

Active Learning Strategies

Right Brain Reports—Let learners work in small groups to create informational reports to present to the large group. Instead of a verbal report on the information, have learners use a song, rap, poem, dance, movement, drama, art, sculpture, pantomime, skit, metaphor, or improvisation, to name a few.

Metaphor Magic—Ask the whole group to list five or six household objects from any room, including the garage. Print these in list format down one side of a chart paper/overhead. Direct the group to state five or six concepts they've learned. Print this down the other side of the chart/transparency. Print this across the top of another chart paper/transparency: *[Concept] is like a [household item] because...* Have learners work in small groups to finish the sentence, using both lists of concepts and objects. They are to create three metaphors using one concept and one object from the lists.

Stand, Walk, Talk—Balance passive seat and listening time with active standing, walking, and talking. Learners can form standing groups while reviewing material. They can use activities like Gallery Walk or Walkabout to add more movement.

Walkabout-- Direct participants to form standing pairs or triads. Tell them they are going to do a Walkabout in which they walk around the room, down the hall, or outside and back. On the first half of the journey, one person will talk and the other will listen. On the second half of the journey, the listener becomes the talker. Tell learners they will have 10 minutes total. They are to talk about the most important facts they remember from the material. Walk and observe the small groups as they do the Walkabout, or join in and listen. Process the activity by asking the whole group what the most valuable take-away from the activity was.

Gallery Walk—Create topic-related questions, sentences to complete, or concepts, one per chart paper, and print them in large dark lettering so they are visible from at least 4-6 feet away. Some examples for an opening Gallery Walk include:

- One fact I already know about this topic.
- One take-away I want from this training.
- One question I want answered.
- How I plan to use what I learn.

Some examples for a closing Gallery Walk include:

- What is a creative way you would use this concept?
- How does this concept link with what you already know?
- List ways you can apply what you've learned.

Tell learners they will work individually on this activity. Direct them to move from chart to chart, writing their responses on the charts. When all have finished, tell learners to take a walk around the gallery, reading the charts and observing any interesting patterns, surprising

comments, etc. Have them report their observations to their table groups. Give the whole group about three minutes to write on as many charts as they can. Play upbeat music during this time if possible.

Brainstorming Time—Encourage learners to work collaboratively whenever possible to create lots of ways to solve problems, provide solutions, answer questions, collect facts, etc.

More Than One Right Answer—Expect learners to think of more than one right answer to any question you ask. Shout Outs are perfect for this. (The participants don't actually have to shout; they can use normal voices as per your directions!)

Shout Outs—(1) Shout out a number between one and ten. Now tell me (state the number) facts you already know about the topic; (2) Shout out six things you want to learn from this session; (3) Tell me three topic-related issues that are really important to you right now; (4) Shout out four ways you can use the information we've covered so far; (5) With the person next to you, come up with a question related to what you've been learning. Let's hear three of those questions; (6) Think of a word or phrase that summarizes what you've learned so far. On the count of three, everyone shout out his/her word; (7) Ask the group a question. Then say: We need five answers to this question; (8) Tell me ten things you have learned today that you didn't know before; (9) Let's hear seven ways that you can use what you've learned today; (10) Post a list of important topic-related words or terms. Say: When I point to the word, everyone shout it out. Then turn to the person next to you and take turns defining the word for each other.

Learner-Created Challenges—Have learners create their own questions, quizzes, and games. Have them exchange games with the other groups, challenge each other with their own game-show questions and handmade quizzes. Place Your Order or Grab That Spoon are good examples.

Place Your Order—This is a review game in which participants work together to put a series of cards in the correct order. Each card describes a specific step in a topic-related procedure (e.g. steps to boot up a computer, filling in a safety report, forming effective teams). Provide learners with index cards from which to make card sets. Have each group make a card set and answer key. Have them mix up the cards. Each group should be doing a different set of procedures/steps. If the game is competitive, make sure you have ample small prizes for the winners and for consolation prizes for everyone else. Set the time limit for exchanging and putting the cards in the correct order. Check the card set against the answer key.

Grab That Spoon—Learners will need pens/pencils and index cards (one of each item per person) and plastic spoons (one for each group). Put the plastic spoon in reach of all learners. Have each learner write a review question and answer on an index card, as well as a point value. (i.e. 1-point for a yes/no question; 3 points for a challenging question). One person volunteers to be the first reader. The reader may not grab the spoon. The reader reads aloud

the question. The first group member to grab the spoon answers the question. If correct, he gets points. If not, he loses points. Group members take turns reading being the reader.

