

HOW TO...

DESIGN BITE-SIZE TRAINING

It may be tempting to think that designing bite-size training (sessions lasting 2 hours or less) is easier than designing a full day workshop, but it isn't. Many sessions that are described as bite-size training are simply a meeting: a presentation with a discussion or short group exercise thrown in and questions at the end.

When designing bite-size training, you need to include all the elements of a 'proper' workshop, but keep things condensed. This doesn't simply mean cutting the time down though – it means using the time more creatively. The biggest mistake people make when designing bite-size training is trying to cover too much and then completely under-estimating the time needed to do the material justice. This inevitably leads to the trainer rushing through the material, skipping exercises and not allowing time for reflection. As a result, delegates come away feeling that they've been on a whirl-wind tour, but can't tell you what they did.

It can end up being a waste of everyone's time. Instead of offering better value, it offers less as nothing of value has been gained from those couple of hours. Here are some top tips to help you design bite-size training that packs a punch.

1. **Make a decision** - When designing a bite-size session you need to limit what you cover. You can't deliver 'performance management' in 90 minutes, but you CAN deliver how to raise a performance issue. Alternatively, you can give an overview of what performance management is about, as long as you realise that this will simply be an 'increasing awareness' session.
2. **Follow MASTER** - Even in a bite-size session, structure your training as you would a longer workshop: **M**indset, **A**cquire information, **S**ift for meaning, **T**rigger the memory, **E**xhibit the learning and **R**evise what has been learned.
3. **Choose your ice-breaker carefully** - In a bite-size session, every minute needs to count. Rather than cutting the ice-breaker exercise, make sure it links directly to the topic being covered so adds value beyond meeting social needs.
4. **Choose exercises with multiple learning points** - You may only have time to run 2 or 3 exercises, so if you can run an activity once to make certain learning points, and then review it 15 minutes later with a different focus, you can get two pieces of learning from one activity. For example, you may be able to run an exercise to look at the stages of team work and later in the session, reflect on the exercise but focusing on effective (or ineffective) communication.

5. **Be precise** - When writing your Session Leader's Guide be clear about what people should do, and the focus discussions should have. You don't have time to discuss things 'in general' and can't risk an activity going off on a tangent. If (for example) you're discussing characteristics of effective teams, instead of asking a broad question, be more specific. Ask "How do effective teams communicate?" or "How are highly effective teams organised?"
6. **Think about practicalities** - Exercises that take a long time to set up, or that require a lot of organisation, eat into your limited time. It doesn't mean you shouldn't use them – but if you do allow the right amount of time for people to move into different rooms, or collect (and put away) equipment. The exercise may only take 15 minutes, but if debrief AND organisation take another 20, you must put this in the Session Leader's Guide. Generally, stick to simple exercises.
7. **Keep the whole thing simple** - Don't over-complicate the session. If you need lots of tech, equipment, guest speakers or are relying on WiFi it can take you longer to set up than run. Focus on the learning in the group rather than the 'show'. Where possible, write the session so it can be run anytime, anywhere, with minimal set up.
8. **Use additional resources** - Accept that you can't cover absolutely everything that you would like to and focus your session on the key messages. It's OK to touch on some subjects and then direct people to additional resources so that they can find out more if they want to after the session.
9. **Keep it active** - A bite-size session without activities is a presentation/meeting. Aim to include an activity every 15 minutes or so. Not only does it keep people alert and raise energy levels, but it also helps people to learn for themselves (making it more meaningful) and helps it to stick in their mind, meaning they are more likely to remember it.
10. **Summarise and Review** - Even if your session is just 90 minutes long, make sure that you build in 10 minutes for summary and review. Allow delegates to reflect on what they have learned, and ask them how they will apply the learning. Of course, this doesn't guarantee transfer to the workplace, but it makes it more likely than if you just end the session with "Any Questions?"