



# Determining Training Breadth and Depth

When training is appropriate for a participant's knowledge and experience, it meets professional development needs, is relevant, and provides opportunities to grow new skills and knowledge. Some training topics cover a wide range of concepts, while others focus more deeply on a singular concept. **Breadth and depth** of content is a term used to describe the focus of training topics.

Trainers who are intentional about planning for and describing the breadth and depth of training help learners select training that best meets their needs. Trainers might consider the following tips and information about breadth and depth when developing and describing training.

## **Breadth and Depth in a Training Experience**

### **Breadth of Training**

*Breadth refers to the span of knowledge of a subject being covered in a training.*

Content may address only a few areas of knowledge or touch on several areas of knowledge. For example, a training about social-emotional development may focus solely on the importance of relationships in supporting social-emotional development. Or the training may touch on several areas of knowledge about social-emotional development, including developmental stages, the importance of relationships, early brain development, culture, behavior support, self-awareness, environments, etc.

## Depth of Training

*Depth refers to the extent to which specific topics are focused on or explored in a training.*

For example, a training about social-emotional development may detail how responsive relationships support the developing brain, provide strategies for responsive engagement, and offer opportunities for participants to engage in deeper cognitive processes (e.g., analyzing, evaluating, and creating).

## Terms That Describe Breadth and Depth

- **Overview/Introductory:** General information about a subject that typically touches on a variety of topics without providing a deep exploration of any one topic.
  - A training that provides an overview of social and emotional learning (SEL) may define SEL and identify the four core competencies without going into detail about a specific competency.
- **In-depth:** Comprehensive, detailed exploration of a subject or concept.
  - A training on early brain development provides detailed information on brain architecture and the impact of responsive relationships on the developing brain.
- **Advanced:** Builds on the knowledge and skills participants have acquired previously.
  - After attending an introductory training about culture, participants may take an advanced training to help them understand their personal biases.
  - A training on responsive and reciprocal relationship practices may require prior experience working with children and families.

## Breadth and Depth: Impacts on the Adult Learning Experience

**Adult learners benefit from understanding the larger context of an area of knowledge.** Training that covers a broad range of information provides a foundation for exploring specific concepts. This is often the format for an overview or introductory training. The trainer should have a broad understanding of the subject so they can respond effectively to learners' questions.

**Adult learners engage in more critical thinking if they have the opportunity to go deeper into fewer topics and pursue areas of interest and passion.** When trainers and educators strive for depth over breadth, they increase both learner agency (control of their own learning) and engagement.

**Adult learners have the capacity to think deeply about concepts and apply them to their daily lives.** Training supports implementation when it offers opportunities to study concepts and embed them into existing practice.

**Adult learners obtain mastery of a topic when they can integrate the concepts into their existing knowledge and experiences.** Training that offers time to reflect on how concepts can be useful to the learner's work encourages sustainable practice.

**Adult learners benefit when training content and activities fit with their level of knowledge and experience.** Training descriptions that include recommendations for participants' prior knowledge and experience support adult learners in selecting training that meets their needs. Trainers can also conduct a brief assessment as an opening activity to better understand and adapt to the needs of participants.

## **Breadth and Depth of Training: Factors to Consider**

A common approach to training is to provide an overview of the subject (breadth) and then narrow the focus to one or two specific topics (depth). This approach encourages learners to think more critically and explore the implementation of training concepts.

Factors to consider when determining the breadth and depth of a training:

- Knowledge and experience of the intended participants
  - Are participants new to the material?
  - How much experience do the participants have with the concepts?
- Framing a training
  - How will you identify a training at an entry or beginner level?
  - How will you articulate the recommended knowledge or experience participants may need for a more advanced training?
- Issues related to time
  - How much time have you been allotted for the training?
  - What is an appropriate amount of time to meet your learning outcomes?

- What is a realistic estimate of your participants' availability (i.e., best day and time) for training?
- Will the time of day you are offering the training impact participant engagement? For example, participant energy levels may be higher in the morning than after lunch or dinner. Or, participants may not wish to turn on their cameras in an online training if their computer is located in a room where a lot of family activity is occurring.
- Training content
  - How much content will your training include?
  - Why was the topic chosen, and what is the purpose of the training? For example, the topic may be determined by the needs of the participants, requests from the field on an emerging practice, state or federal policy recommendations, trainer expertise, or other specific purposes.
  - What type of activities will you use to demonstrate learning outcomes?
- Supporting adult learning
  - How much time will you provide for reflection?
  - How much time will you provide for implementation or program planning?
  - How will you connect concepts with existing knowledge and practices?
  - How will you encourage adult learners to share their experience and knowledge?
  - How will you promote collaboration among participants?

Consider the breadth and depth of your training and provide a detailed description to help participants select training at the right level for their knowledge, experience, and comfort. Trainers benefit from increased participant interest and engagement when the training content and activities fit their goals and needs.