Make It Outrageous—Ask yourself, What is the most outrageous thing I could do to get this point across? Or, What is the most outrageous thing I could have my learners do so that they remember this forever? Then do that thing.

Take a Minute—Choose sixty-second activities that specifically ask learners to link what they are learning to what they already know, such as Connections.

Connections—(1) Introduce yourself to the person in front of or behind you and ask your new acquaintance to tell you three things s/he already knows about the topic; (2) Quickly introduce yourself to someone seated near you and tell him what you want to learn in the session and one fact you already know about the topic; (3) Stand and find one person in the room that you don't know yet. Introduce yourself to this person and ask him what he wants to be able to do with what he learns in the session.

Lecture the Links—During instruction, be sure to point out how the new information fits with what learners already know about the topic.

Use Games—Choose a game format, substitute your own content combined with what learners already know, and give them time to review new and old information by playing the game.

Learner-Created Games—Hand the game making over to your learners.

Talk About It—Always allow time for learners to talk about what they are learning and how it fits with what they already know.

Real Life Challenges—Give learners real-life problems to solve. Assign different challenges to separate small groups and have them report their solutions to the larger group. Or have small groups to discuss actual problems they have encountered, write them down, and exchange them with other groups. Each group can then brainstorm solutions and report them to the larger group.

Demonstrations—Most training participants hate role plays, but demonstrations don't have that negative connotation. Give learners time to demonstrate how they could use their new information. In small groups, have them create demonstrations in the form of skits, chart drawings, lists, presentations, sculptures, news reports, interviews, and so on.

Improvisation—This activity allows learners to model or use new concepts in a simulated, real-life, but unscripted, situation. In it, you describe a real-life scene and ask for volunteers to take different parts of the action. You can stop it at any time to process what is happening, change characters, or step into the action yourself.

Graffiti Wall—This is a large space covered with flip chart paper where learners can write ideas, questions, reactions, or comments. Learners can also brainstorm and write ways to use the information they have learned.

Job Shadowing—If possible, allow time for learners to observe how the training concepts and skills are being applied by shadowing someone who is actually using them.

Guest Speakers—Invite someone to speak who is using the skills you are teaching. Allow time for learners to ask questions and engage in dialogue with the speaker.

Action Plans—Give learners time near the end of training to think, talk, and write about what they are going to do with the information they have learned. Use Tickets Out or Action Plans to do this.

Tickets Out—Have pens/pencils, markers, index cards, blank typing paper, Post-it notes, wall charts, and a small bag or box available. (1) Hang flip chart paper labeled “WOW!” near the door. Say: On a Post-it note, write the most important thing you’ve learned so far, and stick the note on the WOW chart on your way out the door; (2) Hang flip chart paper labeled “How About?” near the door. Say: On a Post-it note, write a question you want answered and stick it on the How About chart on your way out the door; (3) Stand by the training room door and say: On an index card, write down three main ideas from the material we’ve covered, and hand the card to me on your way out the door; (4) Have a small, colorful bag or box at each table group. Say: On an index card, write a one-sentence opinion about an issue related to what you’ve learned, and drop it in the box/bag before you leave; (5) Place a chair by the door. Post a chart where everyone can see it with the words “Glow and Grow” on it. Say: Please take a blank sheet of typing paper and write the words “Glow and Grow” on it. A Glow is something that worked well for you in the training. A Grow is a question you want answered or a suggestion to make the training better. Please write your responses and place the paper on the chair by the door as you leave.

Action Plans—(1) Turn to the person next to you and finish this sentence: “I plan to...” by telling this person what you plan to do with what you learned today; (2) On an index card, jot down two things you are going to do with this new information. Now compare your card with a neighbor’s to see whether your action plans are the same or different; (3) Tape one or two wall charts close to the door. Print the words “Action Plans” in large bold letters. Say: On a Post-it note, write these three words: “I plan to...” Now finish the sentence by writing what you plan to do with what you’ve learned here today. On your way out the door, stick your Action Plan to the wall chart by the door; (4) Have the whole group stand and do a ball toss. Whoever catches the ball states her action plan and then tosses the ball to someone else; (5) On the front of a postcard, write what you plan to do with what you learned today, and some words of encouragement for yourself. On the back of the card, legibly print your name and mailing address. On your way out the door, please give the card to me. In two weeks, I will mail it back to you to remind you of the commitment to action you made here today.

