can be one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of a trainer's responsibilities. The trainer who is able to sustain participant's interest with an exciting, dynamic delivery using a variety of instructional methods is more likely to be successful in helping trainees reach the learning objectives. The time and effort invested in planning pay off as the trainer and trainees interact, discuss, question and work together.

Questioning Techniques

One of the most effective techniques a trainer can use during a session to help ensure interaction is to ask and encourage questions. Questions can be used to introduce sessions, stimulate interaction throughout the session and summarize content. Involving trainees through questioning helps to maintain their attention, which is critical when topics are complex and sessions are long. Suggestions for using questions include:

- Ask questions of the entire group. Those who wish to volunteer may do so, although the trainer must guard against some trainees dominating the discussion.
- Target a question to a specific trainee. When the audience is relatively small, this technique can be used to involve more of the trainees.
- Use trainee's names when asking and answering questions – this recognition is a powerful motivator.
- Provide positive reinforcement when trainees respond. This praise will help to create a very positive climate and will encourage more trainees to enter into the discussion.
- Repeat trainee's questions and answers to ensure that all trainees hear the discussion.
- When a trainee asks a question, the trainer can answer the question directly, respond by asking the trainees different, related questions or offer the question to the other trainees.

The key in asking and answering questions is to avoid a pattern. If the trainer always asks and answers questions using the same pattern, this critically important teaching skill will have limited impact.

Presentation Techniques

The skilled trainer uses a variety of approaches to involve trainees, maintain interest and avoid a repetitive lecturing style. A number of techniques can be used to make a session more interactive and effective:

- Use the session notes prepared during the planning stage. The notes include reminders and key points in the session introduction, body and summary.
- Open the session with a good introduction designed to capture the interest and attention of the trainees.
- Communicate on a personal level. The trainer should attempt to relate to the trainees during the session.
- Maintain eye contact with the trainees. Eye contact gives the trainer feedback on how well trainees understand the content and helps to communicate a caring attitude on the part of the trainer.
- Exhibit enthusiasm about the topic. Smiling, moving around the room and gesturing with hands and arms project a feeling of energy and excitement.
- Project the voice so that those in the back of the room can hear clearly. For large training halls, use a microphone if necessary, with a long cord that will permit

movement around the room.

- Avoid the use of slang or repetitive words, phrases or gestures that may become distracting with extended use. Avoid the use of fillers (e.g "um", "er", "you know")
- Use a variety of audiovisual media.
- Ask a number of questions and encourage trainees to ask questions.
- Provide positive feedback when trainees ask questions, answer questions or make comments.
- Use trainee's names as often as possible.
- Display a positive use of humour (e.g humorous transparencies or slides, topic-related stories.)
- Make smooth transitions between parts of the session. These transitions should be highlighted in the sessions notes and might include:
    - A brief overview of the next topic.
    - A review of the agenda between topics
    - A change of media
    - An interim summary before a new topic
    - An activity (case study or problem-solving activity)
- Close the session with a brief but powerful summary.

Tips to Reduce Presentation Anxiety

- Avoid eating a big meal before the session. Not only will a full stomach make you drowsy, but it makes it more difficult to move around the room with energy.
- Arrive early to make sure that everything is ready before the first trainee arrives.
- Make sure all of the media equipment is working.
- Locate and check the lighting and temperature controls.
- Decide where the session notes will be placed (e.g on a lectern, desk, table) when they are not being held.
- Have a glass of water available during the session.
- Go for a short walk just before the session.
- Look over your session notes one last time.
- Greet trainees as they enter the room. Welcome them to the session and talk to as many of them as possible.
- Take a few deep breaths to relax before beginning the session.

USE OF VISUAL AIDS

Visual Aids are an essential feature of effective communication. Most sessions are improved by using visual aids that we develop as part of preparation for a session. Generally, they are worth using to help trainees learn the major points of the session; they should:

Attract and Hold Attention

When trainees are listening passively, their attention is easily distracted. An interesting visual aid can attract and hold attention.

Explain Words

If they do not understand a critical word in a sentence, or if it is misunderstood, not only does the sentence become useless, we weaken the trainee's belief in the prospect of success.

Illustrate Relationships/Concepts

The saying 'A picture tells a thousand words' holds true.

Consolidate Learning

The key points of a session can be presented on an overhead projector or recorded on a flipchart or chalkboard.

Research has shown that we take in more information from the sense of sight than we do from listening, in the ratio of something like:

75% Sight

25% Hearing and other senses

Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that other studies have shown that sessions using visual aids are far more effective for understanding and recall than sessions that do not use visual aids.

