

After Action Review

An After Action Review (AAR) is a structured, team-based debrief conducted after a task, project, event, or operation. The AAR captures key insights, identifies lessons learned, and improves future performance, regardless of whether the outcome was a success or a failure. Unlike a performance evaluation or a blame session, an AAR is collaborative, non-punitive, and focused on continuous improvement.

Why Use an AAR?

- 🔄 Learn in real-time - Capture insights while details are fresh
- 📈 Drive improvement - Identify what worked and what didn't
- 👥 Build team ownership - Promote open communication and shared accountability
- 🧠 Foster a learning culture - Create space for reflection and honest feedback
- 📊 Prevent repeat mistakes - Convert experience into operational wisdom

When to Use an AAR

- After completing a project or major task
- Following significant events (successes, failures, or disruptions)
- During milestone checkpoints on long-term initiatives

How to Conduct an AAR: 4 Key Questions

AARs can be formal or informal but should always include these four core questions:

1: What was supposed to happen?

Clarify the original plan, goals, and expectations.

2: What actually happened?

Review the facts and timeline without blame or emotion.

3: Why did it happen that way?

Analyze contributing factors—both internal and external.

4: What can we do better next time?

Capture actionable takeaways, process adjustments, or training needs.

Tips for an Effective AAR

- Keep it brief, focused, and time-bound (30-60 mins works well).
- Create a safe environment where everyone can speak freely.
- Assign a facilitator to guide the discussion and stay on track.
- Record key lessons and next steps for follow-through.
- Encourage participation from all roles—not just leaders.

An AAR transforms experience into growth. Whether you're leading a combat patrol, launching a product, or running a sales campaign, the ability to pause, reflect, and adapt as a team will sharpen your edge—and build a culture of trust, accountability, and learning.