

After Activity Review

Self Study Guide

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Objective

Task

Conduct an After Activity Review (AAR) of your training session.

Conditions

Once you've conducted your first training session in this course.

Standards

You must:

Prepare an AAR Outline that describes what you'll do before the AAR to get ready, how you'll begin the AAR, discuss strengths and weaknesses, decide what to do different, summarize the AAR, and what to do after the AAR.

Use an AAR Chart during the AAR.

Meet the standards on the AAR Checklist.

The relationship between officers and men should in no sense be that of superior to inferior nor that of master and servant, but rather that of teacher and scholar.

John A Lejuene: Marine Corps Manual, 1920

Soldiers who identify what went right and wrong learn much more than when lessons are dictated.

FM 25-4, How to Conduct Training Exercises, page 157, September, 1984

Overview

An effective leader listens to his participants. The AAR is your opportunity to listen to your participants during and after training. Why? So that participants can analyze their own performance, get feedback about what happened and what to do differently, AND you can get feedback about how to make the training better.

AARs are a powerful leadership tool for getting the maximum results from training.

”Let’s see, next time I need to take more time to identify customer goals and objectives...”

Participants learn by discussion—from each other and from the instructor.

They learn what was right and what was wrong about their performance and what to do differently.

”Using the role players as customers really worked well. But, next time, I need to have participants practice more before they meet the ‘customer’.”

Instructors learn what “worked” and what “didn’t work” in the training and what to do differently next time.

No matter how many times you do it, each training session is a new experience!

A Few Notes...

AARs can be formal and take two days, or be informal and take five minutes. They can be done in the classroom or at an out-of-class-room training area. They can involve large groups, small groups, or individuals.

Although the focus is on doing AARs for a single training objective and with groups of no more than 20 or 30 participants, AAR techniques presented in this module will work with any size unit. Also, there are many variations on how to do an AAR. This study guide presents a basic model that can be adapted as needed.

“Here’s what we’ll be discussing and doing in this module...”

Conducting an AAR

Look at the “big picture” of how to do an AAR.

What an AAR is and is NOT.

When to do an AAR.

How to write an AAR Outline.

How to do an AAR.

A summary of this module.

A put-it-altogether practice.

Then, you set to take the performance

How To Do An After-Activity Review (AAR)

Here's the big picture. Study it for a moment.

Prepare the AAR.

-
- A. Take notes during the training events
 - B. Organize materials, audio-visual aids, and AAR location
 - C. Write and AAR outline.

Conduct the AAR.

-
- A. Begin the AAR
 - B. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses
 - C. Decide what to do differently
 - D. Summarize the AAR.

Tip!

- Video tape the training activities (either the presentation, practice, or test) and play it back during the AAR to stimulate discussion and interest.
- Participants will have no doubts about what they did or didn't do if they see it on tape. Memory can play tricks!

What An AAR IS And IS NOT

An AAR is:

Instructor-guided. The instructor's job is to guide the discussion by asking questions and keep the AAR on track. The instructor facilitates discussion.

Participant-centered. Participants actively participate and do most of the talking, summarizing, and review what happened in their own words.

Focused on training objectives. The emphasis is on meeting training objectives and standards, NOT on pointing fingers or telling "war stories".

Visual. Instructors SHOW what happened by using models and/or training aids. They relate participant comments to the model or training aids by moving markers or drawing diagrams. If practical, the AAR is done at or near the training site.

Frequent. AARs are done at logical break points during the training and after the training events.

An AAR is NOT:

A *lecture* by the instructor on what participants did right or wrong.

A discussion of *minor* events that don't directly relate to the training objective.

Intended to *criticize* or *embarrass* the instructor and/or participants.

Here's where you are in the Self Study Guide:

Doing an After Activity Review (AAR)

- ☒ Look at the “big picture” of how to do an AAR
- ☒ What an AAR is and is NOT.
- ☐ When to do an AAR.
- ☐ How to write an AAR Outline.
- ☐ How to do an AAR.
- ☐ A summary of this module.
- ☐ A put-it-altogether practice.
- ☐ Then, you get to take the performance test

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WHEN To Do An AAR

In business, you need constant market information about competitor markets, strength, direction, etc.