Some further observations about visual aids:

- They should be simple
- Where possible use pictures and diagrams rather than many words.
- Use colour to give contrast to different major points.
- Where possible prepare visual aids before the session (e.g. overhead projector transparencies and flipcharts) Do not waste valuable learning time during the session.
- Use 'formal' visuals (e.g. an overhead projector) for pre-prepared material, and use chalkboards and flipcharts for 'informal' visuals developed during the session.
- Ensure all major points of the session are presented visually and orally.

PREPARING NOTES

There is no standard format for the notes needed to have a session. Some trainers rely on detailed notes - and many rarely look at them. Some use papers or cards with lists of topic headings as prompts; others rely on their visual aids and use them as prompts; others do not use notes, and however well they conduct the session one might ask whether their session would have been better if they had used them. Some general observations about session notes:

- They are there to help you and are therefore personal to you.
- They should be kept as simple as possible.
- They should be easy to read - you might be some distance away from your notes.
- Use colour to ensure we do not miss major points.
- Use sketches to indicate where a visual aid is to be used
- Include a time schedule.

Although your session notes are personal to you, there may be occasions when colleagues have to conduct similar sessions and would probably appreciate reference to your notes.

SUMMARY

This is suggested that you use the following procedure to prepare the interactive session:

- Describe in general terms what you believe the trainees need to know.
- Develop a 'spray diagram' to show the possible extent of the content of the session.
- Carefully edit the spray diagram to eliminate all points that are not essential to the content of the session.
- List the major points of the session - the points the trainees must be able to recall.
- Alongside this list, note how you intend to assess whether they have learned the point.
- Review the content, taking a critical look at your list of major points, particularly ones that we cannot assess. Ask yourself whether we must include them.
- Write the objective for the session.
- Briefly describe the entry behaviour of your trainees. This might be based on precise knowledge, or on certain assumptions that you must make.
- Does the entry behaviour affect the objective? Review the objective, if necessary.
- Decide the most appropriate structure for the session. Do this by relating the objective, the content, the entry behaviour, and how you propose to assess attainment.

- Structure the content of the session, taking into account the:
    - Objective
    - Analysis of the spray diagram
    - Likely entry behaviour
    - Session structure you consider the most suitable
    - Time available
- Plan your visual aids in relation to the structure of the session. Decide the 'formal' aids you will prepare beforehand, and the 'informal' ones that will be evolved during the session.
- Review the structure of the content to ensure that all main points are suitably presented in visual form.
- Prepare your session notes and visual aids.
- Run through the session mentally to check sequence and logic. Adjust where necessary.
- Check class room and the equipment you intend to use.

FEEDBACK

Trainers plan and implement sessions for the benefit of their trainees. However, the trainers themselves are also presented with a learning opportunity. At the end of a session you can ask yourself many questions, ponder over earlier decisions you made, and generally reflect on the changes you would make if asked to do the same session again.

The following questions suggest areas for you to consider:

- Was the objective appropriate?
- Was the objective achieved?
- Did you assess the entry behaviour of the trainees correctly?
- How did the content relate to the objective and trainees' learning capabilities?
- Was the sequence appropriate?
- Did you choose the right structure?
- Did you ask questions?
- Were the questions of high or low order?
- Did you allow sufficient time to answer questions?
- Did you fit the major points of the session into the best learning period?
- Did you communicate the major points of the session visually and orally?
- Were your visual aids appropriate to emphasising the major points of the session?
- Did the trainees appear to learn from your visual aids?

- Was your introduction appropriate?
- Did you summarise the main points of the session?
- How was your timing in relation to your planning?
- Did you feel comfortable with the timing and content of the session?
- Did the method of assessing performance suit the trainees?
- Was the assessment of performance valid in relation to the purpose of the session?

A checklist is provided for as ready reference.

Planning

- Identify topic
- Prepare a spray diagram.
- Edit spray diagram to identify 'core' items
- Express must items as an objective
- Consider entry behaviour of trainees
- Consider size of group
- Decide structure to be used
- Consider visual aid hardware available
- Prepare formal visual presentation of major points
- Consider informal visual aids
- Decide when to invite questions
- Decide timing
- Decide how learning performance is to be assessed
- Write session notes
- Check timing
- Check accommodation
- Check equipment

Introduction

- Gain attention/rapport
- Explain purpose/reason for learning about topic
- State objective
- Link to entry behaviour
- State participation
- Outline content and structure

- State finish time

Development

- Modulate voice to suit size of group
- Avoid reading session notes
- Use language appropriate to trainees
- Keep check of estimated timing
- Give relevant examples to support major points
- Maintain eye contact
- Present visual aids only when needed
- Avoid reading visual presentation word for word
- Assess trainee's reaction and adjust if necessary
- Assist learning by use of informal visual aids
- Check trainee's understanding where appropriate
- Where possible invite trainee's participation

Summary

- Restate purpose/reason for learning about topic
- Restate objective
- Review content and major points
- Invite final questions
- Can out performance assessment where appropriate
- Give feedback
- Close with thanks