



# Learning By Doing

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The 4-H program was established around the model of “learning to do by doing.” Today, new phrases like *experiential learning* or *authentic learning* are used to describe that model. People learn best by being involved in the learning process, thinking about what was learned and then how to apply it to real life situations. This “doing” method is usually more successful than “showing” or “telling” learners how to do something.

To help members get the most out of learning experiences follow these five steps.



Youth must set clear, self-determined goals for their learning. If they understand the purpose of learning, they can make these goals relevant and meaningful.

Each 4-H member will have different abilities. The same learning method will not be equally successful with all of them. Adequate learning requires motivation. Self-motivation comes from basic needs, personal preferences, feelings of self-worth and belonging. For 4-H members to become life-learners, it is important to promote a learning environment that facilitates self-motivation.

Several traditional 4-H teaching techniques add variety and excitement to the learning process.

## Demonstrations

Demonstrations are showing and telling how to do something. A leader can present demonstrations to help the members learn. Members, in turn, can reinforce this learning by giving their own demonstration for the group. Often this is done at the next project meeting for review.

A demonstration has four parts:

1. **Introduction** — what the member is demonstrating and why
2. **Body** — the steps of the skill and how to do them
3. **Summary** — review of the steps
4. **Questions and answers** — the member answers questions the audience may have

As members become more experienced they should be encouraged to

## Experiential learning model

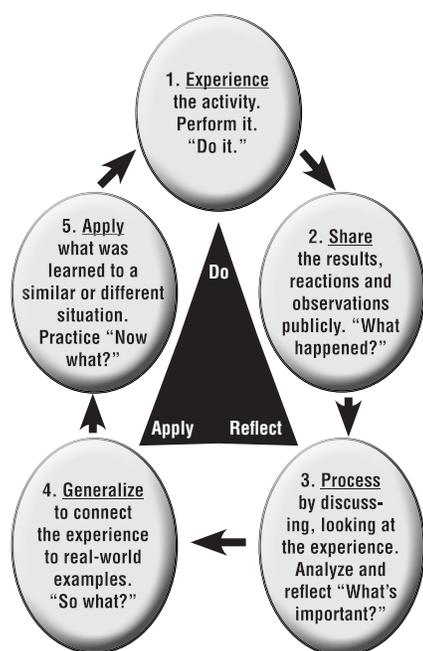
1. **Experience** — do an activity
2. **Share** — discuss the experience by describing what happened
3. **Process** — discuss the experience to identify common themes
4. **Generalize** — identify principles that can be applied in real-life situations
5. **Apply** — use the principles to apply to what was learned to another situation

Completing this entire process helps young people gain meaning from what they learn and do. As the leader, you can help them understand new experiences and what they have learned.

## How 4-H members learn

Here are some basic principles that apply to all learning situations. First of all, people learn in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance. If youth feel they are not wanted by you or other adults or ridiculed by their peers, they will not learn.

## Experiential Learning Model



present their demonstrations at club meetings, for parents, at achievement day or even at the state fair. (See your local newsletter, achievement day announcement and MU Extension publication Y603, *4-H Clover* for more details.) As members progress, they will assume an increasing amount of responsibility for choosing a subject, preparing the demonstration and evaluating their efforts.

#### **Demonstrations help members**

- develop a positive self-concept,
- acquire more self-confidence,
- express their ideas clearly,
- spontaneously respond to questions, and
- acquire subject matter knowledge.

### **Judging**

Judging is making a decision and telling why you made it. In 4-H, judging is comparing two or more items and deciding which is better and why.

Successful judging depends on knowledge of the product and the standards that an acceptable product must meet. Then members compare products to those standards. The next step is to rank the products and give the reasons why members ranked them as they did. An official judge provides feedback on the product standard and the ranking. This can be the project leader or another expert.

One example of a judging class might be making the best choice for breakfast for a 10-year-old boy:

A: pastry roll, butter, soft drink

B: cereal, orange juice, milk

C: pancakes, butter, syrup and milk

D: apple, toast, butter and soft drink

(Example placement: B, C, D, A)

Reasons will include representation from food groups and nutritional content of calories.

Judging teaches members to make sound and valued decisions. It also

teaches members to appreciate standards, to observe closely and to develop their reasoning ability.

### **Skillathon**

Skillathon is a teaching technique involving 4-H'ers and others in challenging, noncompetitive activities. It is designed as a series of mini learning stations with an assistant at each station. Planting a tomato seed is one example of a station. Another might be measuring a cup of flour.

Participants rotate from station to station attempting to perform the task they are given. The assistants allow all team members to test their knowledge and abilities before giving them any hints. 4-H'ers are given feedback on their performance and supported by the assistant when they falter.

Skillathons can help members evaluate their ability to solve the challenge presented. Members can make this part of the learning-by-doing experience. For more information, see MU Extension publication LG733, *Conducting a 4-H Skillathon*.

### **Quiz bowls**

A quiz bowl is based on the quiz contest of old — the College Bowl — and is similar to academic bowl contests in some high schools. It is an exciting way to challenge members' knowledge. It can be competitive and fun, and can also encourage independent study.

Members are given tossup and bonus questions relating to a specific body of knowledge. See publication LG 732, *Quiz Bowls*, for more information.

### **Field trips and tours**

A field trip or tour can be just around the corner, across town or in a different county. Field trips should be planned in advance with members

to make sure the most possible learning takes place. Visiting the local greenhouse, grocery store or craft shop will have more impact if the project group has discussed in advance what they are looking for. Set the stage about what members will see and define your expectations of behavior.

Different settings can create new environments in which members can learn and add excitement. Don't forget to discuss the experience afterwards. Use the experiential learning model to reflect and apply what was learned.

### **Exhibiting**

Many 4-H members will exhibit what they have made at the local or county achievement day or fair. Encourage members to take part in conference judging if it is available. That's where they talk to the judge about the process they used in making their project and what they have learned. This gives members an opportunity to receive feedback on their learning experience and recognition for the work they have done.

*In general, remember the words of Benjamin Franklin, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn."*

Look for more information in other guides in this series:

LG784, *4-H Project Leader*

LG782, *Ages and Stages of Youth Development*

Find these and other helpful resources online: <http://4h.missouri.edu/resources/materials/category.htm#project>.

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*This guide was developed by Mary Jo Williams, state 4-H youth development specialist, and Jamie Tomek, former extension associate.*