

Drawing a Blank!
Chapter Six of *Shake, Rattle and Roll!*

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Chapter Six:
Drawing A Blank

Know what the most ordinary yet most creative object you can hand your learners is? According to Madeline Hunter, former UCLA professor and international speaker:

***The most creative thing
you can hand your learners
is a blank piece of paper.***

No way, you say! Here's the skinny:

A blank piece of paper is an unlimited, open-ended, learner-centered information generator.
Huh? Let me try again:

A blank piece of paper makes learners work with new information in ways that personally connect them to what they're learning. Better?



Depending upon how it's used, a blank piece of paper can be a left-brain, right-brain, or a whole brain learning aid. What's that mean? With blank paper, you can have your learners analyze and evaluate what they've learned (left brain), synthesize and create new ways of using what they've learned (right brain), or do both (whole brain).

With blank paper, your learners (and you) get to find out what they know, what they learned, what they're still puzzled about, and what they plan to do with what they learned.

With blank paper, you can check for understanding, correct misconceptions, and better modify your training to meet your learner's needs.

Besides all that, activities with blank paper take very little preparation time on your part - no complicated worksheets to make or correct, no running to Kinko's to copy a pile of papers, no fiddling with fonts, spacing, graphics, computer crashes and the like.

Still puzzled about the use and worth of blank paper? Try these activities and you'll be convinced:

1. Blackout Bingo: First, the generic activity. Each trainee gets a blank piece of paper (8 1/2 x 11) and folds it to form eight boxes (sixteen if you count both sides). In each box, trainees write a word or phrase naming something that is part of the content of the training (you have a list of training topics, pieces of information, main ideas, etc. posted on a chart paper or overhead transparency for them to copy from). After filling in their papers (with anywhere from eight to sixteen words or phrases), they stand. While you play upbeat music, they walk around asking

other participants to define a word or explain a phrase. The person who defined the word signs the bingo paper of the one who asked him to define it. Participants must go to different people for each signature. When all squares are filled with signatures, the trainee waves his paper, shouts "Blackout Bingo!" and gets a prize.

***Variation One:** Do a Pre-Blackout Bingo as a connecting activity. Give them about five minutes. They won't be able to collect enough signatures because they don't know all the information yet. But they do as much as they can. Then, as the closing activity, have them take their old papers and finish getting the signatures to make Blackout Bingo.*

***Variation Two:** Use the Pre-Blackout Bingo as a note-taking page during the lecture. Have participants fill in the missing pieces of information. Then, as a closing activity, give them a blank sheet of paper to create a new blackout bingo sheet to repeat the activity.*

***Variation Three:** As review, have participants generate the list of words or phrases to be used for the Blackout Bingo activity.*



2. Pass the Paper: Each trainee takes a blank piece of paper and writes her name and one thing she's learned so far. Then she passes the paper to a person sitting next to her. That person writes something he learned, then passes the paper on to someone else. While music plays, participants keep passing papers until they have written on at least five or six papers. When the music stops, participants find their original papers and read the comments written on it. It becomes a review of material.

Variation One: *With each pass of the paper, you can tell them what to write. Examples:*

Write one fact you remember from the lecture.

Write a question about something you learned.

Write the answer to the question that's written on the paper you're holding.

Write one thing you can do with the information you learned.

Write this person a compliment.

Variation Two: *Participants stand and trade papers to write on as they move around the room to upbeat music. When the music stops, or when you give a signal, they find their own papers and sit.*

Variation Three: *Participants stand and form a line. After writing, they pass their papers down the line. The person at one end will run to the other end to pass his paper. They keep writing and passing until they get their own papers back.*

3. Four on the Door: Participants fold their papers to form four squares. They copy the following sentences - one sentence per square - from a chart or overhead transparency that you prepared beforehand:

My feelings about this topic are:

The most important thing I've learned so far is:

One thing I plan to do with the info is:

A question, idea, or comment I still have is:

They write their responses to each sentence, then tape their papers to the doors on the way out to a break. You read the papers and use the information to modify the training and to answer their questions.



4. Ticket Out: Participants write three things they've learned so far on 3x5 index cards and hand the cards to you on the way out the door at break time. You can also have them write questions they still want answered, or what they plan to do with what they've learned (see Chapter Ten for more Ticket Out suggestions).

5. People Hunt: Similar to Blackout Bingo, trainees take papers that they have folded into eight boxes and write something about themselves in each box. Examples: Favorite foods, movies, books, movie stars, vacation places they've gone to, how many kids they have, where they live, when they were born, make of car they drive, etc. Then they stand and move around the room

introducing themselves to others and asking if the other persons' favorite things are the same. If there is a match, the other person signs the box. After a time limit, or when someone gets Blackout Bingo, stop the game and find out how many signatures each person collected and what some of the similarities were.

6. Map It: Hand participants blank papers and, as you lecture, have them take notes in a mind-map or clustering form - main idea goes in the middle of the paper, connecting ideas fan out around it with shapes and lines connecting them to the main idea. Doodles or colors can be added to make the mind-map even more memorable.

