

## **Nifty Notes: Involving Learners with Graphic Organizers.**

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According to Madeline Hunter, author of *Enhancing Learning* (2003), one of the most powerful and creative learning tools you can hand training participants is a blank piece of paper. Also called a "graphic organizer," a blank page becomes a note-taking device that helps learners organize material as they listen to a lecture. Note-taking also keeps learners involved while listening, and helps move information into long-term memory.

Put another way, a graphic organizer is "an unlimited, open-

ended, learner-centered information generator" (*Shake, Rattle and Roll*, 2001). Graphic organizers help learners explore new information in a variety of ways that personally connect them to what they're learning.

### **What Graphic Organizers Can Do**

By using a graphic organizer as a note-taking tool, learners can:

*Remain* involved throughout the length of the presentation or training.

*Analyze and evaluate* what they've learned.

*Synthesize and create* new ways of using what they've learned.

*Find out* what they know, what they learned, what they're still puzzled about.

*Review* course material and remember the information longer.

*Make* a plan to use what they learned.

When your training participants use graphic organizers, you, as the learning facilitator, can:

*Check* for understanding.

*Correct* misconceptions.

*Modify* your training to meet the learners' needs.

## Getting Ready

**Time:** The time will differ according to the purpose for using the graphic organizer. It can be an ongoing note-taking tool during an entire lecture, during part of the lecture, or as a written review of material after a lecture. The time using it can vary from a few seconds to five minutes.

**Materials:** You will need enough blank paper and writing tools (pens, pencils, felt markers, crayons, and the like) for each training participant to create their own graphic organizers, as instructed by you. The blank paper in the five strategies below includes: standard typing paper (white or various colors), blank paper lunch bags, and index cards.

**Group Size:** Any size is fine.

**Room Set-Up:** No special room arrangement is necessary - learners just need some kind of flat surface (table, desk, binder, book, pad, etc.) on which to lay their graphic organizers as they write.

## Five Graphic Organizers

**1. Mind-Mapping.** Also called "clustering" or "concept mapping," this graphic organizer is a visual/spatial way of taking notes. Learners write the training topic in the middle of a blank piece of paper. As you do the lecture part of your training, learners jot down important words or phrases around the topic title. Then they draw shapes around these words or phrases and connect them to the topic title with lines. Learners can also write sub-concepts that are connected to the main concept shapes. The shapes, as well as their placement on the page, help learners remember important information.



To make the mind-mapped information even more memorable, learners can use colored markers or crayons to highlight the most important concepts, circle what they can use, color in the various shapes, or rank the concepts in order of importance.

**2. List It Here.** Learners make three columns on a blank note-taking paper, and label the columns: Information, Questions, Uses. As you lecture, learners write down the key concepts, words, or phrases in the first column. During your lecture, pause and direct learners to jot down their questions in the second column. Later, have them read the questions aloud and discuss the answers. Or you can tell them a question to write and then have them think about it and write the answer as well.

When your lecture is over, or whenever you want them to tie what they are learning to practical application, stop your presentation and tell learners to write three ways they can use what they've learned. They can share their "Uses" with the whole class or just with the persons seated near them.

You can also have them fill out this kind of note-taking sheet as a review after the training.

Other ways to label the columns include: Great Ideas, Ahas, What I Already Know, Comments, Queries, Resources, Procedures, Final Thoughts, Action Plans, etc.

**3. Roadmaps.** Instead of taking notes in a linear format, invite learners to use the metaphor of a roadmap. Designate the top of the page as the starting place, with a doodle of a house to stand for what they already know about the topic. Have them jot down five known, topic-related facts around the house. As you present your material, they can draw doodles of streets, signposts, buildings, trees, bridges, cars, parking lots, and the like in the middle of the page. They fill in these objects with topic-related words, phrases, questions, comments, etc.



They link these objects with the roads as if they are taking a journey from the top to the bottom of the page. They finally arrive at their destination at the bottom of the page with a doodle repre-

senting a billboard on which they write a summary of what they have learned.

**4. Right Brain and Left Brain Notes.** Learners fold a blank piece of paper in half. They label the left half "Left Brain Notes: Words, Phrases, Concepts, Questions." They label the right half "Right Brain Notes: Graphics, Doodles, Icons, Acronyms, Jingles." As you lecture, invite learners to take notes on both halves, jotting down an important word or phrase, and then adding a doodle to represent that piece of information. They can lay the paper out flat so they see both halves, or they can keep it folded and flip it back and forth as they take notes on both halves.



**5. It's In the Bag.** Each learner gets a blank paper lunch bag and a set of a half-dozen index cards. The bags become the note-taking pages on which learners write important training concepts. As learners take notes, they can also decorate their bags with colorful markers. The index cards are for

questions, comments, insights, and action plans.

During the lecture, stop and have learners jot down on an index card a question they have and place it in their bag. Later, have them write a comment on another card and put this in their bag also. They can also use the cards to write personal insights or other information that is topic-related.

Finally, tell them to write their personal action plan on an index card, that is, what they plan to do with what they have learned.

At the end of the training, learners take turns choosing cards out of their bags and reading the cards to the whole group. If the card has a question written on it, the group takes a minute or two to answer the question. If the card contains a comment or insight, the group simply listens.

You can use this time to correct any misconceptions, to summarize their card statements, and to thank them for their insights. Invite them to take their cards and bags with them as reminders of what they have learned.



## **From Listening to Learning**

Unless you are a strong auditory learner and can remember information the first time you hear it, you probably don't remember much of what you listen to. And neither do your learners. For them, it is crucial that they are involved in some way while you present the material you want them to learn.

Graphic organizers do just that: they involve learners, keep learners actively engaged, and help learners to remember information for a longer period of time after the class or training ends.

Bromley, Karen and Irwin-De Vitis, Linda and Modlo, Marcia. ***Graphic Organizers: Visual Strategies for Active Learning.***

Meier, David. ***The Accelerated Learning Handbook.***

Slan, Joanna. ***One Minute Journaling.***

St. Germain, Cliff. ***Study Whiz.***  
For ordering information, log onto [www.studywhiz.com](http://www.studywhiz.com).

Westcott, Jean and Hammond, Landau. ***A Picture's Worth 1,000 Words.***

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## **More Resources for Graphic Organizers**

Bowman, Sharon. ***Preventing Death by Lecture! Terrific Tips for Turning Listeners into Learners.***

Bowman, Sharon. ***Shake, Rattle, and Roll! Using the Ordinary to make Your Training Extraordinary.***

Bowman, Sharon. ***The Ten-Minute Trainer: 150 Ways to Teach It Quick and Make It Stick.***

*Nifty Notes: Involving Learners with Graphic Organizers.*



Author and traveling teacher Sharon Bowman helps educators and business people “teach it quick and make it stick,” - fine-tuning their information-delivery skills and turning their passive listeners into active learners.

Over 50,000 copies of Sharon’s 6 popular teaching, training, and motivation books are now in print. Her newest book, ***The Ten-Minute Trainer: 150 Ways to Teach It Quick and Make It Stick***, is due out August, 2005.

For more information about Sharon Bowman and her books and training, log onto [www.Bowperson.com](http://www.Bowperson.com), or email her at [SBowperson@aol.com](mailto:SBowperson@aol.com).

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