

Bag It!

A Quick and Remarkably Easy Instructional Design Process.

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Note: This article “uses the thing to teach the thing,” that is, it uses the 4 Cs instructional design process while it teaches you how to use this process. To get the most from this article, you are encouraged to participate in the activities along the way. You will learn more, and be able to apply what you learn, because of your participation. Give yourself about 30 minutes to read the article and do the activities - you will be glad you did!

CONNECTIONS

One-Minute Connection: Fast Pass

What are the first ideas that come to your mind when you think of the words “instructional design?” Write your thoughts in this box:

When you create a new “learning experience,” that is, a class, lesson, workshop, presentation, or training, which sentence best describes what you do? Circle one, or write in your own answer:

- A. I just put it all together without any formal plan.
- B. I use an instructional design model I was taught.
- C. I make up my own instructional design plan and use it.
- D. Someone else has done the design; I just teach the material.
- E. I haven’t a clue - I just do it and have never thought much about it.
- F. Another answer: _____

Whatever you think instructional design is, and however you approach it, you are probably always on the lookout for easier, quicker, and more effective ways to create fun and memorable learning experiences. Because instructional design usually takes a lot of time, finding a more time-efficient process is worth its weight in gold.

By applying the concepts in this article, you will find yourself designing training in less time and with better results for your learners as well as for yourself. Cool, huh?

CONCEPTS

Let's begin with a little secret about the instructional design process which we will call the 4 Cs: *This process has been around for decades, and you are already using it - you just may not know that you are.* It has been researched and written about since the 1970s (see the bibliography at the end of this article), and has been called by many names: the natural cycle of learning, the learning compass, training cycle, training map, and the like.

Ultimately, it is about effective teaching (read that "training, facilitating, instructing, presenting").



This instructional design process is "learner-focused," rather than "trainer-focused." In other words, *it focuses attention - and is based - on how learners learn rather than on how trainers train.* It involves learners throughout the entire

training, not just at the beginning or end. If you are already involving learners from the moment they walk into the room, and during every training step, you are already using this design tool.

Here is a bird's-eye view of the 4 Cs:

Connections: During the opening of the training, *learners make connections with what they already know about the training topic, with what they will learn or want to learn, with each other, and with the trainer.*

Concepts: During the lecture-segment of the training, *learners hear the new information, see it, say it (discuss it), and do something with it (write it or do a short review activity).*

Concrete Practice: After the lecture, *learners actively practice a skill using the new information, or they participate in an in depth, active review of what they have learned.*

Conclusions: At the closing of the training, *learners summarize what they have learned, evaluate it, celebrate it, and create action plans for how they will use what they have learned.*

As you can see, learners are involved in EVERY step of the process, not just with an opening icebreaker or a closing question-and-answer session. Learner-involvement is woven into the very fabric of the instructional design process so that *learners are active participants in their own learning during the entire learning experience.* At no time do they just sit and listen for long stretches without any active engagement.

One-Minute Brain Break:
Myth or Fact?

How much do you already know about the 4 Cs instructional design process? Mark each sentence M for Myth or F for Fact, then check your answers. After you have finished this one-minute review, continue reading.

1. From the moment they walk into the training room, learners should have something to do that connects them to the topic and to each other.
2. First open the training with introductions, learning objectives, and housekeeping details.
3. During the lecture-segment, learners should be sitting quietly and listening attentively.
4. Use interesting note-taking pages and quick, one-minute review activities to keep learners involved and interested while you lecture.
5. Follow the lecture with active skills practice or an active review game to help learners move information into long-term memory.
6. Asking if there are any questions is an effective way to review material covered.
7. When you summarize the important information presented in the training, learners will remember and use it.

8. Learners need to summarize the information themselves, and create written or verbal action plans to state how they will use the information back on the job.

If you marked sentences 1, 4, 5, and 8 “F for Facts”, you already understand a lot about the 4 Cs. Furthermore, you are probably already using much of what you have read so far.

Numbers 2, 3, 6, and 7 can be included in a training; they just don’t have a lot to do with *learning*. That is not to say you should leave out these pieces; they are simply secondary to the entire learning process.

Now let’s put the 4 Cs into practice with a topic that YOU teach.

