

## DESIGNS FOR REVIEWING

By Roger Greenaway, Reviewing Skills Training

*This is the first in a series of three articles about design: [programme design](#) (this article), [session design](#) and [method design](#).*

This article is about PROGRAMME DESIGN with a focus on reviewing. It provides 10 practical tips on how to design a reviewing strategy for experiential learning programmes.

1. Ensure that your programme design protects review time
2. Schedule your first review as early as possible
3. Include a participatory demonstration of active reviewing
4. Choose the reviewing methods before you choose the activities
5. Begin with the experience in mind
6. Design a progressive sequence of review sessions
7. Work backwards from the start, outwards from the middle and backwards from the end
8. Place the activities and other programme items in the spaces
9. Holistic checks and balances: *Learning Style Preferences; Right Brain, Left Brain; The Combination Lock Model; There is always another dimension*
10. Test and Evaluate

### 1. ENSURE THAT YOUR PROGRAMME DESIGN PROTECTS REVIEW TIME

You may have noticed that whenever a programme is running late it is usually review time that suffers. The first challenge is to design a programme in a way that protects this fragile review time. Do not fall at this first hurdle: if the time allocated for reviewing gets squeezed out - reviewing will be happening in a rush or not at all. The usual 'enemy' of review time is the activities to be reviewed taking longer than planned.

So make a plan that reduces the chances these other parts of the programme will over-run.

One small change can make a big difference. Instead of scheduling reviewing to happen straight after an activity, plan to take a break and start the next session with a review. Such a change helps to protect review time. This change also means that participants will be arriving fresh and energised for the review.

This is not always the best choice, but if you are locked into the normal pattern of scheduling reviewing at the (shrinking) end of a session, you now have an extra choice: which is to plan reviewing into the start of the following session.

This design strategy also lends itself to 'Reflection Before Action' which is described in a separate article at:

<http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/Reflection-Before-Action.pdf>

### 2. SCHEDULE YOUR FIRST REVIEW AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

Consider the option of starting the programme with a reflective exercise - which can be playful if you want it to double as an energiser.

It is not always necessary to generate a fresh experience before you can review something. We all have an extraordinary range of experiences on which we can draw for further reflection and learning. I try to make an early review a celebration of positive experiences related to the course objective. Brief Encounters is a handy way of achieving this. You will need to tailor the questions to the course objective unless the course happens to be about success:

<http://reviewing.co.uk/success/icebreaker.htm>

So you can start a programme with a review, but why would this be a good idea?

- it demonstrates that review and reflection is a valued part of the learning process right from the start.
- it saves time because you do not first need to generate an experience in order to facilitate experiential learning: you are off to a quick start.
- it serves as a handy example of what reviewing can be (see next)

### 3. INCLUDE A PARTICIPATORY DEMONSTRATION OF ACTIVE REVIEWING

Ensure that your programme design includes a section early on in which active reviewing is explained as being a significant part of the learning process. Ideal timing for this explanation is soon after the group have first experienced a fine example of active reviewing! You could for example, include an explanation soon after a reviewing activity such as Brief Encounters.

*Follow these first three tips and you will have a programme design that protects review time and you could have participants experiencing, enjoying and appreciating the value of reviewing within the first half hour of your programme. Both the programme structure and the participants are now supporting reviewing. And you are already way ahead of the competition who have yet to finish their introductory lecture about experiential learning ;-)*

### 4. CHOOSE THE REVIEWING METHODS BEFORE YOU CHOOSE THE ACTIVITIES

This is (in part) another strategy for protecting review time because it involves scheduling all the reviews before scheduling the other features of the programme. This is an alternative to the common practice of placing reviews in the time gaps left over when everything else is in place.

This design process may seem illogical if you have yet to try it.

The logic is as follows:

- experiential learning is a combination of 'activity' and 'reflection'
- participants are best served when there is an optimal balance between 'activity' and 'reflection'
- when activities are the first items to be placed in a programme design, it is very likely that the balance will be skewed too much towards activities *even at the design stage*.
- if review time is less than ideal, the quality of learning suffers, whereas it is relatively straightforward to find or devise suitable activities to fit in the time available.

*This is not an argument for tipping the balance in the other direction: it is simply an approach to programme design that is more likely to result in the optimal balance that you believe will be most effective.*

### 5. BEGIN WITH THE EXPERIENCE IN MIND

Design is a creative process, so it pays to work with a medium that lends itself to creative thinking. I like to work with a stimulating collection of picture postcards.

