

## **An Introduction to Some “Familiar Terms”**

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Training...instruction...education...learning. These are words we often use interchangeably. When we analyze the words, however, we discover that each conveys a unique meaning. Individually and combined, these four activities give us power to build different types of skills and knowledge. Let's examine each of these words and begin to build a very valuable vocabulary.

### **Training**

You are trying to get your dog to sit at your command. Check off the expression below that best describes what you are doing:

- ☐ Training your dog
- ☐ Instructing your dog
- ☐ Educating your dog

You probably chose “training your dog” because it seems to fit best. The other two sound somewhat strange when applied to animals. If we dig deeper, we realize that, when training a dog, what we want is for it to perform something specific and precise. We also want the dog to do it on command and without variation. You say, “sit,” the dog sits. The more effective the training, the more accurately and rapidly the dog responds.

In “training,” our purpose is to create a change in learners (including dogs) that they consistently reproduce without variation. Through intense training, the learner becomes increasingly able to reproduce the learned behavior with fewer errors, greater speed, and under more demanding conditions. Examine the list below and check off all the items for which you believe training is appropriate.

- ☐ Typing
- ☐ Assembling a rifle
- ☐ Stating a rule
- ☐ Executing a complex skating maneuver
- ☐ Reciting multiplication tables
- ☐ Selecting the right icon on a screen
- ☐ Applying all the steps of the emergency shutdown procedure

If you checked off all the items, you were right. Sounds mechanical? That's all right. Learning things that you apply automatically and invariably is often a

necessary part of learning. How much variation do you want in naming objects, slicing a tomato, or logging on to a computer? Being able to execute mental or physical procedures without thinking is important in our lives (for example, shifting gears in a car, brushing our teeth, recognizing letters and words). It cuts down on our cognitive (thinking) load. Training helps make our lives easier.

## Instruction

“Instruction” helps learners generalize beyond the specifics of what is taught. The ability to reproduce unconsciously what we have learned is absolutely insufficient to make us complete as human beings. Therefore, we add instruction.

Here’s an example: In French, the infinitive forms of regular verbs always end in “er.” For instance, the verb *donner* (to give) is a regular verb. So is *demander* (to ask). Which of the verbs below are French regular verbs?

choisir (to choose)    vendre (to sell)    chanter (to sing)  
apporter (to bring)    nommer (to name)    vouloir (to want)

Even though you may not know much about French, you probably were able to take the rule and the two examples above and generalize to new instances. If you selected *apporter*, *nommer*, and *chanter*, *félicitations* (congratulations)!

In work settings, we require a lot of instruction. Let’s take, for example, safety issues. We provide examples of workplace hazards and means for dealing with different types of dangerous situations. But no matter how many examples and rules we provide, we all know that we may run into many novel instances not covered during instruction. The expectation is that learners will be able to generalize beyond what was taught.

Just as for training, the purpose of instruction is to build new skills and knowledge. The key differences are presented in Table 2-1.

**Table 2-1. Differences Between Training and Instruction**

Training allows you to...	Instruction allows you to...
1. Reproduce exactly what has been taught.	1. Generalize beyond what has been taught.
2. Act automatically.	2. Act thoughtfully.
3. Apply learning without variation, smoothly and efficiently, regardless of conditions.	3. Adapt learning to each new set of conditions.

Just to be sure you've got it, place a "T" beside each action below that you believe to require training and an "I" beside those that seem to fit with instruction.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Light a lighter.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Pronounce the French word *manger*.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Select an appropriate product for a customer.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Respond to a complaint.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Place a specific component in the motherboard.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Tie a reef knot.

Items 1, 2, 5, and 6 are all tasks for training (reproduce without variation). Items 3 and 4 require instruction because each new customer will be different, as will each complaint. Those actions demand generalization of learning and adaptation of behaviors.

## **Education**

The third key vocabulary term is "education." As you probably already sense, education conveys a more long-term and broader connotation than do training and instruction, which are generally short-term and narrowly focused. Education is the result of a variety of life experiences and highly generalized learning principles and events. Much of education derives from implicit messages transmitted through the behaviors of role models rather than from explicitly stated ones. The purpose of education is to build general mental models and value systems.

Placing this in a work context and continuing with the safety example, through training, we build specific safety behaviors, such as set off an alarm, activate a fire extinguisher, or select the right number to call. Through instruction, we acquire the skills to identify new safety hazards or to act when an emergency occurs that we have not encountered before. Through education, we adopt a safety outlook on life. We automatically take precautions and proactively apply measures to avoid accidents. We foresee possible dangers, and we advocate safe working conditions and behaviors.

In our work as parents, teachers, and workplace training professionals, we do all three: train, instruct, and educate. All three activities have their place. One is not more important than another. All three work together. Imagine, for example, that you are responsible for building skills and knowledge in a technical service center where customer support specialists help callers solve technical problems. Consider the list of relevant tasks presented below and place a "T" beside each item requiring training, an "I" beside the instruction items, and an "E" beside those appropriate for education.

- 1     \_\_\_\_\_ Log a call.
- 2     \_\_\_\_\_ Probe to clarify the problem.
- 3     \_\_\_\_\_ Fill in fields in a customer record.
- 4     \_\_\_\_\_ Display empathy for customers' frustrations.
- 5     \_\_\_\_\_ State steps for a specific troubleshooting procedure.
- 6     \_\_\_\_\_ Draw out from the customer what she or he already has done in attempting to correct the problem.
- 7     \_\_\_\_\_ Select type of call code before filing the report.

Items 1, 3, 5, and 7 are most likely tasks to be trained. Item 2 probably is one best handled through instruction. Item 6 is largely instruction but has some aspects of education in it. You have to learn how to go about drawing information from a customer and applying listening skills. The rapport you create can make all the difference in the quality of customer responses you obtain. You can acquire the techniques through instruction, but the nuances of helpfully interacting with the customer draw from the education of the customer support specialist. Finally, item 4, displaying empathy, is a subtle skill not inherent in everyone. Empathy derives from the support specialist's own life experiences plus the models and implicit messages he or she communicates through actions. A person requires education to become empathic with customers.

To conclude our vocabulary drill, training, instruction, and education all aim at building knowledge and skills in learners. Each offers a unique and distinct approach, and all are necessary to help people learn. They seldom remain "pure." They can be mixed so that even while training for a specific behavior, we may be educating by attitude and by the example we create for our learners.

## **Learning**

Learning is change. Don't forget that the whole reason for training, instruction, and education is to enable people to learn. In chapter 3, we will investigate learning more deeply. Suffice it to say at this point that we are seeking to "transform" our learners. If we train—the general term commonly used in the work setting for all three sets of activities—we do not simply transmit information. We *change* people. We transform our learners in ways that are desirable both for them and for our organizations.

**This article is an excerpt from the book, *Telling Ain't Training*. To learn more about the book, click [here](#).**

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