Likewise, in training, you need to constantly “test the water” with the participants to review what has happened and to find out ways to do the training better. That’s what an AAR helps you to do.

Generally, it’s better to do too many AARs than to do too few. Here are more specific guidelines:

When to do an AAR

-
- ALWAYS do an AAR after participants have taken the test at the end of a training session.
 - OPTIONAL times you may want to do an AAR (this is a judgment call):
 - At the end of a day of training.
 - At the end of a course.
 - At the end of a proficiency practice.
 - Anytime participants seem to be asking a lot of questions, seem confused, or are making frequent errors during practice.
 - Whenever you change subjects or tasks.
-

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Practice 1

In the examples below, decide whether you would do an AAR or not.

1. Participants are doing proficiency practice on using Excel for Windows. They've been at it for two hours.
___ DO an AAR.
___ DON'T do an AAR.

2. You've completed a training session on "Digital Systems".
___ DO an AAR.
___ DON'T do an AAR.

3. You see about 14 out of 20 participants making errors, hesitating, and asking questions about what to do, how to do it, etc.
___ DO an AAR.
___ DON'T do an AAR.

4. You've just finished testing participants on how to operate a protocol analyzer when the protocol analyzer ceases functioning. The preview, presentation, practice, and perform went extremely well—participants didn't make too many errors and they did very well on the test.
___ DO an AAR.
___ DON'T do an AAR.

Answers To Practice 1

1. Do an AAR. Although this is a judgment call, it's better to do too many AARs than too few. So, if practical, stop and do a five minute AAR.
2. Do an AAR.
3. Do on AAR. This is a good opportunity to find out what is causing the problems.
4. Yes do an AAR. You want to find out what participants strengths are as well as weaknesses (there may have been some you didn't see). But, even if everything goes perfectly, do an AAR to zero-in on what went well and how to continue it.

“(On the)...next battlefield...danger, isolation, confusion, and physical exhaustion will combine to challenge the stamina, strength, dedication, and resourcefulness of our soldiers... (winning will be) determined by how well our leadership can put together the skill, will, and teamwork of soldiers.”

Small Unit Leadership, Col. Dandridge Malone. Presido Press, 1983, pg. 23.

Step 1. Prepare The AAR

An AAR requires some preparation just like any other training event.

These are the overall steps when preparing an AAR:

- a. Take notes during the training events so you'll remember what you want to discuss.
- b. Organize any materials and resources you'll need in order to conduct the AAR.
- c. Write an AAR Outline.

A. Take Notes During Training

Don't trust your memory. Take notes during the training and use those notes during the AAR (you'll learn how later on.)

Before training participants in how to manage a telecommunications network, the instructor is having them practice operating the protocol analyzer. The instructor is taking notes to use in an AAR he will conduct after the practice session.

Take notes anytime you:

-
- Observe participants taking the correct actions.
 - Observe things participants did NOT do or could have done differently.
 - Think of questions to ask or suggestions to make.

Be sure to write who, what, when and where in your notes.

-
- Who did what?
- When was it done in relation to other things?
- Where did it happen?

B. Organize Materials And Location

Keep it simple. Use the training location you are at, or if that location is too noisy, move to an area nearby.

- Use models, mockups, graphics and tables to help reconstruct what happened.
- Get whatever audio-visual materials will be needed.
- Use posters and graphic training aids (GTAs) to reinforce the key training points.