- From a pool of pictures I ask programme designers to choose pictures representing participant emotions which they expect or want to happen at some point during the programme.
- I ask the designers to place their pictures on a time line which starts before the programme and finishes after the programme.
- I provide sticky labels for people to write labels for any pictures that do not have a clear enough meaning.
- Once a sequence is agreed, an optional creative step is to ask whether the sequence would work in reverse. (Often it will and can lead to some creative breakthroughs in design.)
- I now ask the design team to put cards with names of reviewing

methods at suitable places on the timeline. A method might be 'suitable' because it is a good way of generating, or working with, the kinds of experiences represented on the nearby pictures.

*If you are designing a programme for experience-based learning then it is important at some stage in the planning to look at the desired (or likely) sequence of emotional experiences. Of course you will want to look at the desired (or likely) sequence of learning too. (See next)*

## 6. DESIGN A PROGRESSIVE SEQUENCE OF REVIEW SESSIONS

There are many candidates (models, theories, traditions, journeys, stories) from which you can create a suitable flow or sequence in a programme. Relying on just one sequence for design is unlikely to be sufficient if you are attempting to produce a holistic learning design, but I will use just one model as an example.

The Active Reviewing Cycle is a model that arose from my study of facilitators with good reputations. It represents the kind of sequence that they generally followed within a single reviewing session. More recently I have been using this same sequence for programme design. In other words I am applying the cycle to a longer time scale.

The first two stages of the cycle are FACTS and FEELINGS. Taken together these stages typically involve storytelling (stories of experience). Focusing on facts produces a descriptive account of what happened and focusing on feelings draws attention to individual and group feelings experienced during the event being described. This means that in the early part of a programme I will mostly be using methods that help learners to tell stories about experiences. *This places experience at the centre of experiential learning. Paying attention to experience can be a remarkably effective way of generating a mutually supportive (and evidence-based) learning climate.*

Around mid-way in a programme I will tend to focus on the third stage: FINDINGS. This stage is represented by the spade symbol and involves digging deeper into the reasons why things happen. The review methods at this stage help people to find and discover new learning from their experiences.

Towards the end of the programme I would have a concentration of reviewing methods that focus on the FUTURE while still making strong connections with experiences and learning so far. Some FUTURE methods also fit well at the beginning of the programme and immediately before an activity, but *if you do too much 'future' work there is a risk that you are neglecting the core process of reflecting on past and present experience*

Single review sessions will generally include at least one complete reviewing cycle, but over the programme as a whole, reviewing methods that bring out FACTS and FEELINGS tend to be used most near the beginning, methods that are good for bringing out FINDINGS are most useful in the middle, and methods that look to the FUTURE are most useful towards the end.

There are many other good rationales for sequencing and shaping a programme, but if you want to see some examples of reviewing methods matched to the Active Reviewing Cycle see: <http://reviewing.co.uk/learning-cycle/index.htm>

## 7. WORK BACKWARDS FROM THE END, FORWARDS FROM THE START AND OUTWARDS FROM THE MIDDLE

This kind of planning is most easily done with cards and a time line, and ideally with other people in your planning/design team.

- Ask your planning team which reviewing methods they think will be most suitable and effective for the participants to achieve their learning objectives.

- For each proposed reviewing method, write down its name on a card (one name per card).
- The first card sort involves placing each card into one of three sets: 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end'. (If you provide 'pre-work' and 'follow-up' create extra sets of cards for reviewing methods that can be used before and after the programme.)
- The next card sort involves arranging each set of cards into a likely sequence.
- If the timeline includes start, finish and break times you can also do a provisional test to see if you have too many, too few or about the right number of cards (methods) to fit the schedule.
- With different coloured cards you can now create cards for each activity or input or any other element that you want to fit into your programme.

## 8. PLACE THE ACTIVITIES AND OTHER PROGRAMME ITEMS IN THE SPACES

A useful experience-focused question to ask is:

*'What kind of activity is likely to create the kinds of experiences that would be good to review using this method?'*

Some examples might help:

- if you want to use [Action Replay](#), then the more action there is in the activity the more suitable it will be for a replay. Action Replay is a struggle if the activity involved a lot of sitting or standing around without a lot of movement. Because Action Replay can be used for subgroups to inform each other about what they were doing in a separate location, a replay does not need to be limited to activities in which the whole group was together.
- if you want to use the [Missing Person](#) method it works best when the group can refer to a number of group activities rather than

referring to just one activity. It also fits better after a challenging activity that highlights the need for better teamwork - and while there are still a few activities to come in which the 'Missing Person' can help the group focus on better performance.

