

2000 TIPS

for Trainers &
staff developers

edited by PHIL RACE

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Preface

This book is for busy trainers, who have not the time (or even the inclination, perhaps) to wade through the tomes of theoretical knowledge underpinning the design of effective training programmes. The tips in this book aim to provide you with practical suggestions you can try out straight away in your own work. It is not the sort of book that is meant to be read through from cover to cover. It is meant to be a companion to you, to dip into wherever and whenever you can draw something useful to you from it.

The origins of the book started way back in 1994, when with Brenda Smith I wrote *500 Tips for Trainers*, which has since established itself in both the UK and the USA. Then more recently, with Steve McDowell, I wrote *500 Computing Tips for Trainers*. Also, two other tips books I wrote myself have strong links to the world of training, namely *500 Tips on Open and Flexible Learning* and *500 Tips on Group Learning*. The present book is my attempt to draw from these sources the most relevant of the suggestions they contain, and structure them into a logical compendium for trainers. This compendium also includes some bits and pieces I have adapted from other things I have published, including relevant extracts from *2000 Tips for Lecturers*.

Chapter 1, 'Face-to-face training', is in effect the heart of this compendium, addressing in turn planning, preparing, giving presentations, creating your learning environment, getting events off to a good start, keeping them going and (last but not least) looking after yourself!

Chapter 2, 'Group-based training', is about people learning together, with or without the presence of a trainer or facilitator. Several things relating to group learning are also included in various parts of Chapter 1, but in Chapter 2 is more depth about how learning happens in groups, and tips on addressing the behaviours that can damage the effectiveness of group work.

Chapter 3, 'Resource-based training', is about selecting, adapting or designing learning resource materials that can enable at least some of your trainees' learning to be done under their own steam. This chapter starts with suggestions to help you to work out which parts of your training may lend themselves to flexible learning, and how to select, adopt or adapt flexible learning resource materials. The chapter ends with suggestions about how (if you choose to do so) you may go about designing new flexible learning materials of your own.

Chapter 4, 'Computer-based training', starts with advice about how you yourself may get into

the world of computers and technology, should you not already be there. Next follow suggestions on how to help your trainees get into using computers. This is followed by a section on online learning, including using communications technologies, e-mail, computer conferencing and the Internet in training. The chapter ends with some advice on keeping your own stress levels down when working with training technologies, followed by a 'jargon-busting' glossary, which is intended to be both informative and amusing!

Chapter 5, 'Evaluating your training', ends the compendium, with suggestions on a range of ways of finding out how your training is going, and not just 'happy sheets'.

I hope that you will find things in this compendium that you can put into practice straight away, and others that you can ponder about and develop in your own way. More important, I hope you will recognize throughout using this book things you are already doing really well, and suggestions that you are already exceeding in your own work.



Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Brenda Smith and Steve McDowell, my co-authors for two of the four principal sources of this compendium, for their help in updating and improving the content of many parts of this book. Steve McDowell's eagle eye also caught many of my grammatical and punctuation errors, and he taught me to use the 'tracking changes' features of my word-processing package as an editing resource. I am grateful to Steve Higgins for permission to adapt and include his glossary on the terminology of computing and electronic communications.

I am also grateful to Jonathan Simpson of Kogan Page, who helped to shape the idea represented by this book, and encouraged me along the way. Finally, I am pleased to thank Helen Moss, whose copy-editing unearthed a variety of things that needed putting right.

Face-to-face training

Planning and preparation

1. *What's your training ethos?*
2. *Designing a new training programme*
3. *Setting training event objectives*
4. *Where can learning outcomes be useful to trainees?*
5. *Fine-tuning and communicating learning outcomes*
6. *Getting the content right*
7. *Timetabling your training event*
8. *Tips when using visiting trainers*
9. *Designing pre-event tasks*
10. *Behind the scenes*
11. *Refreshments*
12. *Getting your bits and bobs ready*
13. *Planning for distant venues*
14. *Tips for international trainers*

Preparing and giving presentations

15. *Do you really want to give presentations?*
16. *Preparing your first presentations*
17. *Giving presentations*
18. *Designing and using handouts*
19. *Using overhead projectors*
20. *Why use computer-aided presentations?*
21. *Some don'ts for presentation managers*
22. *Helping trainees to learn from computer-aided presentations*

Creating your training environment

- 23. *Seating, tables and workspace*
- 24. *Using flipcharts yourself*
- 25. *Planning Post-its and flipcharts into group work*
- 26. *Using whiteboards or chalkboards*
- 27. *Using video machines*
- 28. *Maximizing learning pay-off from video*
- 29. *Using audiotapes in your training*

