

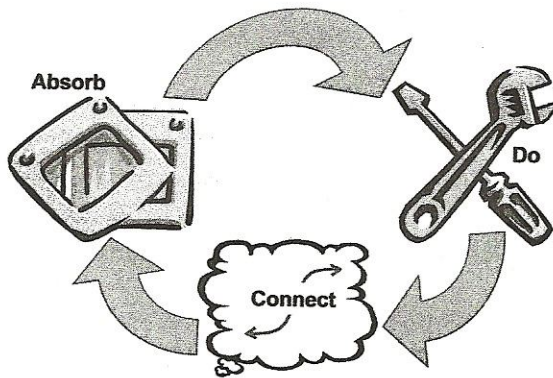
Learning activities exercise basic skills, thought processes, attitudes, and behaviors. But mere action is not a learning activity. People learn little by merely clicking the mouse or chatting about vacation plans. People learn by considering, researching, analyzing, evaluating, organizing, synthesizing, discussing, testing, deciding, and applying ideas. Activities may use mouse clicks and chat sessions, but their goal is to provoke the exact mental experiences that lead to learning.

To accomplish learning objectives, we typically require three types of learning activities: *absorb*, *do*, and *connect* activities. What are they and why do we need them?

What kinds of activities do you need?

With clever design, any kind of activity is possible. If you can do it in a classroom, you can do it in an e-learning course. But do you want to? What kinds of learning activities should you create? To accomplish a learning objective usually requires three distinct types of learning activities.

One type has the learner absorb knowledge, typically by reading text, watching an animation, or listening to narration. In an absorb activity, the learner is physically passive, but mentally active.



A second type of learning activity has learners do something with what they are learning. It might have the learner practice a procedure, play a game, or answer questions. The learner practices, explores, and discovers.

The final type of learning activity has learners connect what they are learning to their work, their lives, or their prior learning. Connect activities are aimed at making it easier to apply learning when it is needed later.

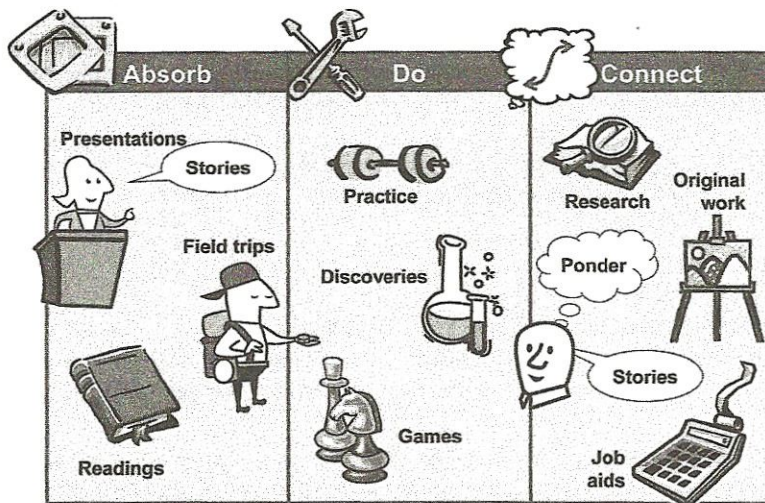
These three activities are shown as a cycle starting with the absorb activity. This is the most common sequence for cognitive subjects, but it is not a requirement and not always the best sequence. Different types of subjects and different instructional strategies will demand a different sequence.

Proven learning experiences

Consider learning experiences in your life. Can you classify them as absorb, do, or connect activities? Remember that *absorb* activities typically have the learner read, watch, and listen. *Do* activities have the learner do something with knowledge, such as practice, explore, and discover. *Connect* activities lead the learner to connect current learning to life, work, and prior learning.

Common types of learning experiences include discovery activities, field trips, job aids, original work assignments, ponder activities, practice sessions, readings, research, stories told by the teacher, and stories told by the learner. Which are *absorb*, which are *do*, and which are *connect* activities?

Here's how I classify them—which is important only in that that is how they appear in the rest of this book.



Absorb-type activities

In the absorb column are activities during which the learner reads, listens, and watches.

Presentations lurk at the left edge of the absorb column, as all the learner can do is look and listen. We hope the learner absorbs the information in the presentation actively.

Stories by the teacher are likewise absorbed by the learner.

Readings include activities for which the learner reads from online or paper documents, such as textbooks, research papers, or technical manuals.

Field trips are at the right edge of absorb activities. Although the learner may be physically active on a field trip, the learner learns by absorbing information. In a field trip to an art museum, for example, the learner may learn by looking at paintings, reading their descriptions, and listening to a museum docent lecture about them. A field trip to a hands-on museum, such as the Exploratorium in San Francisco, however, would be more of a do activity, as learning occurs through experiments and discovery.

Do-type activities

In the do column we place activities during which the learner actively exercises, explores, and discovers.

Practice activities fall squarely in this column. They allow learners to apply skills, knowledge, and attitudes and receive feedback on their efforts. They help learners refine and polish learning. Practice activities can range from simple drill-and-practice exercises to sophisticated guided-analysis activities.

Discovery activities are times for experimenting and exploring. Their goal is to lead the learners to discover concepts, principles, and procedures for themselves.

Games and simulations let learners learn by attempting to apply skills in a safe environment. Learners can gain insights and confidence as they solve realistic problems in an entertaining context.

Connect-type activities

Connect activities lead learners to link what they are learning to prior learning and to situations in which they will apply the current learning in subsequent courses or on the job.

Research activities, during which learners must identify learning resources on their own, are connect activities, as they require accessing and interpreting outside resources.

Ponder activities ask the learner to stop and think about the subject more broadly and deeply. They encourage the learner to view the subject from a new perspective. They are typically used for connecting to what the learner already knows.

Stories told by learners require the learners to draw on their own experiences. They require the learner to connect the subject of learning to personal experiences.

Job aids are used on the job at the time when learning must be applied. As such they help connect learning to work.

Performing **original work** is the ultimate final exam. It fully connects learning to the life of the learner.

Can't wait to learn more about these activities? Here are some destinations for you:

Absorb activities (Chapter 2)	Do activities (Chapter 3)	Connect activities (Chapter 4)
<p>Read, watch, and listen.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Presentations and demos (p. 49). ▶ Stories by the teacher (p. 72). ▶ Readings (p. 78). ▶ Field trips (p. 89). 	<p>Exercise, experiment, and discover.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Practice (p. 106). ▶ Discovery (p. 125). ▶ Games (p. 141). 	<p>Link to prior learning, to work, and to life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ponder activities (p. 169). ▶ Stories by the learner (p. 75). ▶ Job aids (p. 183). ▶ Research (p. 194). ▶ Original work (p. 206)

Where did this list come from?

The activities we identified have been essential for learning in different eras, from different cultures, for different learners, on different subjects, and in different media. If the same technique was used three thousand years ago in Asia for face-to-face religious instruction and today in Canada for satellite TV training in business management, then it is a very powerful and versatile technique indeed.

We chose them because they are proven and flexible activities. When well designed and appropriately deployed, they work well. They can be adapted to work with any subject matter. Many can be used with the class as a whole, by small teams, by individuals monitored by the instructor, and by learners working alone.