



Book Hold On, You Lost Me!

Use Learning Styles to Create Training that Sticks

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Recommendation

Author Bernice McCarthy developed the “4MAT teaching model,” an innovative instructional method that leverages the latest neurological research about right-brain and left-brain thinking. The 4MAT approach allows people with different learning styles to absorb new subject material, retain the information and put it to practical use. McCarthy teams up with corporate trainer Jeanine O’Neill-Blackwell to explain how to use the 4MAT model. The title of their book is particularly apt because, alas, the lay reader can get lost. Perhaps in an effort to be authentically academic, the authors have burdened their text with jargon. It is filled with “mindmaps,” “hemisphericity divisions” and “stream of consciousness dumping,” as well as the probably unnecessary deconstruction of various English words into their Latin derivatives. However, with patience, *BooksInShort* believes that HR managers, course designers, trainers and teachers can unlock the genuinely useful insights offered by this guide to teaching and learning.

Take-Aways

- Every student has a distinctly different learning style.
- Teachers and trainers should adapt their lesson plans to this central fact.
- The “4MAT teaching model” classifies students or trainees as “imaginative learners, analytical learners, common sense learners and dynamic learners.”
- This model gives instructors good methods for engaging all their students, no matter what individual learning styles they have.
- Instructors should stretch their personal teaching styles to accommodate the learning styles of all their students.
- Depending on their individual learning styles, students primarily want to answer one of these four questions: “why, what, how, if.”
- The “learning cycle” progresses through four basic phases: “engage, share, practice and perform.”
- The 4MAT model is based on neurological research about right-brain and left-brain thinking.
- The 4MAT approach allows students to apply their lessons to their real-life situations.
- Instructors can apply the 4MAT model to teach almost anyone almost anything.

Summary

People Learn According to Their Own Styles

Everyone has a unique learning style. Why? People’s individual past experiences lead them to absorb and process information in their own ways. Some prefer classroom instruction. Others like hands-on training. Still others enjoy extensive discussions.

“Whether you design, train, or lead, the process the learner is engaged in is the same: learning.”

The learning process begins when people form perceptions, so the way they “perceive” new material defines their approach to learning. Some people immerse themselves completely in the sensations of a learning experience. Others bypass “feeling and sensing” and cut right to “thinking and judging.” These alternative learning styles contrast sharply. For example, a “senser/feeler” prefers to learn about an orange by looking at it, peeling it and tasting it. A “thinking/judging” learner would rather turn to a reliable information source, such as an encyclopedia, to read about the fruit.

“Our learning styles ease us into one kind of thinking and doing, and are obstacles to other kinds.”

The next step in learning is information processing. “Watchers” are learners who look over what they have learned and think about it. Other learners, called “doers,” prefer to take quick action using their new knowledge. Watchers take the time to process new information carefully. Doers get bored with reflection. They want to discover and plunge into some fast application of their new information. Classrooms generally include both watchers and doers. If you meld these learning styles – thinking or feeling with doing or watching – the result will be the “4MAT model,” that is, a teaching model directed to educating four primary kinds of learners:

1. **“Imaginative learners”** – These “idea people” search for meaning. They listen and share concepts. They are innovative and prefer personal involvement. To keep these learners absorbed, instructors should make them work quickly, open up, share emotions and ideas, plan and experiment.
2. **“Analytic learners”** – These fact finders value information and expert opinions. They deal well with abstract concepts that require careful thought and deliberation. Persuade them to tolerate change, be more instinctive, try new things and take a few risks.
3. **“Common sense learners”** – These problem solvers test every theory and prefer hands-on experiences. They are turned off by vague ideas and concepts. They want to know how things function. To engage these learners, instructors should encourage them to discuss issues in detail, consider alternative outcomes and strive to be more creative.
4. **“Dynamic learners”** – These proactive learners want to investigate all possible outcomes. They actively test information, are interested in applications and can arrive at correct conclusions without relying on logic. Help these learners become more reflective and strategic, and teach them to pay more attention to structure and systems.