Practice 2

1. One of the things you may want to write in the “BEFORE” heading on your outline is how to arrange the seating. Which of the arrangements below would allow participants and the instructor to talk to each other and see each other best (lower case x’s equate to participants)?

a. Instructor

x x x x x x x

x x x x x x x

b. Instructor

x x

x x

x x

x x x x

c. Instructor

x x x x x

x x

x x

x x x x

2. Where would the best place be to do the AAR?
 - ___ Someplace quiet, dry and relatively comfortable.
 - ___ The actual site where the training took place.
3. During the training session, you should be writing notes about what you observe. Which of the events below would you make a note of?
 - ___ You observe a participant taking the correct action.
 - ___ You observe several participants working as individuals instead of in a team as they develop their cost proposal. This is NOT the correct tactic. You think you may know why the participants are NOT working as a team.
4. What information should you include in your notes?
 - ___ Who, what, when, where.
 - ___ Other information—any thoughts that come to mind at the time such as why something did or did not happen.
 - ___ The GOOD things you observe as well as problem areas.

Answers To Practice 2

1. “b” is correct. “a” doesn’t allow everyone to see each other. “c” allows participants to see each other but not the instructor.
2. We would choose some place quiet, dry and comfortable if possible. The actual site might be OKAY, but it also might be too noisy.
3. Check all items.
4. Check all items.

C. Write An AAR Outline

Writing an AAR outline is easy because you should ALWAYS be writing notes about what's going on in the training. All you need to do is put some organization to your notes and you'll have an AAR outline!

How To Write An AAR Outline

- A. Write the training task that you want to review.
- B. List any equipment, materials; training aids, tools, coordination, classroom/training area arrangements, etc.
- C. Outline how you will BEGIN THE AAR. Write reminders to:
 - Explain the purpose of the AAR, your role (discussion leader) and their role (they will do the talking).
 - Tell them any other ground rules (local rules/procedures, etc.).
 - Restate the training objective.
- D. Outline how you will discuss STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES. Write reminders to:
 - Have participants discuss their strength.
 - Have participants discuss their weaknesses and causes of the weaknesses.
 - Write-in any information from your notes about what you observed during the training event.
 - Summarize the strengths and weaknesses.
- E. Outline how you will discuss WHAT TO DO DIFFERENT. Write reminders to:
 - Have participants discuss what to do different.
 - Ask any particular questions you want to ask.
 - Use the flip chart.
 - Add any suggestions of your own for what to do different.
- F. Outline how you will SUMMARIZE the AAR. Remind yourself to:
 - Recap the key strength, weakness, and "what to do different" items.
 - Tell participants specifically what to do next.
- G. **List anything you need to do AFTER the AAR.** In other words, list any actions you need to take such as follow up of items discussed in the AAR, additional training, problem solving meetings to resolve any continuing training problems, etc.

Step 2. Conduct The AAR

Once you've prepared the AAR, conduct it. The overall steps are shown in the picture below. Study them for a moment and then we'll discuss how to do each of them.

- | | |
|---|---|
| a. Begin the AAR. | Here's the objective for this proficiency practice: "...in teams, use the LAN hardware and software platforms to develop a cost proposal." |
| b. Discuss strengths and weaknesses. | <p>"Describe what you did or did NOT do and whether it was a strength or weakness."</p> <p>"Which of these actions do you feel was well-executed?"</p> <p>"Were these actions the right way to put together a proposal? How do you know?"</p> <p>"What could have happened if you had NOT used object linking and imbedding?"</p> |
| c. Decide what to do differently next time. | "What could you have done better? How? Let's sum up how you would do the task differently next time... I want you to write it down..." |
| d. Summarize the AAR. | "Here's what to do next..." |

Tip!

- Set an informal atmosphere—have coffee, soup, soft drinks, etc.
- Do AARs in a comfortable, quiet location away from adverse weather.
- If practical, reenact the training event by doing a walk-through or a walk-through on a model.

Practice 3

1. In the example on the previous page, who is probably doing the most talking during the AAR?
☐ The instructor
☐ The participants

2. What technique is the instructor using to get participants to discuss what happened, what was right, what was wrong, etc.?

