

C1 - Connections: What Happens Before the Content Matters

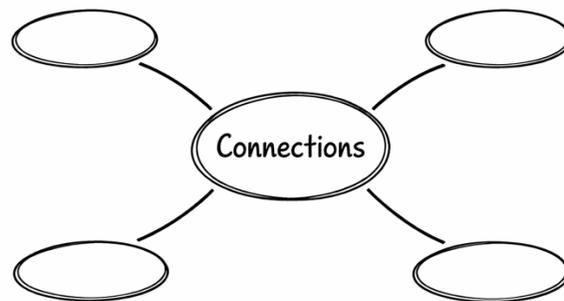
Think about a recent lesson you taught or a session you participated in. How did it start? What was happening in those first few minutes?

When we plan a lesson, most of us start with the new information we will share. We think about what we're going to teach, what slides we need, and what examples we'll use. But before any new content can be learned, something else should happen first.

Learners need to connect.

Connections are short opening activities that help learners get ready to learn. Not just ready to begin, but ready to think and participate. Those first few minutes shape how comfortable and willing learners are to take part, and that has a big impact on how the rest of the lesson goes.

Find a piece of paper and something to write with. Draw a quick mind map with "Connections" in the center and four sections around it. As you read, add ideas to each section.



Each other

One of the first connections learners need is with each other. A safe learning environment doesn't just happen. It's created by giving learners a simple, low-risk way to interact with each other right away. Without that, many people will stay quiet and wait.

Write "each other" in one section of your mind map. What could learners do to interact right away?

The topic

Learners also need to connect to the topic. Before introducing new information, they need time to think about what they already know or believe. New learning works best when it builds on what's already there. Without this step, new ideas can feel disconnected or harder to make sense of.

Write “the topic” in another section. What could learners think about or discuss before new content is introduced?

Their own goals

Another important connection is to their own goals. Every learner walks in with a reason for being there, whether they’ve clearly defined it or not. When learners connect the session to what matters to them, it shifts from something they’re being told to something they’re actively involved in.

Write “their own goals” in another section. What could you ask or prompt so learners consider what matters to them?

Label the fourth section as: To the outcome

Learners also need to connect to the outcome. Learners should know what they will be able to do after the lesson, not just what they will hear. When they know where they’re headed, it’s much easier to stay focused and make sense of what’s coming next.

Write “the outcome” in the final section. How will learners know what they are working toward?

At the same time, learners are also forming impressions about you and the learning environment. They’re deciding whether they can trust you, whether it feels safe to participate, and whether this experience will be worth their time. These decisions happen quickly, often in the first few minutes. Using that time for housekeeping or low-value information is a missed opportunity.

That’s why those first few minutes matter so much. Before you plan your next lesson, it’s worth asking: what are my learners connecting to in the first five or ten minutes?

Before moving on, let’s do a quick check. Choose a way to show your answer with movement. You might move one direction or another, gesture, or use any signal that works for you.

For each statement, decide if it’s a **myth or a fact**:

1. What learners do in the first few minutes has a big impact on how the rest of the lesson goes.
2. Learners are more likely to participate later if they interact with someone right away.
3. New information is easier to understand even if learners haven’t thought about what they already know.
4. When learners consider what matters to them, they are more likely to engage in the lesson.
5. Starting with housekeeping is a good use of the first few minutes of a lesson.

A few easy ways to start

- **Standing survey:** Ask a question related to your topic. Learners talk to one or two people, gather a response, and then repeat it to someone new.
- **Turn and talk:** Have learners share a question they have about the topic or something they already know with a partner.
- **Quick write:** Ask learners to complete a prompt such as, “By the end of this session, I want to be able to...” and optionally share with someone near them.

Before you move on, take a minute to do something with this information.

Think back to the lesson you imagined at the beginning.

- Did learners interact with each other?
- Did they think about what they already knew?
- Did they consider what they wanted to get out of it?
- Did they participate in something topic-related?

What’s one idea you could use to make the start of your lesson more effective?

Myth or Fact Answers

1. **Fact**
2. **Fact**
3. **Myth**
4. **Fact**
5. **Myth**