- if you want to use a group feedback exercise such as [Spokes](#), then it is important that the activity being reviewed was one in which everyone was busy doing something that was mostly in the view of everyone else. In other words, if everyone has had the chance of being noticed during the activity there is more chance that others will be able to comment on their performance.
- for paired feedback exercises such as [Learning Buddies](#), [Goal Keepers](#), [Empathy Test](#) or [Egoing](#), the quality of feedback is better if each pair was working closely together during the activity. Such activities might be ones where pairs sit together or walk together or where the group moves in a line and they are next to each other in the line. This also works for activities where the group is split into two shifts that alternate between the doing shift and the observing shift.

The more that you use active reviewing methods the more you will notice a blurring between what is an activity and what is a review. I choose to put a positive spin on any such confusion by referring to it as '**integrated practice**'. I feel that I have reached this point both by working backwards from review processes and by developing review methods that pay attention to what participants are doing and experiencing during the review method itself. I will save examples of integrated practice for a future issue, because to do so now would spoil the relative tidiness of the programme design processes that I am outlining in these tips.

## 9. HOLISTIC CHECKS AND BALANCES

When designing a programme in which you want to tap into the power of holistic and experiential ways of working, there is probably an infinite array of dimensions that you could consider. But it is unwise and unnecessary to overload your design effort with a multitude of holistic considerations. Fortunately many of these dimensions are present without being designed in to the process. This is largely because you are working with whole persons who bring 'everything' with them and who will be breathing life into your programme design as they participate.

However ... there are some handy design tools and models that can help you to check that there is sufficient variety and balance in the opportunities that your programme provides.

### 9.1 Learning Style Preferences

Over 100 so-called 'learning style preferences' have been identified by various theorists. Most individual theories include styles in these 5 areas: doing, sensing, thinking, planning and integrating. Because any group of people (whatever their job roles) is likely to include a broad range of learning style preferences, a review strategy should aim to include all such preferences - if you want full participation in reviewing sessions. There is no need to exclude people with an 'activist' self-description from active reviewing!

### 9.2 Right Brain, Left Brain

A simpler check is to see whether your overall reviewing strategy will continually exercise both 'right brains' and 'left brains'. Does your reviewing strategy regularly include creative, intuitive and expressive tasks as well as tasks involving logic, language and analytical thinking? Recent research has shown that the brain is not nearly as dichotomous as the popular version of right-left brain theory implies. For example, the best maths is achieved when both halves of the brain work together. (Source: <http://digbig.com/5bfadk>) My belief is that the best reviewing methods are those that get the whole brain working. Why use half a brain

when you have a whole one?

### 9.3 The Combination Lock Model

Colin Beard has certainly applied his whole brain to developing the Combination Lock model which he describes in *The Experiential Learning Toolkit*. Unlike the previous two 'models', this one is designed specifically with experiential learning in mind. The model works a bit like a fruit machine with a row of 6 variables. There is no jackpot and there is no preferred combination. It is more of a creative tool to help a designer of experiential learning to consider a wider range of possibilities in these six areas: Belonging, Doing, Sensing, Feeling, Knowing, Being. All of which, in my view, apply just as much as they do to reviewing processes as they do to the experiences being reflected upon.

A full review of *The Experiential Learning Toolkit* is at <http://reviewing.co.uk/reviews/experiential-learning-toolkit.htm>

### 9.4 There is always another dimension

Any list of holistic 'things' is never-ending, but I feel I must include one more design perspective because it is so different from those already mentioned - and because I find it so useful. It is John Heron's 6 x 3 matrix found in the *Complete Facilitator's Handbook*. You may not want to include all 18 combinations, but it is worth paying close attention to the 3 items in the second dimension: Hierarchical, Cooperative and Autonomous ways of working.

John Heron describes the value of moving around between these three basic facilitation modes. So one check you can run on the reviewing methods selected for your programme is to look at the overall balance of power across the facilitation modes associated with each reviewing method. Are you keeping tight control at the right times? Are you giving it all away at the right times? Do the chosen methods involve 'working with' participants at appropriate times?

*None of the four 'holistic checks and balances' listed above will give you a sequence for your design. But any of these checks will help to ensure that, overall, your reviewing sessions are varied and balanced in terms of the model to which you are referring. If nothing else these sorts of checks and balances will get you out of a rut you didn't know you were in, and in doing so you may happen across ways of helping participants get out of theirs.*

## 10. TEST AND EVALUATE

No design is complete until it is tested - so a suitable test needs to be built into the design. Some people approach this kind of process by trying to tweak a design until it is as perfect as can be. As a result of the 'tweaking' approach people tend to stay close to the original model 'because it has been tested'. But what about all of the other possible models that haven't been tested? Could they be even better?

So when evaluating a programme (or a reviewing design) be clear whether you want a gentle tweak test or something more revolutionary. If you make bold experiments with a range of very different designs you will get a much better feel for what really matters - and you could find yourself saying goodbye to a few sacred cows. You might even conclude that most effective programmes are the freshly designed ones.