“The focus, activities and techniques a trainer uses in the beginning, middle and end of a training session shift significantly in well-delivered training.”

Often, people combine different characteristics from these basic learning types. Naturally, trainers also fall into the same four basic, learning-style categories. As a trainer, your job is to engage your students, no matter what your personal learning style may be. This may require stretching your approach to learning so that it meshes with your students’ learning types.

“The Learning Cycle”

The most effective training fulfills a four-part cycle:

1. **“Engage”** – Learners acknowledge and relate to new information.
2. **“Share”** – Students contemplate what experts teach them.
3. **“Practice”** – Their actions change in some way due to their new comprehension.
4. **“Perform”** – Students apply the new information to their own circumstances.

“All of our knowledge has its origins in our perceptions.” [– Leonardo da Vinci]

These four pedagogic experiences present four primary questions trainers should answer: “why, what, how and if.” Imaginative learners want to know, “Why is this information significant?” Analytic learners wonder, “What does the new information prove?” Common sense learners inquire, “How does the new information work?” And, dynamic learners pose the question, “If I use the information in my own special way, what will happen?” Mirror your students’ questions with similar ones of your own: “Why is it that my students should know about this topic?” “What do I specifically want to teach them?” “How will my students put what I show them to practical use?” “If my students practice what I have taught them, how will this help them grow?”

“The key to being an effective trainer is the ability to satisfy the needs of every learning type.”

Use the 4MAT approach for any educational purpose: to teach someone how to speak a language or ride a motorcycle, or even to handle a new position at work. The 4MAT model segments the educational experience for students so that they initially engage and share, and then practice and perform. Your teaching should address the needs of all four phases of the learning cycle. Your challenge is to help your students feel and think as well as watch and do. Of course, some students will prefer the “feeling” component; others will enjoy the “thinking” phase, while still others will be more enthusiastic about “watching” or “doing.” The trick is to cycle back and forth so that you keep them all engaged. Do not leave out any of the four kinds of activities. That would interfere with the efficient transfer of information.

“Seek out colleagues with different learning styles. Use each other’s strengths to improve your ability to design and deliver effective training.”

Use the right teaching method for each of the four different learning cycle components. For engagement, involve and motivate learners in discussions so they can link the subject material to their lives. One good way to handle this is to have small groups of students discuss the material among themselves. Use stories, exploration and dialogue for this purpose. Promote active listening and interaction among all your students. Imaginative learners prefer this activity above all others, as do imaginative trainers. To use engagement, for example, involve small groups of students in a “survival game.” Each group must decide which 10 of 20 available items they would take to a deserted island.

“When we learn, we move through all four parts of the learning process.”

To share the material you want to teach, use expert information and opinions, research data, formal lectures and similar instructional techniques. Ensure that all your information is concise and focused. Relate specific details to the big picture. This component should be well prepared and orderly. Your professional presentation of the material is vital to the students who are trying to absorb it. Analytic learners feel most comfortable with this phase of training, and analytic trainers excel in lecture situations. To use sharing, ask your class, “If you were setting up a company to compete directly with our firm, what would be your primary competitive concerns?”

“You must be clear about the knowledge and skills you want your learners to master before you begin to create your learning design.”

To get students to practice, have them bring new information to life through hands-on training, role-playing, case studies, demonstrations and experiments. Students should test new skills to master them. The instructor’s primary role during this phase is to observe and assist while the students actively take over the information and

work with it in test situations that involve problem solving. Common sense learners are right at home with this kind of training. Common sense trainers are able to structure the practice phase in the most elegant, efficient fashion. To use practice, provide students with various scenarios regarding a performance evaluation, then ask them to role-play actually coaching employees.

“Designing great training is about defining outcomes and developing learning experiences that will deliver the outcome.”

