

Introduction



Welcome to *Focus on Food*

Focus on Food is a nutrition curriculum intended for school nutrition program personnel, such as nutrition assistants, servers, and cooks. The lessons are designed to assist learners in gaining an awareness of general nutrition recommendations, while allowing them to discover connections between these recommendations and the importance of school nutrition program requirements. A key component of each lesson is applying the knowledge gained to the daily lives of the learner, whether at the workplace or at home.

The curriculum contains eight lessons covering topics such as: nutrients and their functions in the human body; benefits of physical activity; food recommendations based on gender, age, and level of activity; portions, serving sizes, and the Nutrition Facts Label; factors that influence a student's eating behavior, and local school wellness policies. The activities in each lesson were designed using experiential learning and inquiry.

Facilitator Tips: How to Get the Most from This Curriculum

Teaching and Learning Strategies

All activities in the *Focus on Food* curriculum were designed using learner-centered methods, including experiential and inquiry-based learning. Experiential learning is grounded in the idea that experience is essential to learning and understanding. Specifically, experiential learning involves a recurring sequence of three distinct steps: 1) an experience (“Procedure/ Experiencing”) that involves learner exploration; 2) a period of discussion and reflection (“Sharing, Processing and Generalizing”) where learners share their reactions and observations, process their experience, and make generalizations to real-life examples; and 3) an opportunity to apply (“Apply”) new knowledge and skills in an authentic manner, which helps learners deepen and broaden their understanding (it helps learning last!).

Inquiry is a teaching and learning strategy that engages learners in activities requiring observation and manipulation of objects and ideas in order to construct knowledge and develop skills. Inquiry is grounded in experience, focuses on the use and development of critical thinking skills, and targets the learning and application of specific content knowledge. In addition, inquiry starts with a question; effective questioning strategies are critical when facilitating inquiry-based learning. Open-ended questions or prompts (e.g., Explain what you know about...; or Discuss your understanding of...) promote learner inquiry and are considered more effective than closed-ended questions or prompts (e.g., Name the parts of...; or What is the name of...?).

The inquiry-based activities in the *Focus on Food* curriculum were designed using the 5-step Experiential Learning Cycle by Pfeiffer and Jones (1983): Experience, Sharing, Processing, Generalizing, and Application. It is recommended that adequate time be allotted for participants to proceed through each step in order for learning to be maximized.

Organization of the Learning Environment

The activities in the *Focus on Food* curriculum are designed to be facilitated in a small group-learning environment. Learners construct understanding through inquiry using observations, the manipulation of objects and ideas, and personal reflection. However, learning is a social endeavor where dialogue and reflection with others are critical elements. Therefore, creating physical and social environments where learners can carry out inquiry will help learners organize their thoughts to develop an understanding of concepts being emphasized in specific curriculum activities. If the participants are from different sites or shifts, consider providing nametags to help you and the participants learn each other's names. It may also be helpful to perform an icebreaker activity at the beginning of class. Examples of icebreakers can be found at:

1. Institute for Child Nutrition
(<http://www.nfsmi.org/documentlibraryfiles/PDF/20110314102309.pdf>)
2. Or you can use the one below:

Ask participants to introduce themselves to the group by sharing the following information:

Name, job title, and school or site

Finish this sentence: I would like to know more about _____.

(The sentence should describe some topic or area related to nutrition or encouraging healthy choices.)

Organization of the Curriculum

The lessons are sequenced so that foundational concepts are discovered first, and then built upon with more advanced concepts as they continue through each lesson.

Each lesson consists of one hands-on activity, a brief lecture, and one goal setting activity. The goal setting activities provide the participants with the opportunity to take what they have learned and apply it to independent, real-world situations in the workplace or at home. This application of knowledge is a critical step of the learning process.

Curriculum Layout

Lesson Title

The activity title introduces facilitators to the topic that will be addressed during the activity.

Background Information

This introductory section provides facilitators with a brief overview of the subject matter and provides examples that help to explain the importance of the topic.

Facilitator Tip: Facilitators should not share the background information with the participants prior to the activity. Rather, it is intended to support facilitators by providing factual information that may help ground and inform group discussions.

Concepts and Vocabulary

Facilitators are provided with a list of defined concepts and vocabulary that is meant to be discovered by the participants during their exploration and completion of the activities. The list should not be provided to the participants at the beginning of the activity. At the end of each activity, facilitators should ensure that the appropriate terms and concepts have been discovered by or introduced to the participants.