You will find 42 ideas about programme evaluation at:  
<http://reviewing.co.uk/evaluation/methods1.htm>

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I look forward to receiving your entry soon - while you remember.

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## DESIGNING REVIEW SESSIONS: 10 TIPS

By Roger Greenaway, Reviewing Skills Training

*This is the second of three articles about design and experiential learning. The first was about programme design. This article is about session design. The next article is about the design of reviewing methods. To find the archives visit: [http://reviewing.co.uk/\\_ezines.htm](http://reviewing.co.uk/_ezines.htm)*

I am not suggesting that every review should follow these ten tips: most of the active reviewing methods I promote would only meet some of these criteria some of the time. But if your starting point (for a review) is that you simply have a few good questions up your sleeve then STOP! - and ponder whether some of these design tips for reviewing might help you and your participants get more value from the session.

1. Get every individual reflecting within 2 minutes
2. Get every individual communicating within 5 minutes
3. Agree the main focus for the review within 10 minutes
4. Get the main review process going within 15 minutes
5. Agree a time structure for the whole session
6. Ensure sufficient time for reporting back (or other kind of sharing)
7. Build in time for evaluating the review session
8. Highlight key learning at group and individual levels
9. Connect learning with other parts of the programme – and life/work.
10. Close the session with a link to the next event
11. Feel free to play the 'Joker' at any time

### 1. GET EVERY INDIVIDUAL REFLECTING WITHIN 2 MINUTES

WHY: Having everyone reflecting in the first two minutes matters because reflection is for everyone. Solo reflection time allows

individuals to reflect alone before their thoughts can be influenced by others. This thinking time also helps people come up with considered responses rather than finding themselves saying the first thing that comes to mind – which is more reaction than reflection.

HOW: Make one of these proposals for getting off to a quick, thoughtful, inclusive start.

- Write down a statement: such as an observation, feeling, intuition or insight.
- Find an object or picture that helps you say what you want to say.
- Reflect on ... [this question] for a minute and be ready to answer it in one sentence.
- Choose a question you would like to answer and prepare your response.
- Move to a position on the spectrum ... [described] that represents your own view.
- Create a chart showing your ups and downs during the experience.
- Lie down and listen to this guided reflection ...

### 2. GET EVERY INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATING WITHIN 5 MINUTES

WHY: Getting everyone communicating within the first 5 minutes matters because communicating with at least one other person turns fleeting thoughts into a more concrete form. And as reflections ricochet between people this provokes further reflection as everyone discovers an ever broadening range of perspectives. And this is not yet discussion – it is simply the sharing of reflections.

HOW: Make one of these invitations to get everyone communicating their reflections.

- Share your reflections / object / picture / statement / answer /

position with a neighbour.

- Share your reflections with someone you talk with less often than most.
- Share your reflections one-to-one with at least 3 people in 3 minutes.
- Share your reflections in a round (briefly if the 5 minute target is to be achieved!)
- Meet in 3s or 4s to create a summary of your reflections to share in the whole group.
- Exhibit your reflections and tour the exhibition responding to what you see.

### 3. AGREE THE MAIN FOCUS FOR THE REVIEW WITHIN 10 MINUTES

WHY: Agreeing a main focus saves everyone from a meandering review that follows the loudest voices. The more democratic the agreement, the more everyone will be engaged in what follows. Even if the process is simply an endorsement of your recommendation, at least the main focus of the session is the result of an open and deliberate choice.

HOW: Choose one or more of these processes for establishing the main focus.

- If there are no other suggestions I recommend that we focus on ... [this one suggestion]
- I would like you to choose what we focus on using 'Deciding Line' (quick version).
- Show the strength of your preference by where you stand on this spectrum '(Horseshoe)').
- In 3 groups decide the top 3 reasons for and against focusing on ... [one of these topics].
- Show the strength of your preference(s) by where you stand on this triangle of options.
- Lobby and campaign for your preferred option when you can see

where people stand.

### 4. GET THE MAIN REVIEW PROCESS GOING WITHIN 15 MINUTES

WHY: Impatience and frustration may set in if the main process has not begun inside 15 minutes. (For some active reviewing methods, such as 'Action Replay' or 'Sketch Map', the method will have begun within the first minute of the reviewing session. When this happens, the first three 'tips' listed above are usually designed into the method as an integral part of the process.)

HOW: You will have a few options up your sleeve. You need to choose which is the best reviewing method for reviewing the agreed topic with this group at this time and in the time available. If the group is familiar with the methods that are 'up your sleeve', you may wish to include participants in discussing the best method for reviewing the chosen topic.