Getting training events off to a good start

- 30. *First impressions count*
- 31. *Introducing yourself*
- 32. *Mind your body language*
- 33. *Introducing participants*
- 34. *Working with mature trainees*
- 35. *Working with international trainees*
- 36. *Working with trainees with special needs*
- 37. *Gathering and using trainees' expectations*
- 38. *Maximizing learning pay-off*
- 39. *Establishing ground rules*
- 40. *Following up pre-event tasks*
- 41. *Brainstorming*

Keeping the show going

- 42. *Maximize 'learning-by-doing'*
- 43. *Avoiding alienation*
- 44. *Addressing conflict in group work*
- 45. *Handling difficult questions*
- 46. *Working with difficult participants*
- 47. *Gender issues*
- 48. *Coping with the unexpected*
- 49. *Developing participants' creativity*
- 50. *Working one to one*
- 51. *Helping participants to make sense of things*
- 52. *Using role-plays*
- 53. *Ring the changes*
- 54. *Filling five minutes to coffee!*
- 55. *End with a bang, not a whimper*

Looking after yourself

- 56. *Time management*
 - 57. *Workload management*
 - 58. *Stress management*
 - 59. *Working well with colleagues*
 - 60. *Keeping up to date*
-

The tips in this chapter are about planning and delivering training events. Some of the tips apply particularly to designing one-off training events for particular purposes, perhaps for 'away ground' rather than your normal workplace, and others apply to regular day-to-day training in your regular working environment.

The chapter starts with tips on **planning and preparation**, bringing together quite a mixture of agendas, from organizing refreshments to taking your show on the road internationally. However, the suggestions on designing your training outcomes or objectives apply to most training scenarios.

There then follow tips on **giving presentations**, both for trainers who have not yet done much in the way of giving presentations, and for old hands too. In particular, there are suggestions for using computer-aided presentation packages to support your presentations.

The chapter moves on to **creating your training environment**, and addresses some of the other things you may use in your work, including whiteboards or chalkboards, and video machines.

The section on **getting training events off to a good start** includes a wide range of tips on process, and how to deal with different sorts of trainees in different contexts.

There is a broad range of further suggestions on process, including tips on handling difficult situations or people, in the section on **keeping the show going**.

The chapter ends with tips on looking after yourself: some suggestions on handling your own overall workload, and making it that bit more manageable.

1. What's your training ethos?

Here are some general indicators of what could be regarded as a productive training ethos. Good training is about helping trainees to learn and to participate:

- **A training event should be an active occasion for participants, not just for us!** It's well worth building your training event programmes around the things that participants will do during the sessions. People tend to remember more when they are actively involved – and having fun!
- **Plan each training event like a journey, with a beginning, a middle and a goal.** This helps you to ensure that training events are a coherent learning experience for participants, and that participants know where they are at each stage.
- **Participants need to know where they're going.** Make the purposes of each training event as clear as possible, for example by spelling out intended learning outcomes or training event objectives.
- **Participants want to know why they should be going.** Express the intended learning outcomes in terms that participants will find relevant to their work situations, and attractive targets for them personally.

- **Participants like to know how they will get there.** Share with participants information about the sorts of processes they will engage in during the various stages of a training event – doing so may help to dispel any anxieties.
- **Regard the experience of your participants as your greatest training event resource.** Whenever possible, allow participants to tell you things, rather than you telling them things that some of them may already know. Give participants credit for what they already know whenever possible.
- **Build in interaction whenever possible.** A good training event is mainly interactive, and uses only a very limited amount of ‘direct input’ from trainers. The input does not have to be in presentation format, but can take the form of learning resources such as handouts, displays and case studies.
- **Allow for ongoing feedback from participants.** It is far better to abandon your original plans when something unexpected but important crops up, than to try to soldier on and stick to a pre-planned schedule of what should be covered in a training event. However, don’t abandon coffee breaks!
- **Anticipate what you would like participants to say about a training event.** Try to plan your training events along lines that will be both enjoyable and productive from the point of view of participants.
- **Regard each training event as a new learning experience for yourself.** The day you think you’ve got a training event ‘exactly right’, you’ve got a problem! If that day comes, design some different training events, and keep on learning.

2. Designing a new training programme

Designing a new area of training is an exciting but complex task, requiring the integration of a whole range of interdependent elements. The following tips, in sequence, are designed to help you do so in a systematic way. These are most likely to be of use to you if you are (or will be) in the role of leader for the new programme:

- **Identify the market for your programme.** Few new programmes these days are offered to a captive, predetermined market of potential trainees. You will need therefore to have good evidence of a real demand for your proposed programme. It will be useful to identify the competition – other institutions offering a similar programme. Can you show that either the market is sufficiently large or that you can offer something very different to attract a sufficient number of trainees? Your institution will require you to show how your programme will sit within the existing course portfolio.