Learning Activity

Each lesson consists of a learner-centered activity in which the majority of learning takes place. The curriculum contains the following for each activity:

Getting Ready

Time Required

Each module includes an estimate of the time needed to complete the activities. The actual time required for the activities will vary based on the level of learner interest, size of the group, and the setting in which the activities take place.



Materials Needed

A list of the materials needed to complete the activities is provided for facilitators. The list describes the materials to be used. Most materials are provided as an appendix within the curriculum (these are marked with an *); however, other materials (such as pens and markers) will need to be obtained prior to activity implementation.



Preparation

This list describes what needs to be done by facilitators to prepare for the activity, how many of each of the materials to prepare, and what tasks need to be completed prior to the beginning of the activity. Suggestions are provided for the group size designed for each activity. The suggested groupings are meant to help facilitate quality learning among the participants.



Facilitator Tip: When forming groups, it may be helpful not to include supervisors, managers, directors, etc. in groups with those they supervise or manage. This tip has been suggested by instructors as past experience with the lessons has shown that this can disrupt the discovery and learning process if participants defer too much to their supervisors and managers.

Opening Questions/Prompts

Questions or prompts presented at the beginning of each activity are meant to draw the participants into the topic being addressed in the activity. Responses to the questions will provide facilitators with an understanding of what the participants already know about the topic. Recording the question/prompt on a white board or flipchart paper at the front of the room allows participants to have something to refer to. After each opening question/prompt, provide a few minutes for participants to discuss within their groups. Facilitators should encourage the participants to record their answers to these introductory questions on the provided flip chart paper, as this is an important part of the learning process.



Once participants have had a chance to respond to all the opening questions/prompts, discuss each one as a class. There may be a few seconds of uncomfortable silence, but allow time for participants to speak up by their own volition. This is a chance to engage and build rapport with participants. Some statements and questions to help engage participants at this phase are: “Tell me more about that”; “What do you mean by...”; “How is that motivating you?”; “Did anyone else write this?”; “That’s a very popular opinion.” At this stage, don’t correct misconceptions. Make note of them, and if they aren’t corrected organically through the lesson, address them briefly at the end of the lesson.

Facilitator Tip: This is the point when the activity begins with the participants. Open-ended questioning is a key element of inquiry-based learning. For sample open-ended questions, you may refer to Appendix IA at the end of this introduction.

Procedure (Experiencing)

This is the part of the curriculum when the participants experience and complete the activity itself. It is highly recommended that facilitators read the procedure in its entirety before implementing with the participants so that the activity flows smoothly. It is important for participants to record their observations, ideas, and other thoughts during the procedure on the flip chart paper provided, as this is an important part of the learning process.



Optional PowerPoint slides have been prepared for major steps in each activity. These slides are intended to be used for participant reference while completing the activity, and do not include full descriptions of each step of an activity. Facilitators should use the full descriptions included with each step in this Facilitator Guide.

Activity Wrap-Up (Sharing, Processing, and Generalizing)

Following the procedure, there is a period of reflection, during which time the participants come back together as one group and share their observations with each other. This phase provides participants an opportunity to communicate their findings, listen to what others discovered, consider the various thought processes, and learn from each other. It helps to solidify what the participants have learned throughout the course of the activity. This phase also contains prompts that allow the participants to engage in thinking about how they went about solving a problem. This is called meta-cognition, which is considered a key element in developing a deeper understanding.



Concept and Term Discovery/Introduction

At this point of the activity, most of the concepts will have most likely already been discovered by the participants. Many concepts will have already been defined by now as well. However, some concepts may have been missed or poorly understood and need to be clarified; additionally, technical terms may need to be introduced to the participants.



Facilitator Tip: Ensure that all terms/concepts have been discovered or introduced to the participants. Additionally, make certain that any misconceptions have been addressed.

Expanding Knowledge

Through the activity, participants will discover or be introduced to most of the concepts of the lesson. The Expanding Knowledge section of each lesson consists of 5 to 15 minutes of lecture using PowerPoint slides to reinforce the concepts that have been learned, and to expand on these concepts with more detail and information.



Getting Ready

Time Required

This segment includes an estimate of the time needed to complete the presentation. The actual time required will vary based on the level of participant interest.



Materials Needed

This list describes the materials needed to present the Expanding Knowledge PowerPoint slides. In order to do so, a computer and projector are needed, as well as the corresponding lesson PowerPoint.



