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Tools for organizing training, part 1

Many trainers have faced the perplexing task of changing the material or content of their presentations for specific circumstances and learners. Whether creating a singular new class or continuing a multi-session course, these scenarios present challenging questions of what among the training material should be incorporated, minimized, or deleted. Besides determining who should be trained on the new material and why they are being trained, defining the actual content is a top consideration for trainers. How can one address and organize so many concerns, especially when there is so much to teach in a limited time? Well, there are tools available to help trainers develop and revamp training sessions, which I and my colleagues, Christal Huber and Heather Waldis, will share in this and the next three Fruits of Education columns.

The 6Ws as a tool

One approach that trainers can use to organize their training material is to respond to the questions posed by the 6Ws: who, why, what, how, when and where. Already we have mentioned the first two of these questions: 'who' and 'why'. A training session needs to be organized around who the students are, on the basis of their individual and collective needs. Perhaps more important, though, is an understanding of why the training session is needed. This is achieved by defining the expectations and goals of training, which are known as learning objectives. 'What' and 'how' are the next pair of 'Ws': trainers must choose what materials to include and determine how to present them. It is important to consider these ideas together in order to effectively and appropriately convey content; moreover, the answers to these questions depend upon the learning styles of those being trained. The remaining two 'Ws' address logistical matters, asking 'when' and 'where' the training will occur. These usually follow the other 'Ws' in priority and decision-making, because they depend upon the learners and their needs, the

parent institution and its needs, the material and the methods of the presentation.

Agendas as a tool

Ultimately, when informed with the answers to all of the 6Ws, a trainer should be able to organize and outline most of a training session fairly quickly, especially when these answers are used to lay out an agenda or syllabus for training, because the answers to the 6Ws form coherent statements about what will be taught. An agenda based on these questions summarizes who will be teaching whom and what will be taught, with a schedule of when and where the training will take place. This sets the objectives for training, explaining why the learning will take place, in terms that are more general than specific learning objectives. Both trainers and learners benefit by knowing what a training session will encompass.

Learning objectives as a tool

Trainers in the field of lab animal science are not simply responsible for delivering content; often they become instructional designers, adapting curricula and activities for various learners. This tailoring process is sometimes called defining learning objectives or outcomes. A proper learning objective typically consists of a noun that describes what content trainees are learning, and a verb that describes how learners will learn or demonstrate retained knowledge. For example, a lab animal trainer could put forth the following statement as a potential learning objective: "the newly hired animal care providers will be trained on basic safety, and will demonstrate proper wearing of personal protective equipment." The use of learning objectives as a tool to organize training entails several benefits by ensuring that learners' needs are met, the institution knows what is being taught, evaluation and assessment can be easily tied back to the objectives, and the training—as it was planned and actually took place—is documented.



Taxonomy as a tool

Another tool that can help trainers to systematically organize training is known as 'taxonomy'. This concept should be familiar to many from its use in biology, but within the discipline of teaching, taxonomy describes an organizational system of concepts by which students can learn and trainers can train. In the 1950s, a committee of educators led by Benjamin Bloom developed the 'taxonomy of educational objectives', a framework used by both K–12 teachers and college instructors for teaching. This tool, known as Bloom's taxonomy, provides a logical structure of hierarchical steps in the learning process to aid trainers in creating learning objectives based on the way that learners learn. These steps are generally defined as six processes of learning: first, remembering previously learned facts; then understanding by summarizing events and recognizing patterns; applying or carrying out procedures; analyzing, classifying and relating items to one another; evaluating and judging; and, finally, creating unique work.

Conclusions

Collectively, these tools can help trainers determine and organize the material that they are teaching. This step is necessary before one can determine how to teach the selected material. In the following Fruits of Education columns we will discuss Bloom's taxonomy and learning objectives in greater detail, considering how to use them specifically in the setting of lab animal science.