

Training Scouts



Item Code FS315065 Aug/02 Edition no 1

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Some Leaders when faced with training Scouts, think that all they have to do is explain the relevant information and the Scouts will understand and take appropriate action. Unfortunately, it doesn't often happen like that. Either the explanation isn't understood or, if it is, it's ignored. This can be very frustrating for the Leader, particularly when the information has been spelled out clearly and precisely.

Some Leaders believe that Scouts are like empty jugs waiting to be topped up with knowledge. Regrettably, it isn't like that either. Every Scout is different. They have their personality, talents, likes and dislikes, enthusiasms, and background experiences. Because of this, each Scout reacts differently to each piece of training and Leaders must anticipate these differences and make allowances for them.

Reaction to learning

Some Scouts just do not want to learn. They will avoid the Leaders or not turn up for the training session. Even if they realise the session is going to be of some help to them and do turn up for it, it can't just be assumed that they will learn.

What sort of reactions might take place? What sort of things might a Scout be thinking?

"It sounds okay but it's completely beyond me."

"That sounds interesting but it doesn't really apply to me."

"I don't like being talked to like a child."

"I get confused."

"I don't really believe what I'm being told."

When Scouts react like this it becomes very difficult to train them. The reaction that a successful Leader might produce is something like.

"Aha! I see.... so that's it"

What can a Leader do?

The Leader should be aiming for a situation in which the Scout wants to take training. In creating the right conditions and atmosphere the following points will be helpful.

A reason for training

Scouts will learn best when they have a personal desire to do so. They are more likely to want to learn if they realise that the more they know and keep up-to-date, the more likely they are to get on and succeed. Scouts should also be able to see the practical advantage of the training. They will see no reason for learning to signal with flags for example, if no practical use is then made of it. Their attitude towards learning how to use a map and compass for example will be very different if they know they are going on to the hills in the near future.

Enjoying the training

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During training sessions, Scouts must be able to trust their Leader. They should be able to enjoy their training, confident that they are not going to be made to feel foolish or ignorant. They want their opinions, ideas, experiences and questions to be taken seriously. When these conditions exist, the Scouts will become relaxed, feel secure and will want to learn.

The physical condition of the session can also play a large part. Each Scout will want to be able to see and hear what is going on. No one wants to be standing around or sitting still for long periods. Distracting light, sounds and movements such as other activities should be reduced to a minimum. Thought given by the Leader to the physical conditions can also help greatly in putting the Scouts at ease and making them feel comfortable.

Starting points and pace

The best point from which the Leader can begin training is the standpoint of each individual Scout. To do that, the Leader must know all of the Scouts and discover their understanding and ability so that they can begin from there. A knowledge of each Scout will also give the Leader some idea how each Scout might react to this particular subject.

It is helpful to present each new point step by step in a logical sequence, making sure that each step is fully understood. This encourages confidence and interest and promotes good learning. An individual session can therefore be geared to go at the Scout's own pace. If it is too fast, the learning will be confused and if too slow, boredom will set in. When training a group the pace will tend to be slow to accommodate the slowest learner and the fast ones can be used to help the slower ones keep up.

Scouts learn best by doing things. If they are participating by answering questions, thinking,

doing, finding out and taking notes they will learn faster and with greater understanding. All forms of training should therefore have lively active involvement. Who wants to sit and listen to someone talking about building a pioneering bridge when you could be out building it for yourself?

A sense of achievement

Most Scouts, particularly younger ones, desire to have their skills and abilities recognised. The Scout training scheme is designed to acknowledge the progress of each Scout. The badges are a means of saying 'Well done, you have shown you have reached a certain point in your training'.

Leaders can augment this by giving their Scouts a sense of achievement by praising and encouraging them, by letting them share their new skills and abilities with each other and by showing their work and achievement to parents, friends and others. By building on training in this way, a desire to be involved in future training will be created.

Which methods are best?

The Scout Association is a training movement. Over many years it has developed methods of training that have proved to be highly successful and effective. Talks, discussions, instructions, demonstrations, and learning by doing through practical activity come readily to mind. There are advantages and disadvantages to each and Leaders should select the most appropriate method for the training in hand.

One method used widely in the field of education and to some extent in Troops has much to commend it. It is known as discovery learning.

