



Experiential Learning Model (ELM)

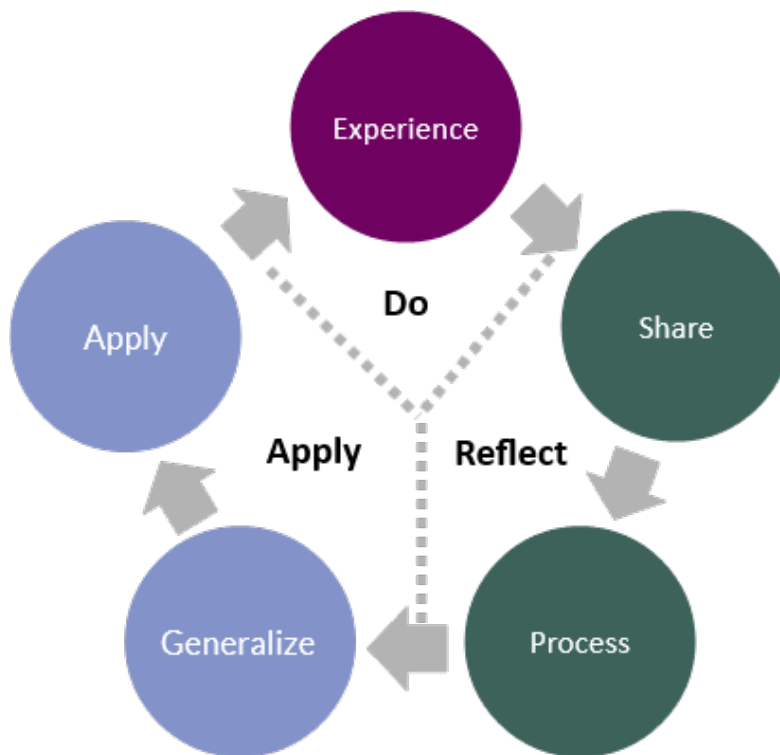


Figure 1. The five-step “do, reflect, apply” experiential learning model.

Do Stage

During the “do” stage, which includes step 1, “experience,” youth are participating in an activity (see Figure 1). You will often need to prepare for activities before meetings so that you can focus on being intentional about what you’re presenting during meetings. This in turn gives youth the latitude to direct their own learning.

Ideally the participants will be engaged in the experience and will draw their own conclusions, with an appropriate amount of guidance and minimal instruction from you. To make this happen, you may need to adapt activities to present them using the participants’ preferred learning style or styles (such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic or tactile, or a combination of styles).

In the “do” stage of the ELM, youth gain knowledge and skills, often without realizing it. This is one reason why the ELM is so effective.

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Reflect Stage

The “reflect” stage of the experiential learning model includes step 2, “share,” and step 3, “process” (see Figure 1).

During step 2, “share,” ask the youth surface questions about the experience. Be sure to give enough time for youth to consider their responses before moving on or asking another question. Examples of questions you might ask include: “What did you do?” “What did you see?” “What did you feel?” “What did you hear?” “What did you taste?” “What was the hardest part of the activity for you?” “What was the easiest part?”

Adults often forget to ask these important questions because we’re right there observing what has happened. (We probably already know the answers to most of these questions, too.) But it’s still important to ask the questions to give the youth the chance to talk about their experiences. It’s easy to assume that everyone participating in the activity has had the same experience, but this process often reveals that every person doing the activity has in fact had a completely different experience.

After the participants have shared their experiences, you can ask more in-depth questions to help them process what has occurred. (**Note:** It’s critical during this step that you don’t make the youth feel like they’re taking an oral quiz about what they learned from the activity.)

- If the activity didn’t turn out the way you expected it to, what could you do differently next time to make it more likely you’d get the result you expect?
- If the activity **did** turn out the way you thought it would, is there anything you’d like to do differently next time anyway?
- You can prepare for and carry out some activities, like baking cookies at home after school, pretty often if you want to. Other activities, like showing a hog at your county fair, take months of preparation, and you can only do them once a year. How would the different time spans and amounts of preparation involved affect the goals you would set for those activities? How would it affect the steps you’d take to reach the goals you set for them?
- How can you use what you did in this activity and what you learned from it in other parts of your life?

Apply Stage

The application piece of the experiential learning model is crucial to bringing the educational experience full circle. Youth need to discover how to make their educational experiences work for them and this is the perfect place for that discovery to happen.

Helping youth learn to generalize their experiences might look hard at first, but it’s not nearly as tough as it looks. By the time your group has reached the “apply” point in the “do, reflect, apply” cycle, you’ve probably been able to spot at least a few life skills the youth have gained from their experiences.

In step 4, “generalize,” the focus is on helping the participants identify any similarities between this and previous experiences. (Note: Those previous experiences may have taken place in school, in other 4-H or nonformal educational activities, or in everyday life.)

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In step 5, your task is to help the youth learn to connect their experiences, the life skills they have or are learning, and the world around them. During this step, they'll move toward applying their experience to other opportunities that may or may not be connected to the ones they're having with you.

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