

Methods in Training



Using a variety of methods during an orientation or training helps get your messages across and holds participant interest. Varying the methodology can make a session more interactive, interesting, and fun.

The following chart lists some suggested methods and their uses. All of these instructional techniques have benefits. The choice of a method depends on the objectives of a particular session, the characteristics of the learners, and the time and resources available. For example, brief lectures and large group discussions are appropriate techniques to introduce a topic and impart knowledge; demonstrations, role plays, and field trips may be more useful for teaching skills; and case studies and simulations are well suited to exploring attitudes. Any given method can be used for multiple types of learning, and each type of learning can be achieved with more than one method. For example, group discussions and role plays can be used to observe and analyze attitudes as well as to impart knowledge and teach skills.

Note that not all participants will be comfortable with all of these methods. Some learners may not be used to methods that require their active participation. Nevertheless, they are likely to learn and retain more if they are actively engaged than if they are just passively listening. Participants will already be in the process of adjusting to many differences in the United States; adapting to the U.S. style of education may be a challenge, but it will be beneficial to them in the long run. Be sure to introduce new styles of learning gradually, however. At the beginning, a brief introduction to the topic, followed by a small-group discussion, may be easier to handle than a game or a role play.

Method	Ideal for	Other Considerations
Brainstorming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bringing up new ideas on a specific topic Imparting and sharing participants' knowledge Exploring opinions and attitudes on a topic Involving participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brainstorming is similar to a group discussion, but allows for more ideas to be brought up. Following a brainstorming session with a group discussion is often effective.
Case Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering problems based on real-life situations Identifying possible solutions Teaching skills Involving participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case studies (or stories) are usually based on real-life experiences and present a situation for a group to analyze and solve. Case studies are good for large- and small-group discussions. Case studies are different from simulations in that situations are discussed rather than acted out.
Debates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exploring two differing attitudes or behaviors, often with no clear correct answer Engaging participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The trainer should be aware that debates can become heated and competitive, and the trainer may be asked by participants to take a side.
Demonstrations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showing and telling Teaching skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The trainer performs the task and participants observe. Instead of just talking about a concept, the trainer demonstrates the information in action. Effectiveness is limited if participants are not allowed to perform the task as well.
Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imparting and sharing knowledge Exploring opinions and attitudes on a topic Involving participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussions have benefits similar to brainstorming, but fewer ideas are discussed. Discussions are very effective when used after any session as a reflection. Small-group discussion allows participants who are uncomfortable in a large-group setting to express themselves. Small-group discussion prevents the trainer from dominating the conversation.

Method	Ideal for	Other Considerations
Field Trips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allowing hands-on experiences • Entering and learning about a new environment • Teaching skills • Engaging participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field trips can be used in a wide variety of places and for different topics. • Field trips provide an opportunity to experience first-hand an actual environment or situation and enter it safely with guidance.
Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practicing skills while having fun • Allowing real-life application of skills • Teaching skills • Engaging participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games provide the opportunity for participants to enjoy learning. • General games can be adapted to use questions that refer to your topic. • Be sure that the games you use do not offend participants by seeming childish (e.g., by using graphics aimed at children).
Lectures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conveying a lot of information in a short period of time • Briefly introducing a topic • Presenting basic information • Imparting knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some groups may initially be more receptive to lectures than to hands-on activities. • Lectures may not lead to actual learning, as participants are passive observers and do not have the opportunity to apply learning. • Lectures can be more effective when preceding or following another method. • Lectures are more interesting when combined with visuals, examples, and anecdotes, and when open-ended questions are encouraged.
Parking Lot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deferring irrelevant questions or those the trainer doesn't have time to address immediately • Demonstrating that the trainer will follow up on unanswered questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the wall, hang flipchart labeled "Parking Lot." • When questions that can't be answered arise, write them on the flipchart. • If you don't know the answer, be honest; get back to the participants later with the information.
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debriefing sessions, whether simple or challenging • Checking for understanding (evaluation) • Ensuring all questions and concerns are covered • Engaging participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is extremely important to allow time to debrief and reflect at the end of a topic. Leave adequate time after every session for at least a brief reflection period. • Use reflection questions, such as asking participants how they now feel about the topic and how their feelings may have changed. This will help you determine how to modify the program for future sessions.
Role Plays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dramatizing a problem or situation • Identifying possible solutions • Engaging participants prior to a discussion • Teaching skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants assume a role and act out a situation with their group while other participants observe. • Role plays are effective for helping participants practice skills or experience situations, and then discussing them. • It is extremely important to debrief and reflect after a role play.
Simulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring attitudes • Learning and practicing skills • Discussing cultural adjustment and culture shock • Engaging participants • Identifying possible solutions • Considering problems based on real-life situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simulations duplicate the real setting in which the skills are required. • Simulations are different from role plays because they require participants to completely immerse themselves in a situation and explore the feelings and attitudes they experience. • Groups can be encouraged to describe and analyze challenges.
Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing visuals • Using with guided discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information can be conveyed in an interesting manner. • A useful technique is to pause the video and ask participants to discuss what they have seen, predict what might happen next, and relate the topic to real-life situations.

© 2010 Center for Applied Linguistics



For more information about resources available from the Cultural Orientation Resource Center, visit culturalorientation.net