Discovery learning

The discovery method literally involves Scouts in learning by experience, finding things out for themselves, reporting on what they have found and drawing conclusions. The subject of their research can vary widely. It might include facts about people, places, ideas, or anything at all that will add to the knowledge of the subject they are looking into. Usually the discovery method takes the form of projects shared by the whole Patrol or Troop. They can be short projects planned for Troop meetings or afternoon activities, or they can take the form of longer projects lasting a weekend or even taking two or three weeks to complete. The advantages of project work, which are listed below, are worth noting.

To the Scouts

- Scouts will enjoy finding things out and sharing their findings with others.
- Scouts will remember better when they have discovered things for themselves than when they are told or shown things.
- Scouts can often draw conclusions and arrive at facts that no one else could suggest to them.
- In the hunt for information Scouts are often spurred on to find out information on other subjects.

To the Leader

- Project work can fulfill all the conditions previously listed to enable a Scout to learn effectively
- Project work provides fun, excitement and practical activity.

- Project work provides opportunities to participate in the Balanced Programme, in a variety of ways.
- Project work encourages Patrols or other groups to work together. Scouts help each other learn, share their experiences, successes and failures and demonstrate how constructive and creative they can be as a team. At the same time they develop the relationship skills of working with others which are so vital in later years.

Helpful hints for Leaders

- Plan carefully what is to be included in the project and the time available to do it. Involve older Scouts in the planning as much as possible.
- Use specialists to contribute to the project reports particularly when working in a specialist area such as minimal impact camping – “leave nothing behind but your thanks”!. They will be able to clear up queries and misapprehensions, and give additional information if necessary.
- Wrap the project up in a story form or exciting scenario.
- Try other methods rather than direct testing of individual Scouts. Observe the project in action and note individual progress. Ask questions to check understanding of the project. Encourage the Patrol Leaders and older Scouts to check the progress of younger members. Discuss with the Scouts how they feel they have progressed as individuals and as a group.
- Praise the successes at the end of the project. Discuss in detail any failings so that they can be turned into positive learning.
- Remember the focus of much of the Programme is to participate –it is not about passing tests.

Short projects for use in Troop meetings

Each Scout is asked to select or is given a task to carry out. The task could last for 15 minutes, an hour, or the whole evening. Working in their Patrols, either individually or in groups of two or three, they set about collecting the information and facts they need. Then, by using what they have collected, they carry out the task as a Patrol.

The information can be sought from individuals, other groups or Patrols, books, newspapers, the Patrol box, the equipment store or by observation and research away from the Troop room. The presentation, demonstration or reports of a project can take various forms. A verbal or written report, an exhibition, painting, drawing, sculpture, posters, models, a tangible project such as a pioneering tower, or even a dramatised scene are some of the imaginative ways a Patrol can be encouraged to present their results.

Whether the project be a few minutes or of several hours duration it is wise to:

- Make sure everybody is absolutely clear what they have to do and the time allowed to do it. Explain where information can be sought from and what sort of 'report back' is required. It is better to have the project written down on cards or a flipchart so there are no misunderstandings.
- Ensure that the equipment, models, books, and other sources of information are adequate for the purpose, of good quality, correct and up to date.
- Ensure the Patrol Leaders know they have you to turn to if they get into difficulty.

Examples: Project-Escape

You are all prisoners. Plans have been made for you to escape. A swinging derrick is being

constructed from various bits and pieces and the plan is to lower everyone over the walls. This means that all prisoners must be able to tie a bowline round their own waist in order to secure themselves to the derrick when the moment comes to escape. Silence is essential!

Using all the resources of the group, e. g. books, charts, and skills of your fellow prisoners, get your group ready for the escape with bowlines tied around your waists and lined up on the castle roof.

This activity is clearly based on the *Scoutcraft and Adventure* Programme Zone. It engages a range of different Methods including, Activities outdoors, Technology and New Skills, Team Building and Themes.

The factors relating to short projects also apply to the longer projects. However the longer projects, e.g. a Treasure Hunt, allow deeper and more widespread research, encourages better presentation, and allows for work to be carried out away from the Troop room.

Longer projects need better resources, information and planning and this will be your responsibility.