Preparation

This list describes what needs to be done by facilitators to prepare, includes the slide number on which the Expanding Knowledge segment begins.



Procedure

The procedure for the Expanding Knowledge segment includes a suggested script for facilitators to use. The script, which is also included with the PowerPoint files, includes opportunities for participant engagement. Questions to ask the class are included to encourage interaction.



Goal Setting

Following Expanding Knowledge, each lesson has a short Goal Setting activity. This is a key part of the learning cycle, as it allows participants to reflect on what they learned, and how it can be applied in their own lives.



Getting Ready

Time Required

This segment includes an estimate of the time needed to complete the Goal Setting activity. The actual time required will vary based on the level of participant interest.



Materials Needed

This list describes the materials needed for this activity. Most goal setting activities require only the goal setting handout provided in each lesson appendix, however some make use of materials from the Learning Activity.



Preparation

This list describes what needs to be done by facilitators to prepare.



Procedure

The procedure for the Goal Setting activity is structured in order to provide participants time to quietly reflect on how they can use what they learned in the lesson, before asking for volunteers to share their goals with the class. There is an optional step that instructs the facilitator to distribute an accompanying newsletter that can be found as the final appendix in each lesson.



These newsletters provide an opportunity for reinforcement of the material in an engaging, user-friendly format.

Facilitator Tip: If offering this course in a single workshop, you may wish to distribute the lesson newsletters weekly in order to help refresh participants' memory and solidify the concepts.



Focus on Food Professional Standards Suggested Crediting

Lesson	Time*	Key Area	Key Topic	Objective
1: Nutrients in Action	1 hour and 15 minutes	Nutrition	General Nutrition – 1300	1320 – Understand general nutrition concepts that relate to school meals, such as whole grains, sodium, etc.
2: How Does Your Food Measure Up?	1 hour	Operations	Serving Food – 2200	2210 – Identify/serve portions of food items according to USDA school meal pattern requirements and diet restrictions.
3: Get Your Move On	45 minutes	Administration	Human Resources and Staff Training – 3400	3450 – Foster employee health, safety, and wellness.
4: My Plate – Foods for Life	1 hour	Nutrition	General Nutrition – 1300	1310 – Relate Dietary Guidelines and USDA food guidance (such as MyPlate) concepts to the goals of the school nutrition programs.
5: Nutrients of Concern	1 hour	Nutrition	General Nutrition – 1300	1320 – Understand general nutrition concepts that relate to school meals, such as whole grains, sodium, etc.
6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices	1 hour	Nutrition	Nutrition Education – 1200	1220 – Integrate nutrition education curriculum with school nutrition program, utilizing the cafeteria as a learning environment.
7: How Smart is Your Lunchroom?	1 hour	Communications and Marketing	Communications and Marketing – 4100	4160 – Create an environment that engages students to select and consume healthy foods with minimum waste, including Smarter Lunchroom techniques.
8: Working Toward Wellness	1 hour	Communications and Marketing	Communications and Marketing – 4100	4110 – Develop strategic plans and marketing plans that reflect program goals and enhance interaction with stakeholders.

*Time includes total time needed to complete all three sections of each lesson.

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Appendix IA – Sample Open-Ended Questions for Facilitators



Observing

- Describe what you know about...
- Explain what you observed when...
- Tell me what happened when...
- What did you notice about...
- Tell me more about that...
- What do you mean by...

Making Sense of what happened

- Based on what you observed, what do you think about...
- How did you decide to go about...
- Using what you know, explain...
- Explain your thoughts about...
- What do you mean by...
- Would you tell me more about
- What do you already know about...

Reasoning

- Imagine...
- Suppose...
- Predict...
- If..., then...
- How might...
- Can you create...
- What are some of the possible consequences...
- What if...
- What do you think would happen if...
- Is there another way to...
- How might you do that differently?

Open-Ended Questions



Observing

- Describe what you know about...
- Explain what you observed when...
- Tell me what happened when...
- What did you notice about...
- Tell me more about that...
- What do you mean by...

Making Sense of what happened

- Based on what you observed, what do you think about...
- How did you decide to go about...
- Using what you know, explain...
- Explain your thoughts about...
- What do you mean by...
- Would you tell me more about
- What do you already know about...

Reasoning

- Imagine...
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- If..., then...
- How might...
- Can you create...
- What are some of the possible consequences...
- What if...
- What do you think would happen if...
- Is there another way to...
- How might you do that differently?

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