### 5. AGREE A TIME STRUCTURE FOR THE WHOLE SESSION

WHY: Participants will take part more responsibly and intelligently if they have an understanding of the bigger picture, if they have a clear sense of shared purpose, and when they know how much time is available. Arbitrarily stopping whenever the clock dictates means that review sessions feel like 'half a review' – such as when sharing happens but nothing is done with what is shared.

HOW: Let participants know how much time is available for the review session and what finishing point you hope to reach. Knowing the time structure allows participants to pace themselves and to make a suitable contribution. For example, if they know it is a 20 minute review with 10 people everyone senses how much to contribute and how much to encourage others to join in.

## 6. ENSURE SUFFICIENT TIME FOR REPORTING BACK (OR OTHER KIND OF SHARING)

WHY: As soon as you have asked people to review in subgroups, there is an expectation that these smaller groups will be sharing something in the whole group. The smaller the group size the greater the opportunities for all to participate, but the more subgroups you create the longer will be the reporting back in a plenary session - unless you have thought ahead and have come up with a time-saving alternative...

HOW: ... Here are some options:

- Have each subgroup put their 'output' on display and extend the break by 5 or 10 minutes so that people have time to tour the exhibition. The 'output' could be a summary of key points, a headline, a picture, a diagram, a question, a formula or recipe, a proposal etc.
- Alternatively announce 2 x 5 minute exhibitions. Each group splits into exhibitors and viewers. Exhibitors stay put with their exhibit while viewers tour at least two other exhibits. For the second 5 minutes, viewers become exhibitors and vice-versa. These are sample timings only: adjust times and advice to suit the occasion.
- Have each individual make a copy of their own subgroup's output in a form that they can wear such as: a badge, a bandoleer, tie, arm band, tunic, apron, sandwich board, headband or hat. Extend the next break to allow time for people to view, mingle and learn about other perspectives.
- '4 x 4' is so-called because I first used this with a group of 16 people who were reviewing in 4 subgroups but this sharing method can be scaled up (or down) for other group sizes. Within each subgroup each person is identified by a number, starting with 1. Then all 1s meet, all 2s meet, all 3s meet and all 4s meet, etc. Each and every individual is now responsible for sharing the output from their former group. An optional extra stage is that people can then return to their former group for further sharing or

discussion.

- Have a representative from every subgroup do a flip-chart or Powerpoint presentation – but now that you have read the other options you may decide that this is not the most time-efficient and engaging way of achieving your purpose.

## 7. BUILD IN TIME FOR EVALUATING THE REVIEW SESSION

WHY: So that you and participants can learn how to improve the reviewing process.

HOW: If you sneak in a quick evaluation at the end of a reviewing session do not expect high quality data. But perhaps some evaluation is better than none. In some situations, mid-session evaluation may be more productive because it has a more immediate purpose and it allows you to make instant adjustments to the review process.

For evaluations of up to 10 minutes you can ask a series of questions that can be asked on a spectrum. I like the physical version ('Horseshoe') in which you ask people where they stand on a curved scale that you have defined. Depending on the purpose of your evaluation, you may find some of these questions useful:

- Do you feel that people are listening well to each other in this group? (very well – not well)
- Do you feel that other participants are facilitating your learning in any way? (a little – a lot)
- Do you get sufficient opportunity to reflect on experience? (a little – a lot)
- Do you get sufficient opportunity to participate in reviewing processes? (a little – a lot)
- Do you find that reviewing processes are adding a little or a lot to the value of this event?
- How do you find the pace of reviewing sessions? (Too fast – just right – too slow).

- If anyone makes a proposal for improving reviewing sessions, turn these into a question that can be answered on the spectrum: how much do you support this proposal? (a little – a lot)

Unless everyone is bunched together and the message is clear, I like to invite people to talk with their 'friendly neighbour' about why they chose their position. As a minimum I would then sample views from 3 points on the spectrum: 'at or near this end', 'at or near the other end', 'at or near the middle'.

For longer evaluations of around 20 minutes or more, I would use 'Simultaneous Survey'. About 8 evaluation questions are shared out throughout the whole group. Each individual walks around finding answers to their own question (while also answering any questions they are asked). After about 8-10 minutes, people with the same question meet up and prepare a summary of their findings to share in a plenary session or put on display.

## 8. HIGHLIGHT KEY LEARNING AT GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

**WHY:** From a design perspective, team reviews can be readily fitted into the time available. But for reviewing at the individual level, the time needs to be more carefully allocated and controlled. A session in which every individual is expecting to receive quality feedback cannot suddenly stop when there are still one or two individuals waiting their turn. Review sessions with an individual focus need to be well timed and well structured to ensure that everyone has a fair share of this key learning opportunity.