- **Clarify the rationale for the new programme.** You need to be sure of your reasons for its particular flavour and its ultimate viability. Can you run it with the human and physical resources you can get? Can you provide for a sufficiently large number of trainees? Specifically consider: the unique characteristics of the group it is aimed at; the programme's aims, intended learning outcomes and the qualification or accreditation that it will lead to.
- **Clarify how it will be costed and funded.** This is a daunting process if it's your first time, and we advise you to gather know-how from other colleagues in your institution who have already planned and implemented a new programme. There may well be formal institutional checklists and guidelines for you to follow.
- **Decide upon a time-frame.** Curriculum design is a complex and time-consuming process. Mistakes are made if the process is rushed. If a programme is to be designed from scratch, sufficient time should be allowed to negotiate and incorporate internal as well as external quality assurance processes. Time is also needed to market the course effectively. Be realistic about a start date!
- **Expect to become involved in the recruitment of trainees.** It is often found, particularly with new programmes, that trainees receive inappropriate guidance and advice, and can end up taking a course for which they are not suited. Retention statistics are increasingly under the spotlight in institutional review procedures. A useful part of planning a new programme is to look at how trainees will be guided before they enrol, and the kinds of follow-up support they are most likely to need after enrolment. Such guidance has been found to be an essential factor in ensuring that trainees don't drop out of new programmes.
- **Map out the intended learning outcomes.** You will need to design these carefully, based on the programme rationale and its target trainee group, so that they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-specified, and in parallel with the standards and benchmarks that may already exist in the subject area concerned. More detailed suggestions on doing this are provided later.
- **Decide on how the outcomes are to be described.** It can often be useful in planning the delivery of learning outcomes to use the terminology of the UK's vocational qualification framework: performance criteria, evidence indicators and range statements. If these are translated into simple, jargon-free language, you will find that both your trainees and fellow trainers will be really clear about what is required of them.
- **Consider appropriate teaching and learning strategies.** You will need to decide to what extent you will use traditional teaching methods, resource-based learning, flexible learning pathways and communications technologies in the delivery of your programme.
- **Think about who will deliver it.** You may need to assemble a team to deliver the programme. It is not a good idea to design a programme that is too dependent on the particular qualifications or expertise of individual colleagues. Typically they will leave or drop out

in due course. This requires you to identify a pool of appropriate colleagues to whom you can turn. It's a good idea therefore to assemble a collection of CVs of the colleagues who are likely to contribute.

- **Think carefully about the people, facilities and resources you will need to run the programme effectively.** These may include training staff, support staff, library and information technology resources. You may also need to budget for laboratory, workshop or studio facilities, specialized equipment, printing and photocopying. Do not assume that institutional resources and facilities will be automatically available to you just because the programme is approved.
- **Consider the staff development the team may need to deliver the programme effectively.** There will be training needs associated with any new programme, be it in using unfamiliar delivery methods, standardizing assessment procedures, content updating or simply team building.
- **Decide how the learning outcomes will be assessed.** It is common to express the content of a programme in terms of what trainees will be able to do or know. Good decisions on how best to assess whether the specified learning outcomes have been achieved are crucial. There is a real danger of assessing only some of the learning outcomes and then only partially. For this reason, put assessment (and quality assurance) at the top of your list of things to get right.
- **Think about the values that underpin your programme.** For example, your underpinning philosophies about how trainees learn need to be explicit, agreed and shared by the course team.
- **Plan into the structure of the programme a process of continuous quality review and improvement.** It is critical that you look at how you will monitor the success of your programme. This will include trainee satisfaction, peer review, retention and completion rates, and assessment reliability.

3. Setting training event objectives

People like to know where they're heading. They like to know what they may expect to be able to do at the end of the training session that they can't do already, or that they may like to do better. They also like to know how the things they can already do relate to the agenda for the session. It is therefore crucial to be clear about the intended learning outcomes of training sessions. The intended learning outcomes are the most important starting-point for any training programme. Learning outcomes give details of syllabus content. They can be expressed in terms of the objectives that trainees should be able to *show* they have achieved, in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and even attitudes. They are written as descriptors of ways that trainees will be

expected to demonstrate the results of their learning. The links between learning outcomes and assessment criteria need to be clear and direct. Learning outcomes indicate the standards of courses and modules:

- **Look for likely ‘training needs’.** In pre-event planning, talk to anyone who can help you focus on to the real issues that you should attempt to cover during the forthcoming training session.
- **Start with some ‘provisional’ objectives.** Prepare a slide or two, or overhead transparency (or handout sheet) listing some relatively broad ‘intended outcomes’ of your training session.
- **Ask participants, ‘What do you want?’** Asking participants to identify their own personal wishes helps you to find out the ‘real agenda’ that may lie behind the training session. A good way of doing this is to give out small pieces of acetate (or Post-its) and ask participants to write down what they ‘hope for most’ from the forthcoming session.
- **Treat participants’ wishes seriously.** If you have gone to the trouble of collecting participants’ expectations, don’t waste them. Stick them up on a flipchart where they can remain visible throughout the training session. As often as possible, return to particular participants’ expectations as the session progresses.
- **Get the wording right.** Make sure that the words used to express training objectives or intended learning outcomes mean the same to everyone. Ask ‘What do we really mean by this?’ and adjust the wording so that the objectives are understood and shared by all present.
- **Feel free to jettison some of your own objectives.** When the real agenda (as determined from participants) differs from the agenda you prepared in your planning for a training session, it is important to be seen to be willing to favour participants’ wishes, even at the expense of some training event objectives that you yourself feel are really valuable.
- **Try getting participants to prioritize objectives or outcomes.** For example, suppose there are six possible objectives. Ask participants to give each of the objectives a ‘star rating’, for example ‘three stars for crucial’, ‘two stars for useful’, ‘one star for interesting’, ‘zero stars for irrelevant’. Collect up the ‘stars’ on a flipchart or overhead transparency listing the objectives, and take your priorities from the result.
- **Return to the objectives or intended outcomes.** Link training event activities to the objectives, so that your participants can see exactly why they are being asked to do particular things during the training session.
- **At the end, review the objectives or intended outcomes.** Feel free to admit those that have not been achieved by the session. Confirm those that you know have been addressed successfully.

- **At the very end, return to your participants' expectations.** Give them the opportunity to confirm which of their expectations have been realized during the training session – and which still remain as 'outstanding'. It is often possible to harness the 'outstanding' expectations as the basis for a follow-up training session.

4. Where can learning outcomes be useful to trainees?

Learning outcomes should not just reside in course validation documentation (though they need to be there in any case). They should also underpin everyday teaching–learning situations. They can be put to good use in the following places and occasions:

- **In handbooks,** so that trainees can see the way that the whole course or module is broken down into manageable elements of intended achievement, and set their own targets accordingly.
- **At the start of each presentation,** for example on a slide or transparency, so that trainees are informed of the particular purposes of the occasion.
- **At the end of each presentation,** so that trainees can estimate the extent to which they have travelled towards being able to achieve the intended outcomes associated with the presentation.
- **At suitable points in the briefing of trainees for longer elements of their learning,** including projects, group tasks, practical work and fieldwork.
- **On each element of handout material** issued before, during or after presentations, to reinforce the links between the content of the handout and trainees' intended learning.
- **On tasks and exercises, and briefings to further reading,** so that trainees can see the purpose of the work they are intended to do.
- **On the first few screens of each computer-based learning programme** that trainees study independently (or in groups).
- **At the beginning of self-study or flexible learning packages,** so that trainees can estimate their own achievement as they work through the materials.

5. Fine-tuning and communicating learning outcomes

- **Work out exactly what you want trainees to be able to do by the end of each defined learning element.** Even when you're working with syllabus content that is already expressed in terms of learning outcomes, it is often worth thinking again about your exact intentions, and working out how these connect together for different parts of trainees' learning.
- **Don't use the word 'trainees' in your outcomes** – except in dry course documentation. It is much better to use the word 'you' when addressing trainees. 'When we've completed this presentation, you should be able to compare and contrast particle and wave models of radiation' is better than stating 'The expected learning outcome of this presentation is that trainees will...' Similarly, use the word 'you' when expressing learning outcomes in trainee handbooks, handouts, laboratory briefing sheets and so on. Trainees need to feel that learning outcomes belong to them, not just to other people.
- **Work imaginatively with existing learning outcomes.** There may already be externally defined learning outcomes, or they may have been prescribed some time ago when the course or programme was designed or accredited. These may, however, be written in language that is not user-friendly or clear to trainees, and that is more connected with the teaching of the subject than the learning process. You should be able to translate these outcomes, so that they will be more useful to your trainees.
- **Match your wording to your trainees.** The learning outcomes as expressed in course documentation may be off-putting and jargonistic, and may not match the intellectual or language skills of your trainees. By developing the skills to translate learning outcomes precisely into plain English, you will help the outcomes to be more useful to them, and at the same time it will be easier for you to design your teaching strategy.
- **Your intended learning outcomes should serve as a map to your training programme.** Trainees and others will look at the outcomes to see if the programme is going to be relevant to their needs or intentions. The level and standards associated with your course will be judged by reference to the stated learning outcomes.
- **Remember that many trainees will have achieved at least some of your intended outcomes already.** When introducing the intended learning outcomes, give credit for existing experience, and confirm that it is useful if some members of the group already have some experience and expertise that they can share with others.
- **Be ready for the question, 'Why?'** It is only natural for trainees to want to know why a particular learning outcome is being addressed. Be prepared to illustrate each outcome with some words about the purpose of including it.