3. What do you suppose the instructor's role is during all this?
☐ Enter the discussion only when necessary to keep the discussion focused on the training objective, or to bring out new points.
☐ Write key strengths and weaknesses and things to do differently on a flip chart.
☐ Ask leading questions to encourage participation.
☐ Use models or other training aids to help illustrate what happened.
☐ To make sure that at least 90% of the participants participate.

4. When all the smoke has cleared, what would you say is the bottom-line result of an AAR?

Answers To Practice 3

1. If you do the AAR the most effective way, the participants will do most of the discussion.
2. The instructor is asking open-ended questions.
3. Check all items.
4. If you wrote something solid like "...participants are able to perform to standards", then you're following our thinking.

Here's where you are in the Self Study Guide:

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- ☐ A put-it-altogether practice.
- ☐ Then, you get to take the performance test

A. Begin The AAR

Begin the AAR by telling the participants what the training objective is and what training event(s) you want to discuss (you might want to review more than one training event.)

Example

Training Objective: Identify and list customer goals and objectives...

Training event(s): Proficiency practice and the test.

“Here’s what it’s all about...”

Tell participants:

- The AAR is to help them reinforce their strengths and improve on their weaknesses.
- You want them to carry the discussion. Your role will be that of facilitator.
- Any other ground rules you may have.

”What was the objective of this practice exercise?”

Restate the training objective. There are two ways to do this:

- Ask participants. If you want maximum participation, ask the participants to tell you in their own words what the objective was. Doing this will tell you how clear your information was and it will get the participants actively involved.
- Tell participants. If time is a consideration, you can tell them.

Write the objective on a flip chart, chalkboard, overhead projector, etc., so all can see it.

AAR Chart

Training Task: _____

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Do Different Next Time</i>

B. Discuss Strengths And Weaknesses (+ / -)

Take the first training event and have participants discuss what they did or did NOT do, whether those actions or in actions were strengths or weaknesses and why they think the weaknesses occurred.

- Turn a flip chart page sideways and draw an AAR chart.
Tell participants to discuss only three things:
 - What they did or did NOT do.
 - Whether those actions or in actions were strengths (+) or weaknesses (-).
 - Why the weaknesses occurred.
- During the discussion:
 - Let the participants do the talking. Ask questions only as needed to clarify or to get participants to decide if something was a strength or weakness.
 - Make the discussion visual by using models, mockups, diagrams, have participants re-enact what they did, or use video playback, models or mockups to show what happened.
 - Listen to the discussion, put their actions or in actions in either the “+” or “-” column as you hear them.

After participants have described their strengths and weaknesses:

- Add any observations of your own—what you saw and/or heard.
- Sum up the strengths and weaknesses that are listed on the chart.

Your Job...

Remember, let the discussion continue unless it bogs down or gets off-focus. “Off focus” means talking about anything that does NOT directly relate to the strengths and weaknesses.

<u>On Focus</u>	<u>Off focus</u>
I tried to achieve too many objectives at once.”	”That business training coming up next week is going to be a real killer.” “The next time, I’ll watch carefully so that I only attempt one objective at a time.” (Participant is talking about what he would do differently instead of strengths and weaknesses.)

Ask questions to keep things moving

Ask questions to:

- Clarify something you don’t understand. Keep the discussion going.
- Get participants to think about what they just said.
- Consider the good or bad consequences of something they did.

Questions to ask ...

“What are some other actions you took?”

“Were those actions strengths or weaknesses? Why?”

“What would happen if you strayed from the customer’s goals and objectives?”

“What is the reason for having your cost proposal up front?” “Why did you do it that way?”

Practice 4

1. Participants: “The teams reviewed the RFP. Then each team member carefully studied their individually assigned parts.” What should the instructor do?
____ Jump in and begin asking questions.
____ Let the participants continue the discussion.
2. No one is talking. What would you do?
3. Participant: “John and I moved the cost proposal to the front of the document. I reminded John that the customer’s RFP required it there.” That’s the correct action. Write a question you could ask:
4. Participant: “I think the training we had last week was really great. It really helped us to understand fiber optics...”
____ OKAY? If NOT, why not?
5. “You really need to be more accurate when I write proposals.” Is this off-focus or on-focus?_____.
If you said “off-focus,” what would you do to get the participant back on track?

