



How to Teach a Skill

This how-to section addresses two important issues: (1) how to teach and (2) how to teach a skill in particular. Let's start with talking about an approach to teaching, based on discovery and learning through experiences.

Teaching

Teaching is not primarily *telling*. It's helping other people learn. That means the focus is on the learners, not the teacher. Earlier in this handbook, we said that people learn best through experiencing something themselves, so when you are striving to teach something, you are constantly trying to

- Get into the shoes of the learners so that you can better understand where they are and what they need from you to *learn* the subject under study.
- Develop learning experiences in which the learners are trying to do something with the insights or skills involved.
- Help learners realize what they have learned to increase their comfort and confidence

in using an insight or skill in actual situations.

- Appreciate that learners do not have one set, definite way of demonstrating that they understand or know something. Each learner is an individual.

Teaching a Skill

Teaching a skill is more objective and tangible in nature than, for example, trying to teach an insight. However, the focus is still on the learners; you are trying to help *them* gain this skill and be able to use it with a sense of comfort and confidence.

In Exploring, skills often come into play in an activity situation, so it's important that you know how to teach a skill. This is especially important for activity chairs and activity committee participants. Teaching a skill involves five basic steps.

Preparation

The first step in teaching a skill is to obtain the necessary equipment and supplies in sufficient quantity so that the skill

can be demonstrated, taught, and practiced. For demonstrating and teaching, simulated or makeshift equipment is never adequate. Preparation also means that you have carefully thought through how to teach this skill in a way that causes the learners to understand its usefulness and to gain the necessary experience to acquire the skill.

Explanation

The explanation serves two purposes: (1) to introduce the subject by giving some background about its usefulness and application; and (2) to describe the subject in a simple, complete, and tantalizing way. The explanation should create a desire to become proficient in the skill. Unusual facts or illustrations arouse interest and create an appreciation of the value of learning the skill. The learners should be able to sense your respect for the skill and the importance of being able to perform this skill.

Demonstration

This is where you actually show how to do the skill. You need to demonstrate each step slowly and clearly so that the learners can easily follow you and gain confidence in their own ability to acquire this skill.

Practice

This is the heart of teaching a skill to others. In this step, the learners *try out* the skill under your guidance and careful coaching. Learners should have enough opportunity to try the skill so that they feel comfortable and confident. You should be especially sensitive to the differences in how people learn. Some participants in this practice might be ready to go very quickly, while others will need to practice the skill more deliberately.

Application

This final step gives learners the chance to demonstrate this skill to someone else. They become the teacher. You are still there in the role of a coach to provide help when necessary. This last step should give learners the awareness that they are ready to use this skill in actual situations.

Time Balance in Teaching a Skill

The most important part of teaching a skill is having the participants practice it. Therefore, most of the time involved in teaching a skill should be devoted to practice.

The proper time balance is:

- Explanation (hearing): 10 percent of the time
- Demonstration (seeing): 25 percent of the time
- Practice (doing): 65 percent of the time

Tips on Coaching a Skill

The following tips will help you teach a skill effectively. As you read each item in this list, try to visualize yourself using this tip when you are actually teaching a skill.

- Be able to perform the skill well yourself.
- Review your own experience in learning it, and work out a series of steps for teaching it.
- Keep the instruction personal by working with an individual or small group and letting them teach others in this small group.

- Size up your audience's abilities and personality traits and consider how the abilities and personalities affect your teaching of the skill.
- If the learner is not familiar with the skill, go slowly. Insist on accuracy first, then speed (if speed is a factor).
- Don't interfere when learners try to do it on their own. Don't interrupt their efforts unless they bog down or go off on the wrong track.
- Let the learners make mistakes if this will help them learn. Simply point out mistakes tactfully.
- Never make corrections sarcastically or for the benefit of onlookers.
- Encourage the learners by making remarks on their progress, pointing out the completion of each step, and remarking on the steps they have done well.
- Urge them to practice and to teach someone else.