

Rapid Learning Stations: Learning a Lot in a Little Time.

From: *The Ten Minute Trainer.*

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Imagine a training tool that keeps your learners motivated and actively involved while they review old information, learn new information, practice skills related to what they have learned, AND that does it all at the same time! This amazing tool, called Rapid Learning Stations, can do all that - and more!



What Is It?

Rapid Learning Stations is a training strategy that has been around for decades and that is highly adaptable to just about any topic and any size group.

Basically, you set up a number of “learning stations” around the training room – designated tables or spaces where small groups of learners will do specific learning tasks for a specific amount of time. The small groups rotate from station to station, doing a different topic-related task at each station. When all groups have participated in all station activities, you lead a debriefing session with the entire group to discuss what they learned from the Rapid Learning Stations. You can also answer questions and explore “next steps” during this processing time.

What Does It Do?

The Rapid Learning Stations training tool enables your learners to:

Review segments of previously learned information in a variety of short, quick ways.

Teach themselves some new, topic-related information.

Practice topic-related skills for a short period of time.

Learn from each other, self-correct and coach each other.

Link new learning to old learning, and draw on what they already know.

Keep both their minds and bodies awake and alert as they move around the room doing various learning activities.

Participate in the training in a unique and novel way, thereby increasing motivation and interest as well as learning and retention.

Time, Materials, Set-Up

Before using Rapid Learning Stations, you will need to do the following preparation steps:

1. Decide what topic-related information you want learners to review, what new information you want them to learn, or what skills you want them to practice.

2. Decide how many learning stations you want to include. A general rule to follow is: There should be no less than 3-4 and no more than 6-8 people at each sta-

tion at one time. So if you have 30 people in your training session, you can have as few as 4 stations or as many as 10 stations. Usually 4 - 6 stations will work with most groups. If you have ten learners at a station, you can always divide them into 2 smaller groups of 5 each before doing the station activity.

3. Decide what kind of activity will be at each station. Activities can include: games, puzzles, worksheets, discussion questions, reading assignments, skills practice in pairs or as a group, individual or group self-corrected tests, charts or diagrams to make, flashcards to review, direct instruction from you or an assistant, presentations or skits to prepare. If you include the last item, learners can perform their skits during the processing time after the station activities end.

4. Decide how long you think each activity will take, and then take the average of that time for the length of all station activities. In other words, the time for each station has to be the same, so you will have to adjust the station activities to fit the time allotted.

Station activities work best when they are from 5 to 20 minutes in length. If you have to err, make them too short rather than too long. Whatever time you choose,

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make sure that the station activity pretty much fits that time span. Allow for about 30 seconds rotation time between stations.

5. Time for the entire Rapid Learning Stations process will vary depending upon the time allotted for the stations and for debriefing afterwards.

For example, if you have four 10-minute stations, 30-seconds rotation time in between, and 15 minutes to discuss the station activities afterwards, allow about an hour for the entire process.

If you have six 15-minute stations, you may want to run four of them for an hour, take a short 5 - 10 minute break, and then run the last two. With rotation time, the break, and whole-group processing at the end of the station activities, allow for about two hours of Rapid Learning Stations time.

6. Decide on a rotation signal to use. It may be high-energy music, a noisemaker, flashing the room lights, or simply saying "Time to rotate." Upbeat music is the most fun signal, as it lightens the mood and energizes the learners as they move around the room.

7. When setting up the training room, designate certain tables or

breakout areas for the stations. Post each station activity set of instructions on a chart paper or handout located at or near the station. Make sure all necessary materials are at the station and that there are enough materials for all rotations. If using games, have all game materials ready to go. If learners need to bring writing or handout materials with them to a station, make sure they know this ahead of time.

8. Do one final check of each station to make sure instructions and materials are there and that there are enough materials for all groups to be able to do the station activity (example: enough art supplies, worksheets, blank chart paper, etc.)