- | **Be ready for the reaction, ‘So what?’** When trainees, colleagues or external reviewers still can’t see the point of a learning outcome, they are likely to need some further explanation before they will be ready to take it seriously.
- | **Work out your answers to ‘What’s in this for me?’** When trainees can see the short-term and long-term benefits of gaining a particular skill or competence, they are much more likely to try to achieve it.
- | **Don’t promise what you can’t deliver.** It is tempting to design learning outcomes that seem to be the answers to everyone’s dreams. However, the real test for your teaching will be whether it is seen to enable trainees to achieve the outcomes. It’s important to be able to link each learning outcome to an assessable activity or assignment.
- | **Don’t use words such as ‘understand’ or ‘know’.** While it is easy to write (or say) ‘When you have completed this module successfully, you will understand the third law of thermodynamics’, it is much more helpful to step back and address the questions, ‘How will we know that they have understood it?’, ‘How will they themselves know they have understood it?’ and ‘What will they be able to do to *show* that they have understood it?’ Replies to the last of these questions lead to much more useful ways of expressing the relevant learning outcomes.
- | **Don’t start at the beginning.** It is often much harder to write the outcomes that will be associated with the beginning of a course, and it is best to leave attempting this until you have got into your stride regarding writing outcomes. In addition, it is often much easier to work out what the ‘early’ outcomes actually should be once you have established where these outcomes are leading trainees.
- | **Think ahead to assessment.** A well-designed set of learning outcomes should automatically become the framework for the design of assessed tasks. It is worth asking yourself ‘How can I measure this?’ for each draft learning outcome. If it is easy to think of how it will be measured, you can normally go ahead and design the outcome. If it is much harder to think of how it could be measured, it is usually a signal that you may need to think further about the outcome and try to relate it more firmly to tangible evidence that could be assessed.
- | **Keep sentences short.** It is important that your trainees will be able to get the gist of each learning outcome without having to reread it several times, or ponder on what it really means.
- | **Consider illustrating your outcomes with ‘for example...’ descriptions.** If necessary, such extra details could be added in smaller print, or in brackets. Such additional detail can be invaluable to trainees in giving them a better idea about what their achievement of the outcomes may actually amount to in practice.
- | **Test-run your learning outcome statements.** Ask target-audience trainees ‘What do you think this really means?’, to check that your intentions are being communicated clearly. Also test out your outcomes statements on colleagues, and ask them whether you have missed anything important, or whether they can suggest any changes to your wording.

- **Aim to provide trainees with the whole picture.** Put the trainee-centred language descriptions of learning outcomes and assessment criteria into trainee handbooks, or turn them into a short self-contained leaflet to give to trainees at the beginning of the course. Ensure that trainees don't feel swamped by the magnitude of the whole picture! Trainees need to be guided carefully through the picture in ways that allow them to feel confident that they will be able to succeed a step at a time.
- **Don't get hung up too much on performance, standards and conditions** when expressing learning outcomes. For example, don't feel that such phrases as 'on your own', 'without recourse to a calculator or computer', 'under exam conditions' or 'with the aid of a list of standard integrals' need to be included in every well-expressed learning outcome. Such clarifications are extremely valuable elsewhere, in published assessment criteria. Don't dilute the primary purpose of a learning outcome with administrative detail.
- **Don't be trivial!** Trivial learning outcomes support criticisms of reductionism. One of the main objections to the use of learning outcomes is that there can be far too many of them, only some of which are really important.
- **Don't try to teach something if you can't think of any intended learning outcome associated with it.** This seems obvious, but it can be surprising how often a teaching agenda can be streamlined and focused by checking that there is some important learning content associated with each element in it, and removing or shortening the rest.
- **Don't confuse learning outcomes and assessment criteria.** It is best not to cloud the learning outcomes with the detail of performance criteria and standards until trainees know enough about the subject to understand the language of such criteria. In other words, the assessment criteria are best read by trainees *after* they have started to learn the topic, rather than at the outset (but make sure that the links will be clear in due course).
- **Don't write any learning outcomes that can't (or won't) be assessed.** If it's important enough to propose as an intended learning outcome, it should be worthy of being measured in some way, and it should be *possible* to measure.
- **Don't design any assessment task or question that is not related to the stated learning outcomes.** If it's important enough to measure, it is only fair to let trainees know that it is on their learning agenda.
- **Don't state learning outcomes at the beginning, and fail to return to them.** It's important to come back to them at the end of each teaching-learning element, such as presentation, self-study package, element of practical work and so on. Turn them into checklists for trainees, for example along the lines 'Check now that you feel able to...' or 'Now you should be in a position to...'.

