

Aiding Retention

This section could be subtitled “How to review without calling it review.” When the trainer says “Let’s review,” most participants tune out thinking they’ve already heard this material before. Looking at how and what people remember gives us some strategies for aiding retention.

Primacy

People learn best that which they learn first. Key concepts should be presented early in the training session. Select a strong opening activity that introduces these concepts.

Recency

Second to Primacy is Recency. People remember the last thing they heard. Select a story or activity to close the session that ties the key concepts together.

Linking

Concepts that are linked to pictures or visuals are more easily remembered. Traffic signs are a good example of this. Seeing a stop sign is a cue to a driver of an action that he needs to perform.

Chunking

People remember things that are grouped. That is why telephone numbers are presented as a group of three followed by a group of four digits. This format is easier to remember than one group of seven digits.

Unusualness

That which is out of the ordinary is more easily remembered. If you say, “The only exception to this rule is” people will most likely remember the exception.

Repetition

Repetition aids retention. That is why most of us can sing TV jingles and recite key lines from commercials. Key concepts in your training program should be repeated and reinforced throughout the session and back on the job.

Five Fun and Painless Review Techniques

1. Give participants note pads and at the end of each section of content have participants write down one valuable thing learned in the session. Pass a hat or other receptacle to gather the ideas. Pass the hat again and ask each participant to take a sheet from the hat and read aloud what is on it. Collect all the sheets and give them to the trainer. The trainer will prepare a document listing the learning points and mail to all participants following the training.
2. Working in teams, have each group develop a list of 10 questions participants ought to be able to answer after completing the training. Allow people to use their manuals and other handouts. Have groups pass their questions to another group. The second group should pick the best five questions and pass them to another group. The third group answers the questions. Go around the room having each group read one question and one answer.
3. Before the training session, put questions covering key concepts on one set of cards and answers on another. At the end of the session, distribute the question cards to half the group and the answer cards to the other half. Give people a set time (three minutes) to find the answer to the question. Have each pair read their question and answer aloud.
4. Use games such as bingo and jeopardy to link questions and answers covering the course material.
5. Have participants keep a list of key points brought out during the training. At the end of training, have participants share the key points with members of their group. Ask the group to come up with the five most important points and why they think they are the most important. Rotate feedback so each group offers only one point and reason at a time, until all are given.