

How to Debrief an Activity or Exercise

Thiagi's six-phase model to structure debriefing questions. Here are some guidelines for each phase of this model.

Phase 1: How Do You Feel?

- This phase gives the participants an opportunity to get strong feelings and emotion off their chest. It makes it easier for them to be more objective during the later phases.
- Begin this phase with a broad question that invites the participants to get in touch with their feelings about the activity and its outcomes. Encourage them to share these feelings, listening actively to one another in a nonjudgmental fashion.

Phase 2: What Happened?

- In this phase, collect data about what happened during the activity. Encourage the participants to compare and contrast their recollections and to draw general conclusions during the next phase.
- Begin this phase with a broad question that asks the participants to recall important events from the training activity. Create and post a chronological list of events. Ask questions about specific events.

Phase 3: What Did You Learn?

- In this phase, encourage the participants to generate and test different hypotheses. Ask the participants to come up with principles based on the activity and discuss them.
- Begin this phase by presenting a principle and asking the participants for data that supports or rejects it. Then invite the participants to offer other principles based on their experiences.

Phase 4: How Does This Relate To The Real World?

- In this phase, discuss the relevance of the activity to the participants' real-world experiences.
- Begin with a broad question about the relationship between the experiential learning activity and events in the workplace. Suggest that the activity is a metaphor and ask participants to offer real-world analogies.

Phase 5: What If?

- In this phase, encourage the participants to apply their insights to new contexts. Use alternative scenarios to speculate on how people's behaviors would change.
- Begin this phase with a change scenario and ask the participants to speculate on how it would have affected the process and the outcomes of the activity. Then invite the participants to offer their own scenarios and discuss them.

Phase 6: What Next?

- In this phase, ask the participants to undertake action planning. Ask them to apply their insights from the experiential activity to the real world.
- Begin this phase by asking the participants to suggest strategies for use in future rounds of the activity. Then ask the participants how they will change their real-world behavior as a result of the insights gained from the activity.