

## Retraining and Refresher Training: Aren't They One in the Same?



***What gap are you trying to solve with retraining and refresher training?***

**By Vivian Bringslimark, HPIS Consulting, Inc.**

I say no, not at all. Ask an operations manager and he'll acknowledge that what it's called is less important than getting the "assignment" done and entered into the LMS. He's usually more concerned about the loss of productivity during the training than the effectiveness of the training at that time. It isn't until later when the training may have to be delivered again (repeated), that the comment "training doesn't really work" is heard.

Retraining is typically delivered as repeat training. Corrective actions from \*CAPAs usually trigger these types of required training events. In the context of the specific CAPA, we uncover the error, mistake, non-conformance or what I like to call performance discrepancy from expected outcome. It is believed that by delivering the training again, the cause of the discrepancy will be resolved. That is, if the root cause was determined to be a lack of knowledge, skill or not enough practice.

Some folks believe that more is better and that with several repeated training sessions, employees will eventually get it right. It always amazes me that we find time to do repeat training over and over again but complain very loudly for refresher training, significant \*\*SOP revision training or even new content training.

Refresher training implies that training was already provided at least once. The intention here is to review on that content. A lot of regulatory training requirements are generated to satisfy this need. Common examples are annual GMP refreshers and several OSHA standards such as blood borne pathogens training. While the aim is to refresh on the content, it is not necessarily meant to just repeat the training. Also included is the part – "so as to remain current" with current practice, trends and new updates. Hence, refresher training needs to include new material based on familiar content.



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### **Upon Biennial SOP Review**

There are some folks who like to use this required SOP activity to coincide with the need to "refresh" on SOPs already read and/or trained. The rational being that if the SOP hasn't revised in two or three years' time, more than likely the training hasn't been repeated either. So, it sounds like a good idea to require that SOPs be "refreshed" upon using the same SOP cycle. One could argue for the prevention of errors; thus, in theory, this sounds very proactive.

But donning my Instructional Designer Hat, I ask you, what is the definition of training? To close a knowledge gap or skill gap. What value is there for forcing a mandatory “refresher reading” on SOPs just because the procedure is due for technical review? In practice, this becomes one huge check mark exercise leading to a paper work /LMS backlog that might actually increase errors due to “information overload!” Again, what gap are you trying to solve? In the above refresher scenario, we are avoiding a compliance gap by satisfying regulatory requirements.

## Defending Your Training Process

For those of you who have fielded questions from regulators, you can appreciate how the very training record produced generates follow up questions. How you describe the conditions under which the training occurred or is “labeled” can impact the message you are sending as well. Calling it “retraining” instead of “refresher training” implies that training had to be repeated as a result of a performance problem not meeting expectations or standards. Whereas refresher training occurs at a defined cycle to ensure that the forgetting curve or lack of practice is not a factor of poor performance. It is routine activity for satisfying regulatory expectations.

For end users, clarifying the difference between refresher training and “repeat” training in your Policy/SOP not only defines the purpose of the training session, it also provides the proper sequence of steps to follow to ensure maximum effectiveness of the training. There’s a difference between training content that is new/updated vs. delivered as a repeat of the same materials. Yes, new and/or updated design takes resources and time. How many times do you want to sit through the same old same old and get nothing new from it? Recall the definition of insanity – doing more of the same while hoping for change. You just might want to review your Training SOP right about now.

\*Corrective Actions Preventive Actions

\*\*Standard Operating Procedures

**What do you think is the difference between “retraining” and “refresher training?” Share your comments in the space below.**



### About the Author

*Vivian Bringslimark’s 28 years of education, life sciences industry experience and consulting engagements enable her to provide human performance consulting services for improving people strategies. Vivian holds a M.A. in adult education from Teachers College Columbia University and a M.S. in Educational Computing from IONA College. She currently serves as advisor to Board of Directors for the GMP Training and Education Association and is an active mentor for SE FL Chapter of ATD.*

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