**HOW:** Some facilitators seem to review mostly at the group level eg 'What are we learning from these experiences about us as a group / about how teams work / about how this team can improve?' Whereas other facilitators emphasise personal learning eg 'What are you learning from

these experiences about yourself / about your abilities / what you need to work on?' This difference in emphasis is partly influenced by programme objectives, and partly by facilitator preferences. But in most programmes there is a need to reflect at both of these levels (and at other levels too). It is important to achieve the optimum balance between these levels. So ensure that you include all relevant levels and that you find the optimum balance for the occasion!

## 9. CONNECT LEARNING WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE PROGRAMME - AND LIFE

**WHY:** Although connections to work/community/life can be made at any point in a review session, there is an argument that the sooner such connections are made the more seriously they will be taken and the more thoroughly they will be explored. But there is also an argument that introducing work/community/life connections too soon may limit what can be learned from the most recent experience. Both arguments are right! The situation determines which is approach is best.

**HOW:** Although this is point 9 in this tips list, it might be the first thing you do at the start of a review session. You may wish to ask 'How was this like/unlike other experiences on this programme?' or 'How do you anticipate this experience could be of relevance to you at work / in life?' The review that follows would delve deeper into any suggested connections. For example 'Action Replay' lends itself to replaying scenes from a) the recent experience b) earlier associated programme experiences c) associated work/life experiences.

## 10. CLOSE THE SESSION WITH A LINK TO THE NEXT EVENT

**WHY:** Reviews tend to be backward looking because the primary process is reflecting on the recent past. But there should also be a sense of movement and moving on. So it is always useful to help learners anticipate their next opportunity to use what they have just learned, or

their next opportunity to continue exploring what they are currently exploring. Ideally, the next activity provides just the right opportunity to do so!

HOW: There are always two chances of linking between activities:

- 1) at the end of the review of Activity A
- 2) when briefing Activity B – which was thoroughly explored in my article on 'Reviewing Before Action'

<http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/Reflection-Before-Action.pdf>

Because 'linking' is so important in learning from experience (with one experience throwing light on another) the optimum strategy is to use both opportunities for linking!

## 11. FEEL FREE TO PLAY THE JOKER AT ANY TIME

The Joker comes from 'The Active Reviewing Cycle': it is the wild card that can be played at any time and can be anything you want it to be. Every system or model should have a Joker – because the Joker is a reminder that a model is an average, sanitised approximation of how things work. Average, sanitised approximations do have a value in helping us to understand how things work, but there comes a point where we need to keep such approximations at a safe-but-helpful distance so that we can see what is *really* happening. The Joker, amongst other things, helps us to get this distance right – giving models (and 'Tips') the respect they deserve, but no more than that.

Yes this was a 10 Tips 'structure', so it is entirely appropriate that the Joker comes in at No.11!

For fuller descriptions of methods mentioned above search for the name at <http://reviewing.co.uk>

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## DESIGNING ACTIVE REVIEW METHODS: 10 TIPS

By Roger Greenaway, Reviewing Skills Training

This is the third in a series of articles in [Active Reviewing Tips](#) about the design of reviewing processes in experiential learning. Each article zooms in closer than the previous one:

The first was about [programme design](#).

The second was about [session design](#).

This article is about [method design](#).

You may be thinking that you could save a lot of time by skipping this article and using a ready-made off-the-shelf reviewing method. You may not think of yourself as a designer of reviews. But I bet you are! I am sure that you adapt and adjust reviewing methods that you already know and use – depending on the group size, the group mood, the time and space available, your primary objective, etc. Without making such adjustments, off-the-shelf methods fall flat. Making adjustments involves re-designing. And the more re-designing you do, the more you can claim to be a designer of reviewing methods. Here are ten tips on how to build on your existing design skills.

1. Simplicity
2. Novelty
3. Go large
4. Use props
5. Use tasks
6. Draw on popular culture
7. Make it fun to facilitate
8. Pull out all the stops
9. Treat participants as explorers
10. Involve participants as co-designers

### 1. SIMPLICITY

There is something appealing about elegant designs that are instantly understood and that need minimal explanation and very few rules. So try designing 'out' what is not essential rather than designing 'in' extras in an attempt to dress up a poor design. Explore the possibility that 'less is more' in your design. 'Less is more' could mean any or all of these:

- the less the facilitator does, the more there is for participants to do
- a review exploring one question achieves more than a review exploring 10 questions
- limiting responses to one sentence improves reflection, expression and listening.

