

Choosing to learn

We may think that we do not learn much in our everyday lives but when we take time to reflect on what we have learnt, it can be surprising and encouraging. It can also help us to plan learning goals for the future. Below is a worked example for you to copy and fill out, which will help you to reflect on the past and plan for the future. On the opposite page, we have suggested some alternative ways of learning which might help you to achieve your learning goals without expensive resources or formal training.

STEP 2

Think about how you learnt this skill or lesson. We learn in many different ways. There are some suggestions below for you to choose from or you can add your own.

STEP 1

Think of things you have learnt over the last month. They could be practical skills like family budgeting, recognising the symptoms of a disease, speaking a foreign language or facilitating a group discussion. Or perhaps a life lesson like how to handle difficult people or how to be effective in the workplace.

What I learnt	How I learnt it
1. How to use a bio-sand filter	from Footsteps
2. How to make a budget	through distance learning
3. How to do basic first aid	from a book
What I want to learn next...	How I could learn it...
1. How to cook more nutritious food for my family	from a friend from the internet from a television programme
2. How to facilitate group discussions	at a training course at church with a group of peer learners

STEP 3

Now, think of something you want to learn in the future. What do you want to understand better? What new skill would you like to have?

STEP 4

Think about how you can learn this skill or lesson. What resources or people can help you to learn what you want to know?



One-to-one learning

A lot of learning happens through a one-to-one conversation. It can involve someone passing on their knowledge and experience of an issue, or if they know very little about a topic, listening and asking questions which make you think about things in a new way.

These conversations may be unplanned and often happen informally. We listen to someone else and what they say makes us think and realise things we had not known before. If you find someone who is particularly good at passing on their own knowledge or is able to ask good questions that help you think for yourself, you could agree to meet regularly, perhaps once every couple of weeks for a few months. It is wise to agree what it is you want to learn through these more formal conversations so that you can reach your goal together.

Role-play

Children are very effective learners. Indeed, they are often better at learning than many adults! One of the reasons for this is that, as we grow up, we often stop using one of the most powerful learning mechanisms we have – play – because we think it is only appropriate for children. But play can be a very effective learning tool because you are practising a skill in an environment where there is little risk if it goes wrong.

FOR EXAMPLE: You could use role-play to 'practise' what you might do as a community if there are heavy rains and the river floods in your village. You use your imagination to pretend it has happened – and decide what needs to be done and by whom. After you have done this, assess how effective your actions and choices were: what could you have done better? What surprised you? This is learning through a combination of play and collective reflection.

Learning in a group

Is there a group of people in your community who want to learn about a specific topic? Or others across your region who want to explore a new area of learning? Examples of possible topics include issues such as children's rights, water and sanitation or farming practices. You could gather an informal group to share learning and encourage one another. You could meet regularly and take turns to share what you have been learning in order to benefit the whole group.



Skills sharing

You might have a skill which you can teach someone and someone else might have a skill you want to learn. Why not arrange to swap your skills? Perhaps you play the drums and you want to learn how to speak a local dialect. On a wider level, you might want to do a 'skills audit' of your community: ask who knows what and how can others learn from them? Look for someone who can teach you the specific skill you want to learn. Think about what skills you can offer to teach others. Start with a small number of sessions and see how the 'skills swap' develops.

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