6. Getting the content right

Many of the suggestions in this book are about *how* to conduct training events, rather than about *what* to cover in them. Of course, the content itself is important too. The following ideas may help you to focus the content:

- **Link the content of your training event directly to the advertised aims or objectives.** Of every component of your planned training event, ask yourself, 'How exactly does this relate to the intended outcomes?' If the link is tenuous, the element concerned may be an optional extra.
- **Remember that most activities take longer than we imagine they will.** This is particularly important when devising new activities that you haven't tried out before. It is better to allow 45 minutes for such an activity and then fill in with something else if it only takes 30 minutes, than vice versa.
- **Don't ride hobby-horses too hard!** When we've got a strong belief in something, it's all too easy for us to plug it so hard that it becomes difficult for participants to take – particularly if they have views rather different to ours.
- **Research how relevant and useful each part of your training event feels to participants.** In follow-up questionnaires or interviews, ask which parts of the training event content were most useful, and ask which things could be left out if necessary.
- **Give participants your content rather than tell them it.** It can save a great deal of time to have the main principles of your training event wrapped up in handout materials or summaries, so that participants can spend their time with you exploring the issues rather than trying to write them down.
- **Check that your content is authoritative, up to date and correct.** It is very useful to find trusted colleagues elsewhere who will be willing to look at your handout materials and over-heads with a supportive but critical eye, and give you feedback about anything that may need to be adjusted.
- **Remember that content changes.** Participants will consider your training event to be as up to date as the most recent developments you refer to during the session. Make sure you have some new references as well as well-established ones. A handout sheet listing these is very much appreciated.
- **Let participants help you to develop your content.** Next month's repeat session can benefit a lot by incorporating questions and answers that emerge from your present training event. A sheet collecting together such questions and answers is very useful as handout material for future training events.

- **Focus on what participants will do during your training event.** The activities you devise will be the most important aspect of your participants' view of the content of your training event.
- **Have plenty of spare content up your sleeve!** You never know when an activity will take only half the time you allowed for it (for example, when everyone already knows a lot about the subject). Sometimes, you'll have to drop a training event element entirely because you find out at the last minute that everyone has already covered it elsewhere. Have ready a range of alternative things that you can use to fill participants' time usefully.

7. Timetabling your training event

If you can manage time, you can manage everything else. Timetabling a training event is an important element of designing it. We've gathered the following ideas by trial and error (mostly by error!):

- **Start with coffee (and tea, and juice).** For example, you're much more likely to achieve a prompt 10.15 start if the advertised programme starts with 'Coffee and informal introductions' at 9.45.
- **Start on time anyway.** Even if participants are still drifting in for an assortment of wonderful reasons, it does no harm to be seen to be already under way at the advertised start time. You can choose to do things that aren't particularly important until everyone has arrived. If you delay the start, participants who have made the effort to be punctual can feel very cheated.
- **Stop on time (or even ahead of time) for coffee breaks or meal breaks.** It may come as a great disappointment to you that most participants are actually rather pleased when a coffee break starts five minutes early!
- **Don't say, 'Come back in 20 minutes.'** No one will know when the 20 minutes started! It's more effective to say, 'Please can we resume at 11.23?' (An odd time tends to stick in people's memories, and usually works surprisingly well.)
- **Plan a reasonable amount of time for coffee breaks.** As well as consuming a drink and a biscuit, participants will probably want to pay a call – or make a call. Also, the conversations that participants get into during breaks are not only interesting but useful. It's better to have a prompt start after a 25-minute break than a laboured start after an attempt at a 15-minute break.
- **Sometimes avoid breaks, but still have coffee.** Where refreshments are available in the room, it is then possible to give five minutes for everyone to equip themselves with refresh-

ments, and enter into (for example) a plenary discussion or syndicate task where participants can consume their refreshments as they work.

- | **Don't underestimate how long it takes for everyone to get lunch.** Even when running training events in hotels, there may be slow table-service, or queues at the buffet table. (Pull out the buffet table from the wall that it always seems to be placed against, so that participants have twice the opportunity of serving themselves.)
- | **In case lunch is fast, ensure that participants don't have a boring wait.** One way of doing this is to combine lunch with a lunchtime task or an exhibition of materials, so that participants can use any spare time without feeling held up.
- | **Have a clearly advertised finishing time.** This helps participants plan round the other things in their lives, including transport home or picking up kids from school. Always finish on (or ahead of) this time. You can of course stay on for informal chats with those participants who are not in any hurry after 'closing time'.
- | **Don't try to do everything you've prepared for.** When a training event gets behind your personal schedule, feel free to drop inputs or activities that are not crucial, and aim to give every appearance of sticking to the planned timetable. Remember, participants find the words 'I don't think we need to spend any further time on this – we've already explored it quite fully this morning' music to their ears!

8. Tips when using visiting trainers

It is always a good idea to introduce variety and change by inviting outside trainers or speakers. However famous and well respected these people are, a few precautions can be vital:

- | **Agree things in writing.** A friendly conversation over the telephone may be difficult to recall months or even weeks later. It is useful therefore to put pen to paper and send a summary of your conversation to visiting trainers.
- | **Check the understanding of the title.** The same words can all too easily mean different things to different people at different times. Try to check out exactly what the title means to you, and to the visiting trainer. Talk things over in advance.
- | **Discuss in some detail the areas to be covered.** Have you had an experience where you thought you had agreed something, only to find the other person doing or saying something completely different? It can be embarrassing, especially when you see the looks on other people's faces. Talk through exactly what you both understand about the topics to be covered. Examples can be very useful.

