

Designing Training Materials

I've been asked recently how I go about designing Facilitator (Instructor) Guides and Participant Guides. It seems that colleagues I've talked to or read about develop their materials very differently.

I design the Participant Guide in conjunction with the Facilitator Guide. Most of my time is spent on designing the Facilitator Guide material. However, as I come across some detailed information, I immediately place it in the Participant Guide, since it may not need to be in the Facilitator Guide. By doing this, I am capturing the material on the spot, saving design time later. The Participant Guide is a guide for use during the training **and** as a resource on the job.

The Facilitator Guide contains much more detail than the Participant Guide. It includes:

- the flow of the content with detailed explanation about how to facilitate the activities, simulations, and games.
- start times, stop times, and even notes breaks.
- as much information as possible to help both trained and non-trained facilitators successfully disseminate the information. In this case, the Facilitator Guide might seem rather constricting and too detailed for the expert facilitator.

I have found that collecting and organizing the content in the Facilitator Guide works best for me....and isn't that how you should create your material – how it works best for you?

Different instructional designers have different processes for designing. In the July 2000 Thiagi Game Letter, published by Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, Lou Russell, an author of *The Accelerating Learning Fieldbook: Making the Instructional Process Fast, Flexible, and Fun*, recommends “designing your games and simulations before your lecture material, overheads, and student workbooks. Leave aside all non-interactive components of your training package until the very end. If you are lucky, you will run out of time and this will prevent you from creating dull and lifeless materials that encourage passive learning.”

Other designers create the Participant Guide prior to the Facilitator Guide. In fact, their Participant Guides look more like PowerPoint presentations rather than reference material to be used during the training and, perhaps more importantly, as a resource on the job.

The key is not to lose sight of the “learner” or participant. Constantly consider what the best way is to present the content so that it “sticks.” In other words, how can the participants apply the information back on the job immediately and effectively?

After I write the content, I then have the pleasure of looking through my collection of activities, simulations, and games. As you may have found, many activities, simulations, and games can be adapted to fit different applications. Going through the options with an open mind is critical. (*Feel free to go to the NASAGA.org website to see articles on simulations and games as well as how to adapt them.*)

Here are few ideas to consider when creating your training material:

- Do you have interactive activities for the “participative” learners?
- Do you have independent learning for the “reflective” learners?
- Do you think about presenting your content so that the “specific” learners don’t become frustrated by information that is not organized?
- Do you allow learning to occur through “big picture” thinking or by giving general instruction for the participants that like to create their own framework or structure to the content?
- Do you tie the learning to the participants’ needs? And if you’re not clear what they are, give them time to make the application themselves?
- Do you provide auditory, visual, and kinesthetic opportunities throughout the training?

In general, I create Facilitator Guides in a 2-column format. The first column, on the left side of each page, contains the module headings with the recommended time allotted. It also references PowerPoint slides, flip charts, videos, handouts, and other materials to be used. The second column contains the detailed content of what the facilitator should say and do. I typically note the difference by regular versus italic font, though quotation marks can also be used. Headers and Footers might contain the course name, module name, page number, company, and date of the last update. The Facilitator Guide also contains an Appendix with such things as: pre and post letters, handouts, PowerPoints, example flip charts, etc.

The Participant Guide format is typically a 1-column format. Consistent headings are used to indicate what material is contained for that page. There is typically no Header. Footers contain the page number, company, and date of the last update. An appendix might contain a glossary of terms, references, blank forms used and discussed in the module, etc.

Designers create their training the way that best meets their needs, while always keeping the learner in mind. Do what works for you. Do what is easiest. Let’s face it, in today’s corporate environment; we don’t have the luxury of time. Let’s do what works – fast!

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