

Ensuring participation

Below are some techniques for enhancing participant concentration, through variation of teaching methods, scheduling sufficient breaks and ensuring regular repetition of the main objectives of the lecture/session.

Show participants where they are in the schedule

A key to participant concentration is making sure that everyone knows when each session begins and ends, that is, how long they are expected to stay attentive at a stretch, and where the lecture/session is going. This information can be given using the objective summaries in each presentation or trainer guide.

Optimise participant engagement

A good strategy is to change the teaching method at regular intervals. Participants can generally be expected to stay attentive to one method of teaching for 20 minutes. As shown in the trainer guides, sessions are structured so as to include regular question and answer or group participant activity sections. These need not be long, but will be crucial to breaking the information up into portions that participants can digest easily.

Schedule appropriate breaks

This is related to the points discussed above. As well as using a range of teaching methods, trainers should ensure they allow enough natural breaks for refreshments. Generally one or two coffee breaks in morning or afternoon sessions will suffice, along with a scheduled lunchbreak for full-day courses.

How long can I expect people to pay attention?

As stated above, participants can generally focus on one teaching method for about 20 minutes. This should be taken into account by the trainer, otherwise the training risks becoming ineffective. There is no point in 'charging on through' with a particular session if you notice participants demonstrating clear signs of extensive distraction. A short break of 2-3 minutes and a subsequent change of focus/facilitation methods may be all that is required refresh the group. Otherwise, if the negative attitudes or loss of concentration remain significant, it may be advisable to reschedule the remaining session to a more appropriate time.

How often should the session be broken up by group interaction?

Breaks in the teaching methods are needed, but group interaction should be carefully planned into the session schedule so as not to become more disruptive than helpful. If participants are to work together for certain activities, trainers must allow time for learners to rearrange themselves into their respective groups, and then also to move back again if required.

How can I make sure the participants will retain the new information?

One important tool is repetition and emphasis of key points throughout a presentation or discussion exercise, as well as the linking of these points to other familiar and related concepts.



Tip: It is critical that learners be able to apply their new skills or knowledge within two days of completing a session. Training should be scheduled to optimise these opportunities, and trainers are encouraged to provide practice exercises and other resources for learners who may not be able to apply their new knowledge immediately in a 'live' environment.

This material was adapted from the following sources:

- Biech, E., *Training for Dummies*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 2004
- Luscre, A. *Planning & Preparing Successful Technology Training: Session Design, Training Materials and Presentation*, Mogadore Local School Network online resource 2007
- Sheltercentre free online training services, 2007.