



British Heart
Foundation

HEARTSTART

THE FOUR STAGE APPROACH

Training a nation
of life savers

The Heartstart course can be taught in a number of ways. Studies show that retaining life saving skills can be challenging, but maximising hands-on practice helps trainees acquire and retain their skills.

The four-stage approach is a common teaching method that helps facilitate and retain learning.

Using the four-stage approach

You can use the complete four-stage approach or adapt it, depending on the time you have available. For example, if your instructors were delivering a two-hour course, they could use the Skills for life video for stages 1 and 2, then break off into groups for stages 3 and 4 to practice. This approach is most suitable for teaching the cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) element of the course, but you can apply it to all life saving skills. The four-stage approach is also recommended for training instructors, when there's usually more time available to apply and discuss it.

The theory supporting the four-stage approach

The theory supporting the four-stage approach is quite simple – using visual demonstrations to teach helps trainees to acquire skills and retain them. The four stages allow the trainee to move gradually from novice to expert.

**FIGHT
FOR EVERY
HEARTBEAT**

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The four-stage approach

Stage 1

You demonstrate the skill, without explanation, at normal speed and with no interruption. This ensures that your trainees clearly see the actions they'll need to perform in an emergency situation. There's no commentary, because it could distract the trainees from concentrating on watching the skill being performed accurately, by an expert. Responsibility for demonstrating the skill is yours at this stage. You could use the relevant real-time Skills for life video sequence for this stage, rather than demonstrating the skill yourself.

Stage 2

You demonstrate the skill again, with added commentary. You now demonstrate the skill more slowly, and add a commentary describing each step. Once again, the trainees see the skill being applied correctly, but with an added explanation. Responsibility for demonstrating the skill is still yours at this stage. Even though your trainees have now had the benefit of a commentary as well as the demonstration, they may have some questions. Make sure you leave enough time for this, but keep your trainees focused by only answering questions about the skill you've just demonstrated. You're now beginning to shift the responsibility from yourself to your trainees. You may want to use the relevant Skills for life sequence to recap.

Stage 3

You demonstrate the skill again, but ask one of your trainees to give the commentary. This is a crucial stage in skill learning. By explaining the series of actions the trainee is beginning to take responsibility, but still feels secure because you're in charge of demonstrating the skill. At the beginning of Stage 1 you're clearly the expert and your trainees the novices, but by the end of this stage the trainees have now seen the skill demonstrated in detail three times and are gradually gaining your level of expertise. If there's enough time you can reinforce the skill by asking each trainee to give the commentary.

Stage 4

Your trainees demonstrate the skill and provide their own commentary. Your trainees now take responsibility for demonstrating the skill, to show that they've understood the technique. You should encourage each trainee to perform this stage and, if there's time, you should allow them several practices to reinforce the skill. You've now transferred all responsibility to your trainees and you can see if your teaching has been effective. At the end of this stage all your trainees should have successfully completed the skill, showing a similar ability to your own. Finally, ask the trainees if they have any questions. If you've planned the session well, and carried it out as described above, there should be very few.

References

Resuscitation Council UK
*Pocket Guide to Teaching
for Medical Instructors*
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