CONCRETE PRACTICE

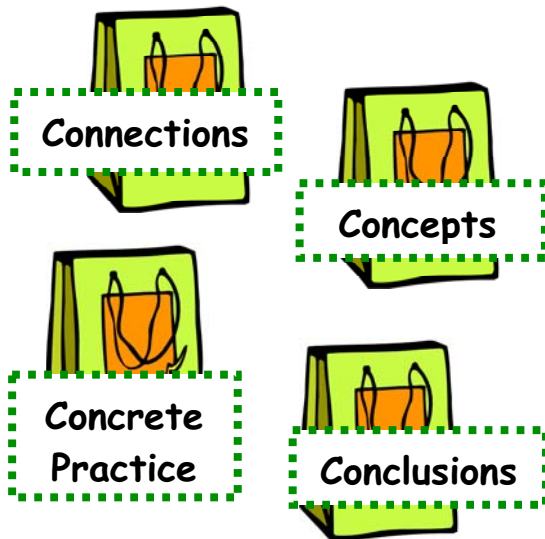
Allow yourself about ten minutes for this concrete practice section in order to gain the most from your own active participation. Your time will be well spent for four reasons:

- You’ll end up with a completed instructional design piece you can use the next time you train.
- You’ll experience the instructional design process using material that is meaningful to you.
- You’ll be able to replicate the process more easily the next time you use it.

- You'll be able to explain the process to colleagues when they ask you how you design training.

10-Minute Concrete Practice Activity:
Bag It.

What You Need: 4 small paper lunch bags, a pen or pencil, and a dozen or so index cards. If you don't have lunch bags lying around, then 4 sheets of blank paper will do instead. In large letters, label each bag (or each sheet of paper) the following (one C word per bag/paper): Connections, Concepts, Concrete Practice, Conclusions.



Topic Title: Now think of a topic that you teach. For example, your topic might be customer service skills, financial investment, using a company computer program, safety on the job, management skills, how to train other employees, etc. We'll use "new hire orientation" as the topic example for this article.

TOPIC
New Hire Orientation

Write your topic on an index card and set it next to the bags.

Design Out of Order. You're going to begin putting the instructional design pieces together in an order that differs from the way you'll deliver the training. This is okay. There are many ways to arrange these process steps while designing training. This activity demonstrates one way of doing it. After you have some practice with the process, you'll figure out the way that is most comfortable for you.

Concepts. Now brainstorm some specific concepts that are key components of the topic you wrote down. For example, under the topic "new hire orientation," you may have concepts like an overview of the company's history, employee expectations and benefits, state and federal laws, safety procedures, etc. We'll use the following concept example:

CONCEPT
Introduction to company's vision, mission statement, and values.

Choose one of your topic-related concepts, write it on an index card, and put the card in your "Concepts" bag.

Concrete Practice. Next, think about a practice activity that will follow the presentation of the concept and that will help learners put the information to use in some fashion. The activity can be a skills practice, review game, collaborative project, skit, simulation, competition, or discussion about the concept.

Here is our example:

CONCRETE PRACTICE

Case Studies: Small groups discuss specific employee scenarios to determine whether the employee demonstrates the company’s vision, mission, and values.

Write down your concrete practice idea on another index card and put it in the “Concrete Practice” bag.

Connections. Next, think about how you plan to connect your learners to the concept and to each other, as part of the training’s opening or “Connections” step. The connections activity can be something short and simple like a paired discussion, or it can be a more involved activity like group brainstorming and charting. Our example:

CONNECTION

Ball Toss Activity: Employees stand and toss a soft koosh or nerf ball to each other. The ball catchers verbally list values that are important to them, and values they consider important in running a business.

On another index card, jot down your connections activity and put this in the “Connections” bag.

Conclusions. Finally, choose a way for learners to summarize and evaluate what they have learned, as part of the training’s closing or “Conclusions” step. Again, the conclusions summary is something that helps learners remember

and use what they have learned. Our example:

CONCLUSION

Poster Job-Aids: Employees use colored paper and felt pens to create their own posters labeled with the company’s vision, mission, and values, and one goal they have for themselves as new employees. They decorate the posters and hang them in their work cubicles or by their desks back on the job.

Write your conclusion activity on another index card and place it in the “Conclusions” bag.