Experiences can be complex phenomena so take care that simplicity in design does not lead to superficial responses. That would be simplicity gone wrong. I regard 'Warm Seat' as a simple 'plain vanilla' design in which the learner receiving feedback is encouraged to ask just one question. See <http://reviewing.co.uk/feedback.htm#warmseat>

### 2. NOVELTY

Go for the kind of novelty that captures the imagination and that makes people want to have a go. With novelty there is less risk of the method prompting unwanted associations, such as an adult saying "This is kids' play – I was throwing rubber chickens around in kindergarten". Novelty provides a clean, fresh start. My own innovations in reviewing arose in many ways including some fresh starts and some recycling of old ideas. Innovation resulted from various processes including:

- deliberate creativity with colleagues
- adapting a method because the usual resources were not available
- developing variations of a method that already worked well
- finding a new use for an old method
- recognising the shortcomings of an existing method and doing something about it
- seeking greater efficiency
- responding to needs arising during a programme

- turning principles into practice
- turning research findings into practice

For my full article on *Innovations in Reviewing*, see [http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/7\\_5.htm](http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/7_5.htm)

### 3. GO LARGE

Scale up methods so that (for example):

- a line on a page becomes a rope on the ground
- a 2 x 2 diagram becomes four quarters of a room
- steps in a process become the stairs to the floor above.

Walking around inside a big diagram stimulates deeper reflection than does thinking about a diagram on a page. I admire experienced practitioners of meditation who achieve deep reflection without moving, but walking around inside large models provides different kinds of opportunities for reflection that are more dynamic and that are more open to all.

### 4. USE PROPS

Some simple props can be highly transformative:

wearing a mask; using a microphone; wearing a special hat; sitting on a throne; operating the remote control in Action Replay; holding the conch from Lord of the Flies, Harry Potter's wand or invisible cloak, a talking stick, or a clapper board ...

The best props instantly transport people into a particular frame. For example, a prop can signify:

honesty, curiosity, authority, democracy, a thinking style, an interview style or a special power.

Props (or pictures) from the activity being reviewed may have taken on special meaning and significance for the group – such as:

the treasure they found, the clock that timed them out, the rope that connected them together, the picture or symbol representing what they survived or achieved.

### 5. USE TASKS

A common pattern in much experiential learning is: Brief → Task → Debrief. During the task, the facilitator often has a monitoring and observing role while the group perform the task independently. When it comes to the debrief (or review), the facilitator is back in charge. *But there is another option at this stage*: the review/debrief can itself be an independent task such as:

- carrying out a survey
- making a map or flow chart
- creating a picture of a new person to join the team
- performing an action replay that highlights critical moments.

Tasks qualify as 'review' tasks if the task design requires people to reflect on their previous experiences. Good designs make it likely that everyone is fully involved in the process. This may, for example, involve people working in pairs or in small groups. A design may focus on just one stage of a learning cycle - such as storytelling or analysis. A review task does not necessarily follow a full learning cycle ending with a future focus. In fact many good review tasks naturally lead into a facilitated review. The output from a review task gives the facilitator plenty of 'material' to work with. When participant tasks feed into the next stage of a reviewing process, the whole process becomes more enriched, more focused and more engaging.

### 6. DRAW ON POPULAR CULTURE

One of the main reasons for drawing on popular culture is that it can provide you with ready-made styles and formats to work with that everyone instantly understands. Quiz shows, chat shows and talent shows with panels of judges scoring performances all provide well-known, ready-made, and tried and tested formats that can be readily converted into reviewing formats. Care needs to be taken with formats that can become cruel or humiliating (such as *The Weakest Link* or *The Apprentice*). Such formats risk introducing values that are at odds with the kind of learning culture that you are trying to create. You can always be selective and build a technique around just one aspect of a show. For

example, Kaye Richards created a mock-up of the *Big Brother* diary room in order to provide the cues for a particular style of interviewing. And Colin Beard models one of his activities in *The Experiential Learning Toolkit* on the *Antiques Roadshow* which cues certain ways of handling and exploring objects and talking about them.

## 7. MAKE IT FUN TO FACILITATE

Create designs that give the facilitator something more to do than simply give the brief and manage the time. Although it is good to keep the focus on what the learner is doing, you can add value by giving the facilitator an interesting and demanding role in the process – without squeezing out opportunities for participants. Here are some examples of facilitation roles that can be 'fun':

- In *Solo Challenge* you facilitate the negotiation of suitable challenges for each individual.
- In *Turntable* you can take turns like everyone else and enjoy joining in on all sides.
- In *Vote of Thanks* your key role is to ensure that no-one misses out on appreciation.
- In *Horseshoe* or *Warm Seat* you can invite feedback for yourself and lead by example.

