

HOW TO...

DESIGN TECHNICAL TRAINING

The main challenge in technical training is that by nature, it's fairly prescriptive. It will often be a precursor to gaining an accreditation; typically Microsoft, Cisco and VMWare training. The same applies if designing training for specific manufacturing, data-entry or engineering processes. So, it's necessary to follow the instructor manual, use the set material and complete the set exercises. The main problem with this is that it can feel a little bit dry and it also can feel as if we're just reading from the manual or following a process.

Of course, you may be designing technical training for your own in-house processes so need to start from scratch.

Good technical training needs to come alive, as well as being thorough, so here are our top tips for designing technical training that does just that.

1. **Put the training into context** - Help people to see how the training will benefit them in their everyday work and career development. If you just dive in with the detail, people don't know where they're going or why. This can impact on the teaching time and also transfer of learning, as the trainer will be having to 'backtrack' much of the time.
2. **Start with a demonstration of the whole thing** - Provide an illustration of what people will be able to do when they have completed the training. Having a clear picture of the end result in mind helps people to focus and stay on track when they are learning a new skill/process.
3. **Break it down** - Deliver the training in chunks. Teach people bit-by-bit so they can go at their own pace and get lots of small successes.
4. **Use the loop; Show-Explain-Talk through-Practice alone** - First show everyone what they need to do, then explain what you are doing and why. Then the instructor should guide delegates through the steps before finally allowing them to try on their own (or with a partner).
5. **Allow lots of time to practice** - People learn at different rates and sometimes there will be technical problems. The trainer cannot coach everyone unless time is built in for this. Engage those who are doing well by using any problems as problem-solving or coaching opportunities. This stretches their own learning whilst keeping the group together.
6. **Test your exercises** - Unlike soft-skills training, where a good facilitator can steer an activity and find good learning points even if things don't go to plan, technical exercises have to work.
7. **Build in some 'stretch' exercises for those who pick things up quickly** - Keeping the fast learners engaged is just as important as making sure those who struggle reach basic competence.

8. **Use different training methods** - An IT course doesn't have to take place entirely in front of the PC. A manufacturing process doesn't need to happen solely at the machine. Get people away from the screen/equipment by including discussions, quizzes and case studies. Get them to create their own flow-charts and 'How to' Guides to tap into other learning styles, encourage group learning and check understanding.
9. **Cover everything** - If a course leads to a qualification, then check and double check that everything is covered and that detailed notes are provided for delegates to review. Don't expect them to rely on their own notes (although of course, these can be useful as a supplement).
10. **Build in a knowledge check as well as a skills check** - Unless skills are applied quickly, delegates will quickly forget. Building in a knowledge check means they are more likely to be able to retrieve the information they need at a later date than if they are relying solely on memory.

Remember that technical training doesn't have to be dull. Encourage the trainer to use music, discussion, humour and tell stories, use 'amusing' names in case studies and get the whole group involved in learning. The more people remember the event, the more they will remember the learning.