Techniques from Training from the Back of the Room by Sharon L. Bowman

Pre-Training Activities

Interview an Expert –Two weeks prior to the training, find someone who knows a lot about this topic. Conduct a short interview in which you ask this person what s/he knows, what is important to learn, and some questions you need to ask during training. Write a short summary of your interview and be ready to present it during the training.

Web Hunt – *Before the training, look over the (provided) list of topic-related concepts, phrases, and words. Choose two or three phrases from the list and do a Web Hunt (Internet search). Jot down what you learned from the Web Hunt and be ready to share this with others in the training.*

Scavenger Hunt – Create a list of 5-10 unusual, topic-related items, such as facts, objects, concepts, questions, books, articles, etc. Send out printed instructions that read: *How many Scavenger Hunt items can you find? Find as many as you can before the training. Record the date you find the item or the results asked for.*

Fast Pass Activities

Dot Voting – Print and post the learning outcomes on large wall charts that are accessible to all. Have sheets of colored dots available at each table. Post these instructions on the PPT or other chart: *After reading this, please take two colored dots from the tables, read the learning outcomes on the wall charts, and put the dots beside the two outcomes that are most important to you. Be ready to explain your choices.*

Post It- Before the training, create a wall chart titled “What’s In It For Me?” and hang it on the wall. Post the following instructions on the PPT or wall chart: *After reading this, take a sticky note and write what you want to learn from today’s training. Post your note on the WIIFM chart on the wall. You will revisit this chart at the end of the training to assess what you learned.*

Start Up Activities

Wall Writing – In large, readable print, title each of a number of wall charts with concepts from the training. Hang the charts at various accessible places on all walls of the room. Post the following on a PPT or wall chart: *After reading this, pair up with another learner, take a marker, and go to a wall chart. Discuss and agree on what you already know about that concept and print it on the chart. Do the same with the other charts.* After three minutes, stop the chart writing and direct learners to walk around and read the charts before sitting down. Facilitate a whole-group discussion by asking:

- *What new facts did you learn from the charts?*
- *What facts were repeated on a number of charts?*
- *What facts did you think might not be accurate?*
- *What concepts do you want to learn more about?*
- *What else did you learn from Wall Writing?*

Card Carousel – Do the following: Before the training, create a set of index cards for each table group (4-7 cards per group, depending on the group size). On each card print one concept that will be covered during the training. Table groups pass out the cards, one card to each group member. Individuals read their respective cards, then turn the cards over and write a related concept, phrase, fact, idea, or question on the back. Participants pass their cards to the right. On the new cards, each person repeats the same process. They pass the cards again until each person has written on at least three cards. When the time ends, learners keep the cards they have. When you cover that concept during the training, stop and ask for a few volunteers to read aloud some of the responses that learners wrote on the concept cards.

Teaching Concepts

Stand, Stretch, Speak – Give learners these instructions: *We are going to take a one-minute, topic-related stretch break to get more oxygen to our brains. Please stand up and form a pair, making sure no one is left out. Decide which of you will be the Stretcher, and which one is the Mirror. If you are the Stretcher, you will lead a stretch. If you are the Mirror, you will copy that stretch. While you both stretch, the Stretcher summarizes what s/he has learned so far. Switch roles and repeat the process one more time. When you have finished the two stretches, thank your stretching partner and have a seat.*

Beat the Clock – Stop lecturing and say: You now have sixty seconds to quickly write down the ten most important facts you've just learned about the topic. The time starts now. After sixty seconds are up, tell learners to stop writing and ask if anyone was able to beat the clock and write ten facts in one minute. If someone did, ask that person to read his/her list to the group. S/he receives a round of applause.

Concrete Practice

One-Legged Teach-Back – Learners form standing groups of 3-5 people per group. Each learner summarizes what s/he has learned, but has to do it while standing on one leg.

Improv Teach-Back – Explain to learners what an Improv Teach-Back is (a jazzed up role play) and that, as a whole group, they will need to have 8 Teach-Backs done in two minutes. This means that each Teach-Back should last between 10-15 seconds. Choose a timer who will signal when 15 seconds are up. One volunteer begins the activity by standing and talking about what s/he has learned so far. While talking, s/he can be as dramatic as s/he wishes, using gestures and voice tone to emphasize the information and add humor to it. In the middle of a sentence or whenever the timer signals that 15 seconds have passed, s/he abruptly stops speaking and calls out another learner's name. The next participant stands and immediately picks up where the first participant left off. After 15 seconds, s/he stops and calls out another learner's name. The rounds continue until the number of Improv Teach-Backs has been reached within the time limits, or until the two minutes are up.