

Learning Formats and Techniques

Format	Explanation	Type of learning	Advantages	Disadvantages	Audience/Group Size
Audience response systems (touch pads)	Two-way communication between presenter(s) and audience occurs. The audience uses an electronic device to respond to a variety of questions (multiple choice, true or false, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attain information, ideas or concepts. • increase awareness of approaches or potential gaps in knowledge or practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active participation • immediate feedback • quick tabulation • anonymity • promotes discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expensive • training required for presenters 	any
Case studies	Participants use real-life situations to apply knowledge or find solutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attain or apply information, ideas or concepts to practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • probing questions • springboard for discussion • in-depth exploration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case discussion may not be generalizable to other situations • easy to digress 	any (larger sizes may increase passivity)
Demonstration	A method or technique is presented with a description of each step or element.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learn through demonstration and observation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active participation possible • promotes discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • time required for questions and answers 	small to medium
Discussion group/ peer exchange/ user groups	People discuss mutually relevant topics based on experience or background.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attain or apply information, ideas or concepts to practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • useful for electronic learning forms, e.g., chat rooms, bulletin boards and e-mail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • often requires a moderator or facilitator • easy to digress 	any
Forum/panels	Two or more people (subject experts or experienced practitioners) conduct a discussion before an audience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attain or apply information, ideas or concepts to practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities to voice and hear opinions • open dialogue/debate • raise controversies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disengagement if topic unappealing 	small to medium

Lecture/plenary method	Directed information presented by a speaker to an audience for purposes of instruction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide information, ideas or concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reaches a large audience • large amount of information delivered in a short time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highly passive • participants unable to direct topic • potential relevance 	any
Question and answer sessions	Participants are able to pose questions to speaker(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss information, ideas or concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • springboard for in depth discussion • interactive learning for larger audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited opportunity to engage in dialogue • often short 	any
Role playing	Participants take part in a simulated situation involving realistic problems and incidents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practice skills, techniques and thinking processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adaptable formats (scripts, improvisational, etc.) • broad content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some participants may refrain from taking part • labour intensive 	small
Seminar	A subject expert meets for discussion on a particular topic. Learners often prepare papers for discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • potential to meet individual learning objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exploration of issues • in-depth guidance and expertise • in-depth discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be lengthy 	small to medium
Simulation	Participants take part in a mock situation using a model duplicating real life situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practice skills, techniques, and thinking processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • first-hand experience • learning in action • focus on multiple competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lengthy • debriefing session required • costly 	small to medium
Small group discussion	A chosen topic is discussed. Structured questions are often used to lead participants in discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apply information, ideas or concepts to practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dialogue (open) • opportunities to raise questions and resolves gaps in understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used too often with lectures and presentations • often requires facilitation 	small
Workshop / hands-on demonstration	A group with a similar background or interest share knowledge and concerns about a topic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • potential to meet individual learning objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responsibility for learning rests with the participants • short and intensive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may lack depth 	any

Adapted from Biddle, S., and B. Huffman. 1994. The continuing medical education handbook: A resource for CME practitioners. Kalamazoo, Michigan: The Upjohn Company, and Arrowhead Library System. n.d. Learning formats and techniques: A glossary by type of learning. <http://www.arrowhead.lib.mn.us/renewal/formats.htm>