

20

A brief guide to preparing for training and facilitating

• Introduction

This section of the *Notes* provides training materials for participatory learning. Each issue focuses on a different topic. This article examines the preparations that you, the trainer or facilitator, should consider before initiating a training session. It outlines how to plan and schedule a training session.

• Basic preparations

The first thing to prepare is yourself. Being a facilitator is not easy. Being clear about your position and responsibilities early on in your preparations will help to prevent any inappropriate interpretation of your role as a trainer (see Box 1).

Objectives of training

Before you begin, you must be clear about your objectives. Why are you going to do a training? Who are you being asked to train? What are the main themes you hope to communicate in your training? You will need to formulate a specific objective for the workshop, based on the subject matter. Writing it down in a single sentence will help you to focus and select materials.

The purpose of all training is to build skills and encourage behavioural and attitudinal changes in participants. So it is essential that your specific objective is something that can be measured or evaluated. There are usually two kinds of objectives that can be identified. The first kind describes general objectives: to understand, to know, to recognise. These kind of objectives reflect the process of learning but are difficult to evaluate.

BOX 1

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TRAINER

- Reflect back to the group their need to take responsibility for their own learning process.
- Remember not to meet your own emotional needs while training (such as seeking attention or respect or making friends).
- Being a facilitator does not qualify you as a psychotherapist. Take great care when participants reach out to you, either directly or indirectly, with their emotional needs.
- It is essential that the group understands what you are doing with them. It is their right to hold you accountable for what you do.

The second kind of objectives are more specific and deal with the skills that participants can learn e.g. to write, to plan, to measure etc. An objective that says “the trainees will understand the principles of PLA” is important but vague. Compare this with “the trainees will be able to plan their own use of participatory methods in their fieldwork”. This can be assessed and evaluated much more easily by both participants and outsiders.

Knowing the participants

No training programme should proceed until you are clear about who you are training. Try to find out:

- How many people will be present?
- Why are they attending, is it their own choice or have they been instructed to attend?
- What are their hopes and expectations?
- What are their fears and concerns?
- What range of experience, discipline, age, gender, status is likely to be represented?
- Do they have any biases towards or against your organisation? Who may feel threatened by the training and why?

- What prior knowledge might they have about the subject matter of the training?

Remember to be sensitive to participants' religious or cultural needs. These may have implications for the timing of sessions and meals, especially if the workshop coincides with a religious festival.

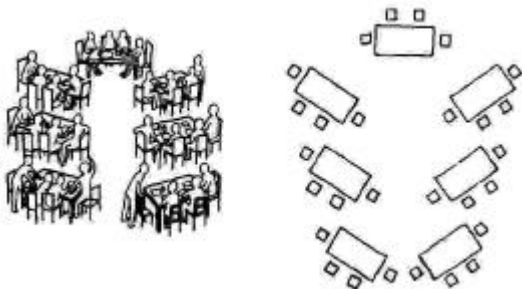
Choice of venue and rooms

You may not be able to plan your training venue or times, but be aware how these affect people's ability to learn. If possible, visit the training site before the participants arrive and set up your materials. Check whether the room will suit the type of session you have planned.

Try to identify potential sources of distraction, both to yourself and your trainees. Walk around the room to check participants will be able to see, hear and be heard. Allow time to set up the training materials and teaching aids that you will use. Check that you have all the materials you need and that any audio-visual equipment is working. Organisation will make the session proceed more smoothly and will give you extra confidence.

Seating arrangements

Seating arrangements have a big influence on the session. Many people are used to sitting in rows, knowing they can daydream or 'hide' in the audience. To increase interactions between trainees, try arranging the chairs in a circle, a semi-circle or a 'U' shape. If you have a small number of trainees, you could all sit around a table. If you have a lot of group work planned, the banquet or fish bone style of seating works best. It limits disruption as you shift from presentation to small group work.



Be creative with seating arrangements and explain to the participants why they are important!

Timing of sessions

People cannot concentrate for long periods if there is little variation in the style of the presentation. Twenty minutes is about the maximum so you should enrich presentations with visual materials, exercises, stories, jokes or breaks. If there is to be no active participation, you will need to carefully plan lecture-based presentations.



The time of day has a big effect on how well people respond to different kinds of learning approaches. People can generally concentrate better in the mornings. After lunch, participants will be tired, slower to respond and less able to concentrate. You will, therefore, need to make sessions more lively: the more participation the better. Avoid lecturing or slide presentations. It is better to begin with some kind of energiser game, then introduce longer, interactive exercises which allow participants to move around and discuss issues or practise skills amongst themselves.

Pace and content of sessions

It is important to structure each session carefully. Begin by thinking about the trainees:

- How much do they already know?
- What do they need to learn?
- How much time do you have to cover the material?

To help in the selection of material, think about what the participants *must* know, *should* know and *could* know.

Most of us want to fit in lots of information, especially if it is a subject we know well. But too much detail covered too quickly will hinder the success of the presentation. You can only expect participants to remember a few key points. For a 30-minute talk you should select no more than five main points. The rest is detail to keep everyone interested.

The session should then be structured around the key points you think they **MUST** know by the end of the training session. Although it may seem unnecessary to you, always repeat the central ideas. *Repetition reinforces memory.*

If you wish to communicate five main points to the group, save the most important point until last. Begin by capturing the interest of the group, and then give a taste of what is to come. Deliver the detailed message in the main body of the presentation and build up to the most important point. Then summarise everything by restating the purpose and major points.

• **You as a performer**

To train well is to give a good performance. You will need to pay attention to the way you present yourself, your style of performance and the learning environment. The message you deliver is comprised of three components: the words, the tone of your voice and your body language (see Box 2). People will grasp your main message if you *keep it simple* and *avoid jargon*.

BOX 2 BODY LANGUAGE

- Look at the group and try not to stare at your notes. Make eye contact with the whole group. While looking you can also assess the level of interest by people's reactions;
- Smile - even if you are nervous or apprehensive. It will put your audience more at ease;
- Avoid placing barriers between yourself and the trainees. Don't hide behind lecterns or desks. Crossed arms or legs are symbolic barriers, too. Be open in your posture, particularly when participants are giving feedback.



Articulation and expression

More than 50 % of the message is conveyed by how you say the words. Guidelines for helping you to articulate your thoughts include:

- Do not be afraid of pauses. Pause after your key points to allow the group to absorb them. Look at your trainees and you will be able to tell whether they have understood;
- Act a little. Use a wide range of vocal tone and pitch to strengthen expression and emphasis in your message;
- Speak clearly, articulate words carefully and do not let them run together; and,
- Speak up by breathing deeply but do not shout. Both a loud and a quiet voice can add emphasis or drama to a statement.

BOX 3 TRAINER'S CHECKLIST

- Are you clear about the overall training objectives?
- What are the main characteristics of the likely participants?
- Have you adapted your schedule to the time of year when the training workshop is held?
- Are you clear about the main points that you wish to communicate to participants?
- Are you aware of your style of intonation, articulation and expression?
- Have you prepared the sessions to include an introduction, main section and summary?
- Have you checked all the electrical equipment you will use?
- Are the room and seating arrangements suitable for your session?
- Have you prepared all the audiovisual aids that you will require, without overdoing it?

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Next issue: Methods of training.