

Effective Training

Systems, Strategies, and Practices

T H I R D E D I T I O N

P. Nick Blanchard

Eastern Michigan University

James W. Thacker

University of Windsor

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Gagné-Briggs Theory

The Gagné-Briggs theory of instructional design,⁹² discussed in Chapter 3, is applicable to cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal learning. As a micro theory, it provides a set of procedures to follow for each instructional event to enhance learning. The theory identifies nine events of instruction, which are tied to social learning theory (see Table 5-12). Note that the first event in the theory of instructional design is “attention,” which parallels that of social learning theory. The next event, “informing of the objectives,” further activates a process of getting the trainees’ “attention” focused. Stimulating recall of prerequisite learning ties into activation of memory. Let’s examine the nine events of instruction in more detail. As we do so, we will refer back to relevant sections of social learning theory for additional information.

Gain Attention

Attention can be gained in several ways (raise voice, clap hands, or a comment such as “Now watch me carefully”), but is best when tied to the training at hand. If the training was in problem solving, for example, ask the question, “How do you go

Table 5-12 Gagné-Briggs Nine Events of Instruction

INSTRUCTIONAL EVENT	RELATION TO SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY
Gain attention	Attention
Informing the trainee of goal (objectives)	Attention
Stimulate recall of prior knowledge	Retention: Activation of memory
Present the material	Retention: Activation of memory/symbolic coding/cognitive organization
Provide guidance for learning	Retention: Symbolic coding/cognitive organization through guided discovery
	Retention: Symbolic rehearsal
Elicit performance (practice)	Behavioral reproduction
Provide informative feedback	Reinforcement
Assess performance	
Enhance retention and transfer	Reinforcement

Adapted from: Gagné, R. M., L. Briggs, and W. Wager. 1988. *Principles of Instructional Design*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

about solving a problem?” or “We have high absenteeism; what should we do about it?” These types of questions focus discussion on the types of problems trainees face and their typical problem-solving approaches. This initial focus leads nicely into the introduction of the problem-solving objectives. Another way to gain attention is to have the CEO/president welcome the trainees and indicate how important the training is to the future of the company. This approach was effective for the training developed by Dr. Camp in Training in Action 5-2. High-level support for training is always important, and when a key decision maker takes time to convey this support, it is especially effective in getting trainees’ attention.

Inform the Learner of the Goal or Objective

We covered learning objectives and their importance in depth. Clearly, this step is important in getting the trainee focused and aware of not only what needs to be learned, but also what will be required when training is complete. Also, it is useful to tie the training back to the job and how it will help trainees be better performers. Having done a TNA, you will find this an easy task.

Stimulate Recall of Prior Relevant Knowledge (Learning)

This step is important to ensure that the trainee has accessed the information/knowledge necessary for the learning that is about to take place. At the moment of learning, all relevant prerequisite capabilities must be highly accessible to be part of the learning event.⁹³ Suppose “team problem solving” training is to be conducted. Previously, some brainstorming training and problem-definition training had been completed. Now trainees should be thinking about these topics so that the previous learning will be accessible to the problem-solving training. Ask for an explanation of brainstorming from a trainee, or focus a discussion on these two topics and show how they are related to the present learning task. Or simply review the two topics with a high level of participation from trainees.

Present Material to Be Learned

Material is presented in a logical and understandable format. This point seems obvious, but recall that what the trainer might think is obvious might not fit in the trainees’ schema. To ensure understanding, the method of instruction should include several questions designed to elicit responses from trainees regarding their level of

understanding. Highlight important points with verbal emphasis (raise voice, slow down presentation for effect). Use easel sheets with bold print to highlight important learning points. Also, eliciting examples from trainees serves to ensure that trainees understand the material. The trainer in team problem solving should list the steps on an easel board for all to see, with the sub-steps provided under each of the main headings. Some simple examples of problems and the procedures to solve them could be on a video for effect. The video could be stopped at each step to highlight the step and the preparation for the next step. These examples reflect ways in which the organization and presentation of material assist the trainee in their symbolic coding and cognitive organization.

Provide Guidance for Learning

The key here is to guide the trainees to the appropriate answer/conclusion, not just to tell them the answer. Get trainees to examine the possibilities related to the topic, both right and wrong. When the solution is reached, the overall discussion will have helped trainees obtain an in-depth understanding of the topic. Provide them with a problem and ask for possible alternatives. For example, in problem-solving training, give trainees a problem such as “absenteeism is high” and ask them to “define the problem” (the first step in problem solving). This task gets trainees thinking and providing different perspectives. These different perspectives are shared and all can assess (depending on whether the response was correct) their own level of understanding. Providing numerous examples allows the trainees to see the generality of the material to many situations. Asking for their examples confirms that the material is being put into the correct context.