Activity Instructions

1. Explain to the training participants the purpose of the Rapid Learning Stations strategy. Tell them how groups will rotate (clockwise, counter-clockwise, randomly), the time allotted for each station, and what the rota-

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tion signal is. Let participants know what they need to take with them and what they do when they finish.

2. Check for understanding by asking learners yes/no questions about the procedure to make sure they know what they will be doing.

3. Have participants count off from one to the number of stations you have (example: they count off from 1 - 6 if you have six stations). All the ones go to Learning Station One, all the twos to Learning Station Two, etc.

4. Tell station groups to choose a facilitator for the entire process. Or they can choose a different facilitator for each station activity. Also let them know that they will be staying with their station group for the entire activity.



5. Begin the Rapid Learning Stations process and time each rotation (or assign someone to do this). While the activities are

going on, walk around the room monitoring the station groups, answering questions, and offering assistance if necessary. Pay attention to the station time allotted - if it seems too short or too long for most of the groups, then change it to fit the needs of the majority.

6. When participants have rotated through all the learning stations, announce a short break, and then talk about the station activities with the whole group. Be sure to allow enough time for processing the entire learning experience. Have a list of discussion questions posted that station groups can talk about among themselves first and then discuss with the whole group. Discussion questions can include:

Which activity challenged you the most?

Which activity did you learn the most from? Which was the most meaningful for you?

What were three important things you learned from the activities?

What did you learn about yourself? About others?

What are three take-aways for you from the Learning Stations?

What knowledge/skills will you use back at work because of these activities?

What is your action plan as a result of these activities?

What is one question you still have concerning any of the learning station material?

7. Have participants acknowledge and celebrate their learning station groups with kudos, applause, handshakes, or high-fives.



Activity Variations

1. Instead of doing all the Rapid Learning Stations in a row during a specific chunk of time, scatter them throughout your training day, having small groups go to different learning stations as breaks between lecture segments. For example, you lecture for about 10 - 20 minutes. Then each table group goes to a different learning station and does the activity there for about 5 minutes. Afterwards, groups return to their tables and you lecture again until the next Station Break.

2. Instead of rotating groups through the stations, you can rotate the activities from table group to table group. Simply make sure that everything needed to do each station activity is in a large manila envelope or small box, and pass the envelopes or boxes from table to table.

3. Have a “game table” where all the Rapid Learning Stations activities/games and instructions are displayed. During a Station Break, each table group can choose an activity to do. They return all game materials to the game table when done. Or you give them enough time to choose two or three activities/games to do/play.

4. Have small table groups make up the Rapid Learning Stations activities, complete with all necessary materials and instructions. Then do Activity Variations #2 or #3 with the “learner-created” activities/games.

5. Post a list of “Early-to-Finish” ideas so that any group that finishes before the station time is up can choose something to do for the extra few minutes.

6. Have learning station groups lead the processing afterwards, making up the discussion questions and facilitating the whole group discussion. You become

the “guide-on-the-side” through it all.

Final Thoughts

Rapid Learning Stations is an extremely versatile instructional strategy that lends itself to a number of practical uses. With it, your learners can review already-learned information, become aware of new information, practice skills, plan projects, study, quiz themselves or each other, and create their own performance-based presentations using what they have learned. The skies - and imagination - are the only limits with this useful, motivational, high-energy training tool!

“Rapid Learning Stations!” is an excerpt from Sharon Bowman’s newest book *The Ten-Minute Trainer! 129 Ways to Teach it Quick and Make It Stick*, to be published by Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer in 2005, and printed with permission. Please cite the source when downloading this material. You can contact www.Bowperson.com for more information about *The Ten-Minute Trainer*.



Author and traveling teacher Sharon Bowman helps educators and business people “teach it quick and make it stick,” - fine-tuning their information-delivery skills and turning their passive listeners into active learners.

Over 40,000 copies of Sharon’s 6 popular teaching, training, and motivation books are now in print. Titles include: “*Preventing Death by Lecture*,” “*Presenting with Pizzazz*,” “*How To Give It So They Get It*,” and “*Shake, Rattle, and Roll*.”

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