

Using Activities Effectively

Activities serve many purposes in training. They can help people get to know one another. They can energize the group. They can be used to open or close a session. They can be used to review and reinforce learning. To use an activity effectively, identify what you want to accomplish, then select or design an activity to achieve this outcome.

Structure activities using the ADA theory.

A = Activity	What?	The activity should be related to a key learning point.
D = Discussion	So what?	Allow people time to discuss what they learned from the activity.
A = Application	Now what?	Have participants discuss how what they have learned from the activity will be useful on the job.

Opener & Ice-Breaker Activities

1. License Plates

Purpose: To creatively and visually get participants to introduce themselves.

Time Required: 15 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited

Materials Required: A blank "license plate" prepared in advance by the trainer. Markers for the entire group.

The Exercise in Action:

At the beginning of a session give each participant a form designed in the likeness of a blank license plate. Ask each person to create a personalized plate using no more than seven letters or numbers.

Then ask participants to introduce themselves to the rest of the group using their new "vanity" plate as a starting point. Each participant should give the group a few moments to "decode" the plate before explaining it, as some can be fairly tricky.

Some sample ideas are: SLSMN = salesman; WKGMMOM = working mom; DADOV3 = dad of three; INVSTR = investor; H2OSKER = water skier.

2. Ball Toss

Purpose: To help participants learn one another's names.

Time Required: 10-15 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited

Materials Required: A tennis ball.

The Exercise in Action:

Participants stand in a circle. The instructor states her name and tosses a tennis ball to someone. That person, in turn, says his name and tosses the ball to another. This continues until everyone has tossed the ball several times.

Then the rules change. As players toss the ball, they say the recipients' names instead of their own. The game always provides a few laughs while helping people to learn one another's names.

3. Slogans

Purpose: To spark creative thinking skills at the outset (or any point) of a session.

Time Required: 10 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited, but trainees should work in small groups of three to six.

Materials Required: Writing materials for each participant.

The Exercise in Action:

Try opening a session by asking each person to write a company slogan, omitting the company name. For example, Chevrolet's "The Heartbeat of America," Charmin's "Squeezably soft," and Burger King's "Have it your way." Write the slogans on flip-chart pages, then break the class into groups and have each group try to match the correct company name to each slogan. Results are tallied to see which group got the most correct answers.

Lead a discussion of what the slogans say about the companies they represent and have groups spend five minutes thinking of slogans that represent Mosaic's mission and values.

4. Sneaky Slogans

Purpose: To actively break participants into pairs for small group activities.

Time Required: 5 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited

Materials Required: Index cards with slogans on them, prepared in advance by the trainer.

The Exercise in Action:

Write part of a commercial slogan on a card and put the second half of the slogan on another card. For example, on card one put the famous Alka-Seltzer slogan, "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz ..." and on card two, "Oh, what a relief it is." Hand out the cards and ask participants to find their partners.

Review & Closing Activities

1. Fact or Fiction

Purpose: To encourage participants to create their own review session and provide the trainer with a snapshot evaluation of the material.

Time Required: 15 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited

Materials Required: None

The Exercise in Action:

At the end of a training session, have participants evaluate the module by helping them create their own "fact/fiction" sheets. Instruct individuals or small groups to develop a series of true or false statements based on the information covered. Once the statements are written, participants exchange lists and then attempt to identify which statements are true and which are false. The exercise provides a thorough review and evaluation, and also can yield good questions for future tests.

2. Word Games

Purpose: To lead participants through a review game.

Time Required: 10 to 20 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited

Materials Required: None

The Exercise in Action:

Use a variation of the board game “Scrabble” as a review exercise. Write one word in the center of a piece of graph flip-chart paper. Participants must build on the word and subsequent words in a Scrabble or crossword puzzle fashion. Any letters can be used to build words. It’s a great way to review or brainstorm topics.

3. Total Recall

Purpose: To lead participants through a review of “the basics” during multiple-day sessions.

Time Required: 10 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited, but trainees should work in small groups of three to six.

Materials Required: None

The Exercise in Action:

In multiple-day training sessions, recalling the basics from one day is often essential to the next day’s learning. Try starting each day by asking participants to write down everything they can remember from the previous day, individually and without discussion.

After participants have completed their lists, give them time to discuss what they’ve recorded with others at their tables. Then, the groups can take turns offering information that gets recorded on a flip-chart.

The method gets people thinking about the subject matter. Because it’s done without notes, it is a good test of what points the trainer is communicating well. If no participants or only a few remember a particular item, chances are it was not presented as well as it should have been.

4. A Day at the Races

Purpose: To review a lot of material, reward individual initiative, and at the same time allow each person to participate on a team.

Time Required: 15 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited

Materials Required: Flip-chart paper and markers; game pieces for horses.

The Exercise in Action:

Tape two pieces of flip-chart paper end to end with the short ends touching. Then draw a racetrack and divide it into 10 sections, one for each review question. You can have as few as two teams, or as many as five, comfortably.

The action begins as you ask questions to advance the “horses.” If the question is answered correctly by the individual whose turn it is to answer for the team, the team’s horse moves forward one square. If the question is answered incorrectly, the horse moves back one square.

If the individual doesn’t think he or she can answer correctly, that person has the option of making it a group question. If the group then answers correctly, the horse stays in its place. If the group answers incorrectly, the horse moves back two squares.

5. Phrase Craze

Purpose: To lead a nontraditional review session and get session feedback.

Time Required: 10 minutes

Size of Group: Unlimited

Materials Required: Paper and writing utensils for all participants.

The Exercise in Action:

Close sessions by listing several unfinished phrases: I learned. . . , I was surprised. . . , I understand . . . , on a flip-chart. Ask each participant to choose and complete one of the sentences. After allowing two minutes for participants to write their answers, ask them to share what they have written.

The exercise serves as a nice summary of key points, provides good facilitator feedback, and leaves participants with a positive feeling about what they have learned.