Elicit the Performance

Here, trainees actually do it. For example, in the case of learning a problem-solving model, they now would work in teams to solve a real problem. The problem should be similar to or even the same problem they have been discussing all along. It should also be the simplest type of problem they are likely to come across. Until now, working through the solution was piecemeal; now, as a team, they do it as a whole integrated process without interaction with other teams or the trainer. Once they are successful, provide a more complex problem to solve—even suggest that they use one they previously encountered in their workplace.

Provide Feedback

Once the team completes a process, a feedback session as to how they did is essential. Feedback can be provided in numerous ways. Videotaping the session and going over it with the team (time-consuming), sitting in on parts of each meeting and providing feedback, or having another team watch and provide feedback are all methods used to provide feedback. The type you use will, to some extent, be a function of the time available and the number of trainees. Of course, designing a program in which training is spread over a number of weeks would allow for more individual feedback between training sessions, but the benefits must be weighed against the cost of trainer time. The important thing is that trainees know what they are doing right and wrong, and that they can make corrections before training is complete.

Assess Performance

The Gagné-Briggs theory indicates that learning should be assessed after each topic is taught. So, after training on effective feedback skills and before moving to performance appraisal training, you need to assess the learning that took place regarding feedback skills. The assessment need not be formal, especially when a formal

evaluation may be planned for the end of the training program. But some method of determining whether the trainees learned the material is necessary. Questioning (for cognitive knowledge) is one way to assess this. Asking trainees for a behavioral response (a skill) is also a form of assessment. This approach has two purposes: It confirms that learning took place and provides for additional practice at recalling the knowledge or performing the skill.

Enhance Retention and Transfer

An important part of any training program is the transfer of the training to the job. Designing the program to facilitate retention and transfer is one of the more critical components of the training design. If the purpose of the training is cognitive knowledge, the opportunity for review (retrieval of the information) needs to be provided at spaced intervals after the training is complete. The same applies to skills. All of the support processes discussed earlier are relevant here. For an example of using the Gagné-Briggs design theory to develop training, see Table 5-13 below.

Table 5-13 Cognitive Portion of “Giving Effective Feedback” Using the Gagné-Briggs Nine Events of Instruction

A sample training design using the Gagné-Briggs model:	
EVENT	FEEDBACK TRAINING
Gain attention	Ask questions of trainees to initiate interest in topic of feedback: “Who has received constructive feedback that they actually appreciated?” If some have, ask them what it was about the feedback that made it better than other feedback they received. If no one has, ask what it was about previous feedback that made them not appreciate it. Have a brief discussion about what is wrong with the typical feedback received and what would make it better.
Inform of goal	Show objectives and discuss; tie to previous discussion.
Stimulate recall of prior knowledge	Ask “How do you behave when you are trying to help someone versus when you are disciplining them?” “How do you behave toward someone you are trying to help (helping is what feedback is all about)?” Get trainees to verbalize things they do such as “provide it in private,” “do it as soon as possible,” and so forth, to put them in a helping frame of mind with their rules for helping in their “working memory.”
Present material	Share a list of what makes for effective feedback—be specific, not general; be descriptive, not evaluative; and so forth. Present it on an easel sheet in bold. Provide examples for each item.
Provide guidance	Provide trainees with multiple examples (some good, some poor) and ask for input as to effectiveness. Give a handout sheet with a number of feedback statements and ask trainees to rate their effectiveness. Get trainees in small groups to discuss their results and come up with a group consensus as to which are good and which are not so good. Have them provide a rationale. Now go through each and ask trainees to discuss them in terms of their responses.
Elicit performance	Performance here is cognitive knowledge about what is effective and not effective feedback. Ask trainees to form groups of three. Have one of the three teach the others the rules of effective feedback with examples. Then switch, so each trainee has the opportunity to show they know the information well enough to teach it to others, and provide their own unique examples.
Provide feedback	The other two trainees receiving training complete an evaluation form giving feedback to the one doing the training (in the groups of three). The trainer also goes around to each group and provides feedback.
Assess performance	Conduct a quiz that asks trainees to recall the rules for effective feedback. Go through a list of feedback examples (similar to the ones earlier) and indicate which are effective, which are not effective, and why they were not effective.
Enhance retention and transfer	Trainees will be back to learn the behavioral component of the training in a week. At this time, review will take place to facilitate retention.