For more examples see 'What do facilitators do?' at [http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/13\\_1\\_what\\_do\\_facilitators\\_do.htm](http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/13_1_what_do_facilitators_do.htm)

Fun for participants can be even more important, and is included within the next tip. For more on 'fun' see *Reviewing for Fun*: [http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/8\\_1.htm#Reviewing\\_for\\_Fun](http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/8_1.htm#Reviewing_for_Fun)

## 8. PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS

Playing the organ with only one stop pulled out is timid and cautious and does not reveal the full range of sound that is possible. 'Pulling out all the stops' when designing reviews means engaging:

- more than one kind of intelligence
- more than one kind of learning style
- more than one kind of thinking style
- more than one part of the brain and
- more than one part of the body.

Ideally the method you design will require a rich mixture of abilities while also being in a social context that fulfills a range of personal and social needs. Needs to consider can include:

the needs for belonging and acceptance, for care and friendship, for praise and recognition, for responsibility, achievement, self-respect, creativity, new experience, connection, significance, contribution, fun and power.

Yes you can achieve all of this through reviewing – if your design encourages participants to pull out plenty of stops! Even simple designs such as *Simultaneous Survey* pull out most of the stops listed above. For more about how reviewing can meet a variety of needs, see *Reviewing for Development*: <http://reviewing.co.uk/articles/reviewing-for-development.htm>

## 9. TREAT PARTICIPANTS AS EXPLORERS

Think of reviewing as a journey in which participants are searching and exploring. Many reviewing methods could be viewed as exploring aids. The traditional 'discussion host' facilitator does all the exploring through the questions they ask. Whereas well designed reviewing methods treat participants as the main explorers. For example, people can explore ...

- by carrying out a survey
- or by finding out what it's like to be 'in the shoes' of others
- or by seeking patterns in events
- or by searching for reasons why things went wrong (or right)
- or by exploring options for their next move.

Exploring readily fits with making and using maps (such as *Metaphor Maps*) and with charting progress towards a goal. Ideally each participant will feel that the review itself is a journey and not simply a motionless resting point between journeys. One way of working with the idea of

review as a journey is to finish a review in a way that reflects where it began and how it might continue. For ideas about matching or echoing beginnings and endings see *Facilitative Frames* at [http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/13\\_2\\_facilitative\\_frames.htm#2](http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/13_2_facilitative_frames.htm#2)

## 10. INVOLVE PARTICIPANTS AS CO-DESIGNERS

Perhaps you have half an idea? Present the idea to participants and they might well provide the other half. Here are some examples:

- "I feel we could all do with some fresh air, but how can we use the time well for reviewing if we go outside?"
- "We might make better progress in smaller groups. What could a small group realistically achieve, make or produce in 15 minutes that would assist the whole group review process?"
- "Whenever we use the picture postcards there seems to be more energy and focus to what we are doing. Is there any way that using the pictures might help us just now?"
- "When you return from your review in subgroups, each subgroup has 3 minutes in which to report back in a unique way that is different from every other group."

Review design is not so precious that we should do it all ourselves – leave scope and space for participants to be designers too. Participants can even be given 100% responsibility for design – but that is another story and strays beyond the frame of this article which has been to provide you with tips for creating your own designs for active reviewing.

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After writing this article I felt I should challenge myself to design a new method using some of the tips above. The starting point was tip #6 above: 'Draw on Popular Culture'. I chose the 'chat show' format and named the method 'Couch Potatoes'. You will find Couch Potatoes at: [http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/13\\_6\\_designing\\_review\\_methods.htm](http://reviewing.co.uk/archives/art/13_6_designing_review_methods.htm)

## DESIGN COMPETITION: HOW TO ENTER

This issue brings you the third in a series of articles about the design of reviewing processes in experiential learning.. That adds up to 30 design tips over the last three months. If you missed any you can easily track them down at <http://reviewing.co.uk/ezone1/art001.htm>

**How to enter:** you need to implement at least one of these 30 design tips and describe what happened - in a Tweet or a few sentences.

**Your reward for entering** is that you will receive FULL descriptions of two of the following methods: *Activity Map*, *Back to the Future*, *Storyline*, *Simultaneous Survey*, *Horseshoe*, *Turntable*. Say which two you would like. That is your reward - simply for entering.

**Winning entries** that are published in Active Reviewing Tips (with your permission) will be rewarded with all six descriptions. I hope to publish one winning entry each month in 2012.

If you get frustrated when you see the name of a reviewing method in Active Reviewing Tips without an accompanying description, then ease your frustration by entering the competition and receiving 2 (or even 6) full descriptions for your growing toolkit.

I look forward to receiving your entry soon - while you remember.

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[roger@reviewing.co.uk](mailto:roger@reviewing.co.uk) (for competition entries and any other business)  
<http://reviewing.co.uk>

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