7. Flip Strips: Cut blank flip chart pages vertically into two pieces. Then cut the pieces into strips about 3 inches wide. Each trainee gets about a half-dozen strips. During the training, the learners write one thought, idea, question, fact, comment, "aha," suggestion, etc. per strip. They can color-code what they write by using colored felt pens. At various times during the day, they tape their strips to the walls (example: questions on one side, comments on another, "ahas" on a third wall) and read all the strips at break time. (From:

Creative Training Techniques Newsletter.)

8. Two Part Paper: Cindee Davis, math instructor at Truckee Meadows Community College, uses this type of paper (found in office supply stores) for math quizzes. Students work on their own to solve a problem copied onto the paper from the chalkboard. Then they tear off the top copy, pass it in, and work in groups with the bottom copy to solve the problem again and get immediate feedback as to how they did the first time. Students can also do a Pass the Paper activity with the top copy, then compare it to their own bottom copy when they get it back.

9. Advanced Organizers: Diane Cheatwood, instructor and staff development trainer at Community College of Aurora in Colorado, uses advanced organizers to start her classes and trainings. Participants divide a blank piece of paper into columns or squares and label each division with a heading related to the subject matter. Then they use the paper as a note-taking tool to help organize material as it's being presented or discussed.



10. Musical Questions: Each participant writes a question on a card about the information just covered. While music plays, trainees pass the cards to the right and keep passing until the music stops. Then they answer the questions on the cards they ended up with, using each other and written materials as resources if necessary. They share their questions and answers with the whole group. (From: *The Accelerated Learning Newsletter*)

11. Overhead Transparencies: Small groups use transparency film instead of chart paper to create pictorial representations of information already learned. They present their transparencies to the whole group.

12. Coin Toss: Each table group takes a large piece of paper (8 1/2 x14, 11x17, or half a chart page) and lays it on the table. With felt pen, the table group members divide the paper into large squares (any shapes will do) and in each square they write a term from the material learned. Then they take turns tossing a coin onto the paper. The tosser has to define/explain verbally the term that the coin landed on or closest to. (From: *Red Hot Handouts* by Dave Arch)

13. Tablecloth Writing: Table groups use colored markers to decorate paper table cloths with words, phrases, doodles, cartoons, etc. all relating to the topic. (From: *The Accelerated Learning Newsletter*).

14. Placemat Writing: During the lecture, participants use paper placemats on which to scribble notes, comments, doodles, and questions related to the topic.



15. Bag Writing: Instead of placemats, trainees take notes on blank white paper lunch bags. They add doodles representing the new information, questions or comments about the information, and examples illustrating what they've learned. They share their bags with a partner, or they can write additional comments on each others bags. The bags can also double as souvenirs of the training.

16. Snowball Fight: This is one of the craziest and most enjoyable activities to do at the end of a training. Each participant writes his action plan - what he's planning to do with what he's learned - on a blank white paper. Then all participants form a standing group in a large space away from the furniture.

They crumple up their action plans into "snowballs." When you say "Snowball fight!" they have thirty seconds to throw, catch, and throw again as many snowballs at each other as they can. At the end of thirty seconds, you signal them to stop. Each person picks up a snowball (doesn't have to be his own), opens it, and reads it to the group. If the group is really large, participants can form smaller standing groups of four to six and read the snowballs in small groups instead. (From: *How To Give It So They Get It*)

***Variation One:** If space is a problem, trainees can simply toss their snowballs straight up above their heads, then catch someone else's snowball and read it to the group.*

***Variation Two:** Besides a closing activity, the Snowball Fight can be an introductory review activity of material already learned in a previous class or session. Trainees write facts they know or questions about the material. Catchers read the facts or answer the questions aloud as part of the post-activity discussion.*

17. Blizzard Balls: Lynn Jackson, Program Specialist at the Arkansas Career System Partnership in Little Rock, and Melanie Faby, Education Specialist, give the Snowball Fight their own

special twist. As a review activity, they direct each small discussion group (or participant triads) to write a question pertaining to the topic on a blank piece of paper. Participants wad up the papers and the trainer collects them. Then the trainer turns her back to the participants and tosses the "blizzard balls" over her shoulder all at once. Small groups or triads catch the balls (one per group or triad) and proceed to discuss and agree on an answer to the question they caught. They present their answer to the whole group after the discussion period has ended. If they get their own question, they exchange it for another blizzard ball.

A blank piece of paper. How ordinary. *And what a simple thing to use to make your training extraordinary.*

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Author and traveling teacher Sharon Bowman helps educators and business people “teach it quick and make it stick,” - fine-tuning their information-delivery skills and turning their passive listeners into active learners.

Sharon is the author of six popular teaching, training, and motivation books, including: “*Preventing Death by Lecture*,” “*Presenting with Pizazz*,” “*How To Give It So They Get It*,” and “*Shake, Rattle, and Roll*.” 40,000 copies of her books are now in print.

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