Performing is the culmination of the process. Learners put information to work, thus assuming “ownership” of the knowledge. Your role as an instructor is to help your students integrate the information in some dynamic, beneficial way. Evaluate their efforts and cheer their achievements. By this stage, if you have done your work properly, you should be out of a job – at least with this group of students. Dynamic learners like this activity best of all, and dynamic trainers perform like stars in this kind of setting. To use performance in teaching, have students work together to create a story about a company that demonstrates its philosophy and values.

The Right-Brain and Left-Brain Origins of 4MAT

The 4MAT model is a straightforward, simple teaching approach. At the same time, it is sophisticated and up-to-date, because it is based on the latest advances in neurological research, particularly on scientific findings about the right and left hemispheres of the brain. The left mode operates in an analytical fashion. It is numerical, experiential and language-based. The right mode, on the other hand, is more metaphorical, deciphering meaning from images and patterns. The 4MAT model activates the brain’s left mode and then its right mode – swinging back and forth between “synthesis” (right brain) and “analysis” (left brain). These two different forms of thinking manifest in each of the four learning styles, to create this eight-step process:

1. **Engagement: Synthesis** – Students make connections, learn from their experiences and become directly involved with the material.
2. **Engagement: Analysis** – Students impart and explore ideas and perceptions regarding their experiences.
3. **Sharing: Synthesis** – Students achieve a visual, conceptual understanding of an idea.
4. **Sharing: Analysis** – Students make notes and observations that result in a wider understanding of an entire subject.
5. **Practicing: Analysis** – Students carrying out individual activities to learn how to exercise new knowledge.
6. **Practicing: Synthesis** – Students apply what they have learned to real-life situations.
7. **Performing: Analysis** – Students evaluate and “refine” all that they have learned. They “take ownership” of their newfound knowledge.
8. **Performing: Synthesis** – Students integrate learning into their lives.

“By creating experiences that emotionally connect, engage and challenge the learners, the trainer increases active engagement and, ultimately, retention.”

During the engage and share phases, the students receive information. During the practice and perform phases, they produce information, internalize new knowledge and make it something invaluable that they own. The 4MAT model incorporates several primary “brain concepts, including “perceptions and connections,” “reflections and actions, “language and images,” “big ideas and details,” and “ladders and networks,” the steps in building relationships.

Lesson Plans

Follow these four steps as you develop your 4MAT model lesson plans:

1. **“Define the learner outcomes”** – Look ahead to the performance phase to determine how the students will demonstrate their mastery of new knowledge. Define what your instruction will specifically teach the students, what enhanced skills some of them will have gained and what impact this will have on their lives.
2. **“Mindmap the content”** – Envision the course content broadly and in detail. Plan the books, “training modules” and other materials for the course, and figure out how everything will fit together. Understand how all the elements of teaching interrelate.
3. **“Determine the concept”** – What is the one “big idea” that will make the information you teach your students relevant to their lives?
4. **“Complete the wheel”** – Plan all of the necessary activities (lectures, graphic aids and videos) to deliver information to students in a meaningful way. The imagery you employ to show new information will affect students’ retention. Develop some practice activities (role-plays, worksheets) that demonstrate how well students understand the information. Help them connect emotionally and intellectually to the new material, so that they can process their fresh knowledge through storytelling, small group discussions and so on. Develop some reliable means students can use to assess how well they are retaining information. Provide opportunities for them to share information by developing and presenting and developing portfolios or projects.

“The coach’s role is to facilitate the process of identifying behaviors that are not delivering the intended outcomes.”

The 4MAT approach makes new knowledge eminently practicable and useful. You can move your students beyond being simply passive receptacles for new information. Instead, they can become active participants who adapt what they have learned so that it directly benefits their lives. That is what learning is all about.

About the Authors

Bernice McCarthy created the 4MAT teaching model used by organizations around the world to improve instruction and learning. **Jeanine O’Neil-Blackwell** is an expert in developing initiatives that help trainers become more effective.