“Inside every fat course, there’s a thin job aid screaming to get out.” Joseph Harless.

Answers To Practice 4

1. Let the discussion continue.
2. Ask a question to get things rolling again.
3. Ask a question to get them thinking about their actions. Something like, “Why is that important to do?” You want to emphasize the strengths and NOT just call attention to the weaknesses.
4. NOT OKAY. Participant is getting off focus. Yes, it’s great that he thought the training was so wonderful. But, it doesn’t directly relate to what did or didn’t happen in this practice exercise. We would have said, “That’s good to hear. But, in terms of this practice exercise, what did you do?”
5. It’s off focus because participant is saying what he would do differently. You want him to focus only on his strengths and weaknesses for now. You could tell the participant, “That’s something you could do differently. Tell me what the strength or weakness is, regarding your proposal accuracy.”

Tip!

- If your AAR involves a large group or a lot of topics, REHEARSE it just like you would any training session.
- Have participants take any corrective actions (more practice, etc.) as soon as possible.

C. Decide What To Do Differently

You have the strengths and weaknesses listed and participants have discussed why they think the weaknesses occurred. Now, for each of the weaknesses, go back over the “-“ column and get participants to tell you how they would do it differently next time.

1. For each weakness, tell participants to come up with possible ways that they could do it differently.
2. Let the participants do the talking.
3. Ask questions only as needed to:
4. Clarify and summarize what they’re saying.
5. Get participants to think about the possible consequences of what they suggested and/or alternate courses of actions.
6. Listen to the discussion, write their possible actions in the “do differently” column as you hear them.
7. After participants have described how they would do it differently:
 - Add any suggestions of your own.
 - Summarize specifically what participants should do differently the next time and what they should continue to do (the strengths).

Tip!

Be sure that any “things to do differently” are:

- Consistent with EDS standards.
- Relevant to the goal, goals and objectives.

D. Summarize The AAR

Once all things to be done differently are listed, summarize the AAR:

Do this:

- Recap the discussion items - strengths, weaknesses, and what to do different.
- If more practice is needed schedule it.
- If participants are up to standards, move on to the next training event.
- Ask participants if there are any questions concerning the AAR.

Tip!

- Let the participants conduct their own AAR. Try grouping participants into fours. Have each group list the strengths and weaknesses. For the weaknesses, have them come up with at least one or two ways they could do it differently next time.
- Remember to use your “Parking Lot” for unresolved issues - write the questions or comments you CAN’T respond to on a flip chart and post the flip chart where all can see it. As you answer them at a later date, line through them.

Field-Expedient AAR

Sometimes you won't have the time to do the preparation for an AAR. If so, do a "field-expedient" or "lab" AAR. Just skip the preparation and conduct the AAR.

Skip this:

Prepare the AAR

- Take notes during training.
- Organize resources.
- Write an AAR outline.

Do this:

Conduct the AAR:

- - Begin the AAR.
- - Discuss strengths and weaknesses.
- - Decide what to do differently.
- - Summarize the AAR.

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Summary

Here's what we've discussed about AARs:

- An AAR IS:
 - Instructor-guided.
 - Participant-centered.
 - Focused on training objectives.
 - Visual.
 - Frequent.
- An AAR is NOT:
 - A discussion of minor events that don't directly relate to the training objective.
 - A gripe session.
 - Intended to embarrass the instructor and/or participants.
- These are the steps for preparing the AAR:
 - Take notes during the training events.
 - Organize materials, resources, and the location.
 - Write an AAR outline.

These are the steps for conducting an AAR:

Begin the AAR—state the purpose of the AAR, restate the training objective, list the training events to be discussed, and explain any ground rules.

