

ANGELA WIENS, BSc

Learner Assessment at a Distance

Learning Objectives

At the end of this session participants should be able to:

1. Explain the relationship between learning objectives and learner assessments.
2. Outline the various levels of learner assessment (or evaluation).
3. Introduce techniques for assessing learners.

Abstract

Learner assessment, or evaluation, is a critical component of instructional design. However, assessing learners is often skipped because course developers feel that this evaluation is either impossible or unnecessary. Instead, assessment is an integral component of training programs that seek to improve the learner's performance and the course's effectiveness.

At this stage of the training development cycle, collecting data and information is used to improve the effectiveness of instruction and to measure learners' achievement of course objectives. Data collected on learner's achievement and satisfaction indicate adjustments that might be made to the course to improve its efficiency. Therefore, the work done in the design stage of the training development cycle – during which course objectives are determined – are reflected in the evaluation stage of the cycle. If the learning objectives are poorly written and poorly defined, assessing the learners is unlikely to produce valuable results.

When course objectives are "measurable," they are valuable inputs into the assessment process. These measures, or criteria, help to determine how successful the training course is in relation to meeting the course objectives. Given the range of objectives and criteria possible, assessment should not be used to evaluate a course as good or bad or to evaluate a learner's achievements as complete or incomplete. Instead, use assessment as a scale, assessing the *degree* of success instead of an absolute yes-or-no conclusion.

Kirkpatrick developed a four-level model of evaluation. Level 1, or Reaction, gauge learner's satisfaction with the course. Level 2, or Learning, is concerned with learners' performance during the course. Level 3, or Behaviour, examines the extent to which learners transfer what they learned in the course to how they perform their jobs. Level 4, or Results, relates the results of the training course to organizational objectives.

Appropriate assessment tools are examined in this workshop that address learning objectives and the four-level model of evaluation.

Self-Assessment Questions

1. What importance have I placed on assessment of learners?

2. How can I use learner assessment to improve the course's effectiveness?
3. What levels of evaluation have I used?

References

Conrad, Kerri and TrainingLinks, *Instructional Design for Web-based Training*, HRD Press, Amherst, MA, 2000.

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Goldstein, Irwin L., *Training in Organizations*, 3d ed., Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, Pacific Grove, CA, 1993.