

# STUDENT BULLETIN BOARD

OCTOBER 2020

## LEARNING How to Learn More From Courses

© Copyright Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD, Authenticity Consulting, LLC.

Market research shows that we adults are enthralled with courses. We love to learn! Trainers and developers are responding with an explosion of new courses, and these are costing more than ever. Therefore, it is critical to know your learning needs and how to meet them

### Preparation

- Too often, we decide what courses to take by scanning a list of new courses. This is like picking dessert from a dessert tray: you pick what you want more than what you need. Reflect on your needs. What do you need for your career? Is there a particular problem you are facing in your career, home life or job?
- Try to specify your needs in terms of outcomes or impacts, not in terms of activities. For example, seek certain enhanced skills, knowledge, perceptions, etc. Think about how you will know if these outcomes were reached or not.
- Do not just look at courses as means to achieve your preferred outcomes. Too often, we think we only can learn in classrooms from an expert who lectures us. With today's technologies, we have immediate access to a wide range of materials and information. "Home schooling" is an increasingly useful technique for learning.
- Think about how much you've really used materials from earlier courses. For example, are you the kind of person who takes a course and brings materials home to sit on a shelf and never be looked at again? If so, what can you do to change?

### When Considering a Course

- Look at the outcomes promised from the course. Do they match your needs? Do the objectives and learning activities sound like they'll really produce those outcomes promised from the course?
- Call the instructor and discuss your needs. Find out if he or she believes the course will be useful. Beware the person with a big hammer -- to them, everyone is a nail.
- Get a biography of the instructor. What evidence do you see that the instructor really has the expertise to be teaching that course and subject matter?
- Attempt to get an outline of the course. Is the course well organized? Does the course include sufficient time for questions and for evaluation? Are materials provided to support lectures?
- Ask the school or the instructor for a copy of the form used to evaluate the courses and the instructor. What objectives are measured by the form? These objectives are often those that the instructor will try to reach.

- Assess if the course will be jam packed and very hectic. If so, there will probably be little time for questions and answers. You might be overwhelmed with a “data dump” of information and little knowledge.
- See if there is a discount to take the course a second time if needed. Occasionally we do not get enough from a course even if the instructor does a fine job and the materials were very useful.

### **During the Course**

- Be sure you are comfortable and can hear the instructor. Sit at the front of the room if possible.
- Take notes by recording important points and conclusions, not everything the instructor says. Note if the instructor is speaking from a set of materials, in which case, you may not need to record all the important points because the materials may already contain those points.
- Get a list of who’s in the course. Ask some classmates if they are interested in getting together to help each other apply the materials and exchange feedback about experiences.
- Is the instructor following the agenda? Will promised topics be discussed with sufficient time?
- Find out how to get in touch with the instructor at a later time if needed. You may have a question or two about how to apply materials. The instructor may appreciate your feedback.
- Ask questions if you do not understand the instructor or what is going on! This may be the most useful activity for getting the most out of your course. Speak up if you wonder whether information or materials seem realistic or practical.

### **Evaluation**

- You can learn a lot from evaluation! The most useful forms of evaluation include time at the end of course for learners to discuss the quality of the course. At the beginning of the course, ask the instructor to try leave sufficient time for this.
- Too often, evaluations are based on our feelings about our experiences in the course, rather than if the course achieved its objectives or not. Carefully consider whether the course met its objectives or not.

### **Follow-Up**

- Very soon after the course, review your notes and the materials. This will ensure your notes are complete and help you internalize the materials.
- Mark your calendar for three months out. At that time, ask yourself if you are using materials from the course? If not, why not? What can you learn from this?

**SOURCE:** <https://managementhelp.org/personaldevelopment/learning/getting-more.htm>

# What is Group Learning?

In recent decades, researchers, educators, authors and leaders have accepted that people in groups can learn a great deal from each other. The learning does not always have to be from an expert who somehow conveys expert knowledge onto others.

The benefits of group learning have spawned a wide variety of approaches, formats and styles that have, in turn, spawned related phrases like "collaborative learning", "cooperative learning", "peer learning" and "social learning". As typically happens when a movement emerges, there are many different values, perspectives and opinions, even about which phrases to use, where and when.

The groups might be closely organized formal teams in which members share a common purpose, goals, structure, leadership, and methods of making decisions and solving problems. Or, groups might be spontaneous and informal gatherings, such as a gathering at a meeting to discuss a common topic.

The groups might be as few as two people or as large as 20 members or more -- although experts in group theory and dynamics often suggest that a group is smaller than 20; otherwise, it has an additional layer of overhead activities that are different than a small group. Therefore, experienced facilitators often arrange large groups to be organized into smaller ones, at least until the group learning activities are underway.

The methods of learning can range from informal to formal. Informal learning might be casual advice shared among members or noticing sudden messages that a member gets during the group's activities. Formal learning is typically designed and structured to achieve certain outcomes among all members. For example, all of them might attend a course on time management, share their insights from the course, and then carefully document their learnings in a journal.

## **But What is Learning? What Are Its Various Forms?**

Despite attending many years of schooling, many of us still do not fully understand what learning really is. Educators refer to learning as new knowledge, skills and abilities. Knowledge is information that is useful to learner somehow, for example, to achieve a goal or solve a problem. A skill is the expertise to actually apply that knowledge to get something done. Abilities are the on-going competencies to apply that knowledge in a highly effective and efficient manner. As we mentioned above, learning can be informally or formally gathered.

**SOURCE:** <https://managementhelp.org/groups/group-learning.htm>