Learning Outcome: Finally, take one last index card. On it, write a short learning outcome for the entire 4 Cs process you have just created. *The learning outcome describes what the learner will be able to do at the end of the training.* It does NOT describe what will happen during the training, nor does it describe what YOU do as the trainer. Instead, it is about the learner and, as such, describes the learner’s post-training behavior or skills as a result of the training.

Your learning outcome should follow this simple formula:

Action Word (observable behavior) + Concept/Skill = Learning Outcome

The “action word” needs to be observable, that is, behavior that can be seen or quantified in some way. You can’t use words like “know, understand, learn” because you can’t actually observe someone knowing, understanding, or

learning. Instead, use words like “demonstrate, explain, list, define, show, apply, use, act, solve, do, discuss, perform,” etc. These words are observable and, thus, can be measured in some fashion. Our example:

LEARNING OUTCOME

Employees will be able to explain, in their own words, the company’s vision, mission, and values.

Once you have written the learning outcome on an index card, place it alongside the topic card.

Deliver In Order. You are now ready to put your cards and bags/papers in the following order:

- Topic Card**
- Learning Outcome Card**
- Connections Bag**
- Concepts Bag**
- Concrete Practice Bag**
- Conclusions Bag**

Essentially, you have now created an entire 4-step instructional design process for one piece of your training. When you deliver this piece of the training, you will do the 4 Cs in order, that is, the order that they make the most sense and that the pieces flow from one to the other: connections, concepts, concrete practice, conclusions. All of the pieces relate to the topic, and all contribute to the learning outcome.

In other words, each step of the process is connected to the topic and learning outcome.



Adding Cards. You can also add more index cards to the bags. For each topic-related concept card you write, also add a connections card, as well as concrete practice and conclusions cards. Make a learning outcome card for each series of four cards as well. For example, for the customer service training, you might have three or four concepts, each with their own connections, concrete practice, and conclusions pieces.

Brainstorming Cards. A different approach using the four bags is to brainstorm all the concepts that come under the topic, one concept per index card, and then put all these cards in the concepts bag. Then do the same for the rest of the bags, brainstorming all the connections activities you might use, as well as all the concrete practice and conclusion activities. Put all cards in their respective bags. Once you are done, then sort the cards into groups of four, with one card from each bag. Finally, write a learning outcome for each group of four cards.

The 4 Cs instructional design process is the most popular and effective training tool around, according to training experts. It's guaranteed to save trainers a whole lot of time and effort while making sure that the training is focused on the learner, not just on the trainer. With its four easy steps - Connections, Concepts, Concrete Practice, and Conclusions - it can be applied to any training topic and any audience. Trainers are using this four-step process to polish what they already do well, create new training programs, and fine-tune those programs already in place. Trainers rave: "This is the most practical and useful instructional design process we've ever used!"

The 4 Cs instructional design process is yours now. Play with it, vary it, and make it work for you and your learners. Use it to create training that is interesting, motivational, informative, fun, and infinitely memorable!

Resources for this article:

The Accelerated Learning Handbook.
David Meier

Experiential Learning. David Kolb

How to Give It So They Get It.
Sharon Bowman

The Ten-Minute Trainer.
Sharon Bowman

The following page contains a "Bag It!" job-aid for you - feel free to print it and use it in your next training. You can also reprint this article and share it with colleagues - just please cite the source.

This article is part of Sharon's newest book, to be published in 2008 by Pfeiffer Co., a division of John Wiley & Sons. Log onto www.amazon.com for Sharon's five popular training books already in print.

Log onto Sharon's website at www.Bowperson.com for other free, downloadable pdf-formatted articles about effective training.



Sharon Bowman is the president of Bowperson Publishing & Training, Inc., a professional member of The National Speakers Association (NSA), and a member of The American Society of Training and Development (ASTD). Over 60,000 of her popular training books are already in print.

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"Bag It" - The 4 Cs

A Quick and Remarkably Easy Instructional Design Process

This is a reference page and a training job aid. Use it when you design a training, presentation, workshop, or meeting.



Connections

Learners make connections with what they already know about the training topic, with what they will learn or want to learn, with each other, and with the trainer.



Concepts

Learners hear the new information, see it, say it (discuss it), and do something with it (write it or do a short review activity).



Concrete Practice

Learners actively practice a skill using the new information, or they participate in an active review of what they have learned.



Conclusions

Learners summarize what they have learned, evaluate it, celebrate it, and create action plans for how they plan to use it after the training is over.