- **Prepare guidance notes about overhead transparencies.** How many times have we all been at training events where we cannot read what is shown on the overhead projector (OHP)? A few guidance notes on general layout and size of print can save much embarrassment later. Prepare a standard checklist form to send to all visiting speakers – this could help maintain the quality of your training provision.
- **Ensure that enough copies of handouts are available for distribution.** Ask presenters to bring along copies of their overhead transparencies, or send them before the event, so that you can produce copies. Suggest shrinking overheads to four or six on a page, and photocopy both sides of the paper to save forests.
- **Check when your presenter wants to distribute material.** If handouts are supplied in advance, check whether it is intended that they should be issued at the start, or at particular stages during the session.
- **Check what facilities the presenter will need.** Ask how the room should be set out. Are tables needed for materials? Is a remote control for the video essential or not? Presenters who wish to stop and start a video frequently while adding comments could be rather thrown if they have to sit in front of the machine and jump up and down at each appropriate moment.
- **Send a good map, well in advance.** There is nothing more frustrating than trying to find a venue with a poorly constructed map, especially when doing so as a visiting presenter. Ensure the map is printed large enough to read without a magnifying glass, and that appropriate buildings and streets are clearly marked. It is a good idea to indicate which way the map should be held, by relating it to marked buildings or landmarks – and always include a compass pointer that shows which way north is at least, otherwise it is all too easy to hold a map upside down!
- **Don't be afraid to interject when necessary.** If you can see that the audience has completely switched off, try to bring the session back on track. To throw in a question can help to steer things in another direction when necessary, or can help the audience to understand better. Alternatively, a quick and friendly chat to the visiting trainer over coffee can often save the day.
- **Follow up with a thank-you note.** However experienced we are, it is always good to receive such notes. It may also be appropriate to send on any evaluation comments you receive.

9. Designing pre-event tasks

You haven't always the chance to set participants tasks to do in preparation for a training event –

but when such an opportunity is available, you can use it to your advantage, and your participants can benefit considerably too. Here are some suggestions:

- **Make sure the tasks reach everyone in good time.** One way of checking that all your participants have received the tasks is for the same mailing to include something they need to send back to you before the training event, for example a registration form or a car-parking permit request.
- **Don't make the tasks too demanding.** Short, specific tasks are best. Ideally, you want all participants to have spent approximately equal time on the tasks, rather than have some participants who have spent a great deal of effort on them while others have only thought about them lightly.
- **Include pro formas.** For example, if one of your tasks is 'Work out a list of 10 questions that you think we should address during the course of the training event', providing a page with 10 boxes can help to make sure that participants bring their lists ready. The lists can then be displayed during the training event, and an agenda for discussion can be made from the most common questions.
- **Make the tasks quite definite.** It's little use just asking participants to read through some handout material as preparation for the training event. It is better to give them something definite to do while they read, such as 'Find five advantages of the approach described in the handout, and also find five drawbacks of the approach.'
- **Use the tasks to bring participants up to an appropriate 'starting level'.** It can save a lot of valuable time if those participants who are starting from scratch have an opportunity to gain familiarity with the basics of the topic from tasks they do using handout materials before they come to the event itself.
- **Use pre-event tasks to prioritize training event objectives or outcomes.** Simply asking participants to give a rating showing which objectives or outcomes they can already achieve is useful. This can help you avoid wasting time on things that your participants can already do.
- **Don't depend on all participants having done your pre-event tasks.** With the best will in the world, things won't always go your way. You may end up with one or two substitute-participants who were told to attend your training event at the last minute – and of course, they won't even know about the pre-event tasks.
- **Don't leave a task unattended.** When people have spent time doing some preparation, they are naturally quite upset if their work goes unrecognized. Make sure that each pre-event task is debriefed at least briefly during the training event.
- **Encourage participants to bring along to the training event materials they think may be useful or relevant.** Setting a pre-event task along these lines may help you track down

valuable resource materials that you would not have come across otherwise, and such tasks place value on participants' existing knowledge and experience.

- **Print your pre-event task sheets on coloured paper.** This can help you recognize at once the things that participants have already done in preparation – and helps participants themselves to avoid losing the task sheets in a mass of white papers.

