

Strategies for Creating a Productive Learning Environment



Refer to this guide for ways to make a learning environment more productive.

Set ground rules	Ground rules create an agreement as to how a group will interact to get the most value out of the learning. Talent development professionals can also go back to these should issues arise in the classroom. Involving learners (where possible) creates additional accountability and commitment. Ground rules should include items that support safety and interaction such as confidentiality, respecting others, and encouraging participation.
	Face-to-Face Environment • Engage the group in an open discussion, capturing ideas on a chart. • Have learners agree to the ground rules by raising their hands or standing. • Post them somewhere they can be seen by everyone; refer to them as appropriate.
	Virtual Environment • Engage the group in an open discussion or have them annotate on a slide. • Have learners agree to the ground rules by raising their hands or using an online tool such as a check mark. • Save the captured ground rules and come back to them as appropriate.
Help learners get to know each other	When learners build a positive rapport with each other, they are more likely to interact and support each other's learning. Participants learn as much from each other as from the program. Knowing where others are coming from makes it easier for learners to listen and contribute. For both face-to-face and virtual sessions, this can start even before the learning with access to a discussion blog for welcomes and introductions.
	Face-to-Face Environment At the beginning of the training, break participants into groups and conduct an icebreaker exercise that allows learners to get to know each other and build a common connection.

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	Help learners get to know each other, Continued Virtual Environment Have learners participate in a warm-up activity that allows them to utilize the virtual tools while sharing personal information about themselves, their backgrounds, and goals for the program.
Encourage input and suggestions	Establish an environment where respect is mutual and ideas are encouraged. Ask participants to contribute their own ideas, examples, and stories. Remember that all participants aren't alike. Some may be outgoing and others more reserved. Acknowledge this and make it okay for learners to process and contribute at their own pace while encouraging all individuals to share.
	Face-to-Face Environment • Ask learners "What do you think?" and determine who may want to contribute; note this is more than by the raising of hands. Look for eye contact and body language (e.g., leaning in) to signify interest. • Break the class into small groups to discuss a topic; have them share a summary of their thoughts.
	Virtual Environment • Ask learners "What do you think?" and encourage them to respond verbally by raising their hands, typing into the chat, or annotating their thoughts on a virtual whiteboard. • Use breakout rooms to encourage group discussion with a debrief where groups share their discussion.
Acknowledge participant contribution	When a participant speaks up in front of a group, the participant may feel he or she is taking a risk. Is this idea right? Is it good or of value? To create trust, maintain learner esteem, and encourage future participation, it is important to acknowledge input and ideas. Use names, show appreciation, and thank learners for sharing. Build on comments to highlight their value; connect ideas or input others have previously shared.

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	Acknowledge participant contribution, Continued
	Face-to-Face Environment Ensure participants have name tents so you can easily use their name when acknowledging their contribution. Encourage learners to do this with each other.
	Virtual Environment • Use tools such as emoticons or other icons to express appreciation for contributions. Encourage other learners to use them as well. • Verbally acknowledge contributions and use names.