Discuss strengths and weaknesses—have participants discuss their strengths, write the strengths on the AAR Chart. Have participants discuss weaknesses and possible causes, write on chart, then add your own observations.

Decide what to do differently—have participants discuss what to do differently. Write the ideas on the AAR Chart. Add your own suggestions.

Summarize the AAR—recap main strengths, weaknesses, what to do differently and then tell participants what to do next—more practice, more training, etc.

Here's where you are in the Self Study Guide:

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- ☒ Look at the “big picture” of how to do an AAR
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- ☐ Then, you get to take the performance test

Practice 5

Let's get some practice doing a mini-AAR.

1. Group into threes. One of you will be the "participant," one the "instructor," and the third, the "observer."
2. Have the participant pick some business task he has done recently.
3. Instructor:
 - Begin the AAR following the steps listed in this module.
 - Use a flip chart page and have the participants discuss what he did or didn't do, if those actions or inaction's were strengths or weaknesses, and why they think the weaknesses occurred.
 - Then, have them discuss what they would do differently.
 - Summarize the AAR when the participant is finished.
4. Observer
 - Use the checklist on the next page to record instructor performance and take notes.
 - When the instructor is finished, have the instructor discuss his strengths and weaknesses and what he would do differently.
 - When the instructor is finished, add any comments of your own and sum it up.
5. Everyone trade places! Observer becomes instructor, instructor becomes participant, participant becomes observer. Repeat the practice until all have played the instructor.

Observer Checklist

- ___ Instructor lets participants discuss. Did NOT lecture the participant.
- ___ Asked questions to clarify, get participant to consider the consequences of what he did, etc.
- ___ Instructor made the participants actions visual—drew diagrams, had participant re-enact what he did, etc.
- ___ Instructor did all the AAR steps: Began the AAR, discussed strengths and weaknesses, decided what participant could do differently, and summarized.
- ___ Instructor kept the discussion focused on things relating to the objective.

Notes:

Performance Test

Conduct an After Activity Review (AAR)

Do this:

1. When you are ready to do your AAR, check with your instructor for a time and place to do it. Use the same students you taught your session to. Have one of them be the observer. You are the “instructor.”
2. Instructor:
 - Write an AAR Outline.
 - Use your AAR Outline and begin the AAR.
 - Use a flip chart page and conduct the AAR.
3. Observer:
 - Use the AAR checklist on the next page to record the instructor’s performance and take notes.
 - When the instructor is finished, have him discuss his strengths and weaknesses and what he would do differently.
 - Add any comments of your own and sum it up.
 - When you agree that the instructor has met the requirements on the checklist, initial the box below and let the instructor know.

Observer’s Initials: _____

Notes:

AAR Checklist

The observer uses this checklist to record instructor actions during the AAR.

•BEFORE—

- ☐ Instructor prepared an AAR Outline.
- ☐ The room (or training area) was comfortable.

•DURING—

Instructor did all the AAR steps:

- ☐ Began the AAR—stated the purpose of the AAR, restated the training objective, listed the training events to be discussed, and explained any ground rules.
- ☐ Had participants discuss their strengths, wrote the strengths on the AAR Chart then...
- ☐ Had participants discuss weaknesses and possible causes, wrote on chart, then...
- ☐ When all strengths and weaknesses were discussed, added his own observations, then...
- ☐ Had participants discuss what to do differently. Wrote the ideas on the AAR Chart.
- ☐ When all had finished, added suggestions of his own.
- ☐ Specifically told participants what to do next—more practice, more training, etc.
- ☐ Summarized the AAR.

Overall:

- ☐ Participants talked 75% of the time. Instructor did NOT lecture the participants.
- ☐ 90% of the participants participated in the AAR at some time or other.
- ☐ Instructor asked questions to clarify and to get participant to consider the consequences of what they said, or did, etc.
- ☐ Instructor made the participants' actions visual—drew diagrams, had participants re-enact what they did, etc.
- ☐ Instructor kept the discussion focused on things relating to the objective.

Notes:

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