10. Behind the scenes

It's vital that you make due preparations before your training event takes place, so that everyone is at ease during the session – and to save you from last-minute panics:

- **Get your venue details right – and send them out.** Send each participant relevant details, including travel directions if needed, about 10 days ahead of the event. Remember that some participants may be travelling directly from some other event or location, so give time for the details to be redirected to them if necessary.
- **Show the way.** Prepare large direction signs for the event and venue – enough for all possible entrances to the building. Remember how creative people can be when it comes to finding their way into a building they do not know!
- **Prepare name badges for everyone (including yourself).** These are best prepared using big lettering (18- or 24-point on desktop-publishing programmes) so that names can be seen without an intimate inspection of the upper body! Double-check your spelling of people's names – no one likes to be misnamed.
- **Feed bodies as well as minds.** Check that catering arrangements are in place and that you have catered for diverse needs or tastes as far as you can. If you want to keep your group awake in the afternoon, fresh fruit works rather better than syrup sponge and custard. However, oranges (except mandarins) are not a good idea, as participants don't really want to be seen with juice dripping down their fronts!
- **Prepare evaluation sheets.** Make these specific to the event you're going to run, so that you can gather detailed feedback on which of the aims have been achieved successfully, and find out any expectations that have not been met.
- **Check your equipment.** Make sure that you are familiar with the projector, video machine or TV sets that you may want to use during your session.
- **Get your ambience sorted out.** For example, if you wish to play suitable music during the minutes while participants are arriving and settling in, check that suitable playback equipment

is available – it's often worth bringing your own anyway (a small portable tape or disc machine will do).

- **Have more than enough handouts.** Check that they are stapled in the correct order, or filed in piles so that you can give them out in the right order as your session proceeds. Photocopy or print back-to-back wherever possible, to save trees.
- **Get your own act together in advance.** Get your overheads and notes assembled into the right order, so that you don't have to scramble around looking for particular resources as you proceed.
- **Know who is supposed to be coming.** Get your list of expected participants ready, and have copies available for everyone. When participants are coming from around the country, it can be useful to circulate lists in advance, including contact phone numbers, so that participants can help each other with travel arrangements. It is amazing how often participants can travel to your session from the same site and organization, without knowing of each other's attendance till they arrive.

11. Refreshments

Think back to the last conference you attended. Whatever else you've forgotten about it, you'll probably remember whether the food was superb or terrible! The following suggestions may help you to ensure that your own participants don't have sad memories about the refreshments during your sessions:

- **Provide drinks on arrival.** People may have travelled a long way and usually welcome a top-up of caffeine, tannin and so on. Try to arrange that the drinks are available some time before the advertised start of the session, so that people who arrive early have their own reward.
- **Allow people to make choices.** Provide tea (including herbal, raspberry, orange, passion fruit), coffee, orange juice, hot water, cold water, fizzy water and plain water. People feel better when they have choices to make. This is your first step towards empowering your participants. Making such choices is also a good way of participants getting to know you and each other.
- **Don't forget the late arrivals.** Make sure that the drinks are still available 30 minutes after the start of your programme. Anything could have happened that morning – failed alarm clock, flat tyre, mother-in-law called just before departure, late train and so on. It's not always people's fault when they're late. (In your case, of course, it's your fault!)

- **Provide lots of refreshments.** Regular breaks help the brain to function more effectively, and it's amazing what some people will tell you over a cup of coffee!
- **Provide a table for the refreshments.** Those with bad backs will find difficulty bending down to floor level to pick up their cup of tea. A table also acts as a central focus for conversation. It somehow gives stability to strangers, and if anyone finds conversation difficult they can always eat a biscuit and talk about the advantages of wholemeal ones.
- **Place the table in a suitable part of the room.** If the refreshments are to be topped up throughout the event, try to avoid the catering staff having to fight their way through people, chairs, flipcharts and video cameras. Place the table somewhere where it is easily accessible, and not blocking anyone's view. If your group is large, it helps to place the table so that people can get to all sides of it – this helps to avoid queues.
- **Watch the budget.** It is really impressive to serve fresh salmon and strawberries, followed by afternoon tea! However, you may be unable to provide seminars later in the year, or people may not be able to afford to come. Simple, wholesome food also helps to keep people awake.
- **Variety is the spice of life.** Isn't it amazing how different we all are? Have you ever tried cooking a meal for six children! In your group you will probably have people who eat most things, vegetarians of different kinds, people who can't eat pork, eggs, caviar, cucumber and so on. Play safe and provide a mixture of food.
- **Provide earplugs or play lively music!** Have you ever wondered why catering staff never go on training courses that teach them how to lay out cups and saucers quietly? Try and be flexible so that while stocks are being replenished you can provide a change in activity that does not require quiet contemplation.
- **Allow lots of time for eating.** Evaluations often state that the most valuable part of the session was talking to colleagues. Therefore a way of improving your ratings with clients is to provide lots of opportunity for this interaction to occur. How often have you had to leave a lovely, sticky dessert because the afternoon session was about to begin?

12. Getting your bits and bobs ready

Carry your case of bits and bobs with you at all times. Being prepared is the motto of the effective trainer. How many times have you asked for materials to be available only to find they were not provided?

- **Get a box!** Invest in a creative box, carry-case or container that you can take anywhere.