



Teaching on the run tips 3: planning a teaching episode

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Setting

You are in the emergency department and have just treated a patient with ventricular tachycardia. You have 5 minutes you can spend with some new interns and decide to discuss the management of VT.

TEACHING can be thought of as a planned learning activity.¹ Clinicians think teaching “on the run” in the clinical setting can’t be planned. But given that we know we will be teaching, we know we are going to be busy, and we know the topics that recur, we *can* plan. With experience from seeing many patients, we build up “teaching scripts” on common topics (such as ventricular tachycardia) related to diagnosis, management, social circumstances and so forth.² We can draw on these, in the context of assessing the patient, to guide us in covering the essential points. This can be in a 5-minute grabbed moment, a 30-minute interactive tutorial or a 1-hour lecture, as appropriate.

Peyton and colleagues³ have described a method for planning any teaching event based on a triad of concepts:

- *Set*: what you need to think about beforehand;
- *Dialogue*: what happens during the event; and
- *Closure*: how you finish off.

Some aspects of *Set* can be decided during the planning stage, but others occur as you are starting your session. The essentials of *Set* include being clear about the desired learning outcomes, which should be specific and achievable in the time available. They should be relevant and important for the learner and pitched at the right level. Remember the principles of adult learning discussed in our “Tips 2” article.⁴ Consider the environment and whether the seating, the room and the teaching “props” are adequate. Ensure that there is privacy, that the patient is suitable, and that the learners are not tired or distracted by other work. Think about the roles of the patient and learner. Tell learners what teaching method will be used and what is expected of them.⁵

Dialogue is the crucial part of the learning experience and involves interaction between the learner and the teacher. Given that the attention span of an adult is 10–15 minutes,

varying your delivery in longer sessions (eg, by including a learner activity or case study in the middle of a tutorial) can significantly increase factual recall in learners.⁶ The essentials of *Dialogue* include delivering the content in a stimulating way to make it engaging. Use eye contact, address people by their names, and ask questions to keep them involved. Questioning also allows you to check understanding.

In the *Closure*, provide a summary with the take-home message and links to topics for self-directed or future learning (as not everything can be covered in the time available), and make sure you finish on time.

Remember that sometimes, when you or the learners are too busy, it isn’t worth trying to teach. Delay teaching for a time when you and they are all able to concentrate, but don’t delay it forever.

Stop and think! How could you apply Set, Dialogue, and Closure next time you teach?

Reflective teaching

Improvements in your teaching can only occur if you reflect on how each encounter went.^{6,7} You can do this in simple ways.

■ Ask yourself, How did that go? What went well? If you did it again tomorrow, what would you change to make it better? Think through how well you did with *Set*, *Dialogue* and *Closure*. Too often we rush on to our next busy task and never do this, then find ourselves doing the same thing year after year.

■ Ask the learners for feedback:

- Verbal. Ask them what they thought went well and what could be improved;
- Written. Ask them to write down any points that were not clear, then collect and read the comments to find out what they are still confused about. Also ask learners to fill in an evaluation form.

■ Review the learners’ progress. Next time, do they remember the lessons learnt, and did they perform well in assessments?

■ Ask a colleague to observe your teaching and provide feedback in a structured way.

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Take-home message

When you next teach “on the run”:

- Consider the concepts of *Set*, *Dialogue* and *Closure* in planning teaching sessions.
- During a session, vary your methods to keep learners engaged.
- After a session, make time to reflect on or ask “What went well?” and “What could be improved?”.

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Competing interests

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