



Five Things That *Make a Course Teach*

Five checks for a course that changes what someone can do. Read the principle, then run the instruction on your own course.

THING 01 · PRESENTATION

More is a tax.

WHAT IT IS

A learner can only keep a few things in mind at once. Every element you add spends some of that attention, whether it teaches or not.

APPLY IT

List everything in one lesson. For each item, ask what it does for the learner. Keep what builds understanding or skill, and move the rest to a bonus or remove it.

THING 02 · PARTICIPATION

Engagement is only a vital sign.

WHAT IT IS

Engagement tells you the learner is paying attention. Whether they learned anything is a separate question you have to check on its own.

APPLY IT

After any part where the learner watched or read, give them one thing to do with it. A choice, a sort, a short answer. If you can't find a way for them to use the material, that part only delivered information.

THING 03 · APPLICATION

Doing is the change.

WHAT IT IS

Understanding forms when the learner does something with the material, not when they watch you do it. A skill doesn't transfer without the doing.

APPLY IT

For each thing you want the learner to be able to do, build one activity where they do it on a real example.

THING 04 · FEEDBACK

The answer is the proof.

WHAT IT IS

When a learner produces an answer, that answer shows them whether they understood. A correct one confirms it. A wrong one shows them what to fix.

APPLY IT

Write feedback ahead of time for each likely answer, including the wrong ones. For a wrong answer, name what the learner missed and what to do about it. "Correct" and "incorrect" give them nothing to act on.

THING 05 · TRANSFER

The lesson outlives the lesson.

WHAT IT IS

Transfer is the learner using what you taught in their real work, without you or the course. It's the only outcome that counts.

APPLY IT

Write your outcome as a sentence, "By the end, you can __," and fill the blank with a real task from the learner's work. Then check every lesson against it. If a lesson doesn't move them toward that task, it doesn't belong.

ONE MORE THING

This is *instructional design*.

Deciding what teaches and what does not is the whole job. Run these five things on your own course and what you teach will stick.