

C3 - Concrete Practice: Where You Can See the Learning

Think about the last time you learned something new. Not something you just understood, but something you can now actually do. What made the difference?

It probably wasn't more explanation. It was likely practice.

Concrete practice is the part of the lesson where learners do something with what they've learned. If it's a skill, they practice doing it. If it's knowledge, they actively work with it in a way that helps them remember it. And one thing matters more than anything else here: everyone is doing something.

Not watching. Not waiting. Not taking turns while others sit back. All learners are actively involved.

That's where concrete practice is often misunderstood. Watching a demonstration, reading through examples, or answering questions as a whole group can feel like practice, but it's not the same thing. Those can support learning, but they don't replace practicing the concept or skill.

Another important part of practice is that it needs to feel safe enough to try. When people are learning something new, mistakes are part of the process. Practice is not about getting it right the first time. It's about improving over time. When the environment feels low-risk, learners are more willing to try, adjust, and continue.

Practice also works differently when learners are interacting with each other. When they collaborate, they hear different ideas, notice new approaches, and support each other as they learn. At the same time, each learner still needs to stay involved. It's not enough to be in a group if only one person is doing the work.

Here are a few examples of something that might be called "practice":

The trainer asks for a volunteer to come to the front and try the skill while everyone else watches.

Learners take turns answering questions while the rest of the group listens.

The trainer walks through several examples while learners follow along.

Rewrite each of these so that they follow our definition of Concrete Practice.

Concrete practice is not about keeping learners busy. It's where learners are working with the content in a way that makes their learning visible.

A few simple shifts can make this easier to design. Instead of asking for a volunteer, have everyone try at once. Instead of practicing the whole skill at once, break it into smaller parts. Instead of one person responding, design something where each learner has a role.

A few easy ways to start

- **Teach-back:** Have learners explain or demonstrate the skill to a partner or small group.
- **Act it out:** Use a short role-play or scenario so learners can practice in a realistic situation.
- **Card game:** Create a simple activity where learners match, sort, or apply ideas using cards while actively participating.

Based on this information, would you change anything about how you design your practice activities?

Answers for example revisions - your answers may be different

Instead of one volunteer trying the skill, all learners try it at the same time, either individually or with a partner.

Instead of taking turns answering questions, all learners write or discuss their responses before sharing.

Instead of walking through examples for learners, learners work through an example themselves and then compare or discuss their thinking.