After action review template

An after action review template helps the people who ran an event compare what they planned with what happened, while the details are fresh. This kit gives you the four questions with a filled example from a pilot workshop, a blank review sheet and timeline, an action register, and a 45-minute review with a shortened 30-minute version.

45 minutes | 3–12 participants | Online and adaptable in person

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The outcome

Within 45 minutes the people who ran the event record the plan, a timeline of what happened, possible reasons for the largest differences and no more than three actions, each with an owner who has said yes, a date and a sign that it was done.

Before the session

- For trainers, co-facilitators, producers and project teams who have just delivered a session, a pilot, an exercise or an event. Hold the review within 48 hours, while people still remember times and details. Use the lessons learned template instead when a different team or a later project needs the learning.
- Invite the people who ran the event and the person who can approve changes. Keep the group to 12 or fewer. Say in the invitation that the review looks at the plan and the process, not at individual performance.
- Collect the facts before the meeting: the plan or run of show, times from the platform or room, attendance and evaluation counts, and messages from the backstage channel. Enter them in the timeline so the group starts from records, not memory.
- If you can, choose a facilitator who did not lead the event, and a note-taker. Send the four questions in advance, open the review sheet in a shared document, turn on captions and offer a way to add points in writing.

Included in this kit

A facilitator run of show, participant worksheets with real tables, reference tables, debrief questions, adaptation notes and a follow-up plan. Use the editable Word copy to tailor examples and prompts before delivery.

Original material by Superglue. Timings are suggestions; adjust them to your participants. This resource has not been independently evaluated.

What is inside

- After action review sheet
- Filled example: after action review
- Timeline: planned and actual
- Filled example: timeline
- Blank action register
- Filled example: action register
- Facilitator section: run of show, reference tables, debrief and adaptations

After action review sheet

Use one sheet per event. Write facts with times where you can, and mark an explanation as possible until someone has checked it.

Event, date, and who took part in the review

_____

Question	What we recorded
1. What did we plan to happen? **Purpose, success measures, times, roles**	
2. What actually happened? **Times and events, recorded or remembered**	
3. Why was there a difference? **Two possible explanations for each**	
4. What will we keep or change? **No more than three, with a trigger**	

Filled example: after action review

A fictional online pilot of “Writing clear handover notes”, run by a facilitator, a co-trainer and a producer. It is the same workshop as the example in the run of show template.

Question	What we recorded
1. What did we plan to happen?	A 90-minute online pilot of “Writing clear handover notes” for 18 registered people, 10:00–11:30. Practice rooms of three at 10:35 for 18 minutes. Evaluation link at 11:20. Success measures: every participant rewrites one handover note, and at least 12 evaluation replies. Finding: the producer understood the link would go out at 11:20; the facilitator understood it would go out after the writing task.
2. What actually happened?	16 people joined, two of them 20 minutes late. One practice room had one person, so the producer moved people by hand and the rooms opened at 10:39. The break was cut to three minutes. The demonstration went better than planned: nine people named the missing owner within two minutes. The evaluation link went out at 11:26 and 7 of 16 people replied. The call ended at 11:31.
3. Why was there a difference?	Rooms: the producer assigned them from the registration list, and two registered people did not join (recorded). Late link: the cue was a clock time for one person and a task for the other (recorded); some people may have left before 11:26 (possible, not checked). Demonstration: the weak example was close to the group’s own handovers (possible explanation from the chat).
4. What will we keep or change next time?	Change: assign rooms at 10:30 from the people present. Change: post the evaluation link at the start of the action segment, whatever the time. Keep: open the demonstration with a weak note from the participants’ own kind of work. Owners and dates are in the action register.

Timeline: planned and actual

One row per segment or event. Write times from a record where you have one, and name the source. Add what went better than planned as well as what went worse.

Planned	What was planned	Actual	What happened	Source	Difference

Filled example: timeline

The fictional pilot, from the platform log, the chat log and the producer’s notes. One entry is marked remembered because no record exists.

Planned	What was planned	Actual	What happened	Source	Difference
10:00	Admit people; 18 registered	10:00	14 joined by 10:08, two more at 10:20	Platform log	Two registered people did not join
10:10	Opening question in rooms of three	10:11	Rooms ran as planned	Chat log	+1 min
10:20	Demonstration: weak and revised note	10:21	Nine people named the missing owner in chat within two minutes	Chat log	Better than planned
10:35	Practice rooms open for 18 minutes	10:39	One room had one person; producer moved people by hand	Producer notes	+4 min
10:55	Five-minute break	10:59	Break cut to three minutes	Platform log	Two minutes lost from the break
11:00	Compare and revise	11:02	Three volunteers shared; the segment ran to 11:19	Remembered	+4 min over
11:20	Evaluation link posted	11:26	7 of 16 people replied	Form count	+6 min; replies below the target of 12
11:30	Close and end the call	11:31	Recording stopped at 11:30	Platform log	+1 min

Blank action register

No more than three actions per review. Each owner says yes before the action goes in the register. Close an action only when it was used at the next delivery.

#	Keep or change	Trigger: when it applies	Owner (said yes)	By when	How we will know
A1					
A2					
A3					
A4					
A5					
A6					

Where this review is stored, and who checks the actions before the next delivery

Filled example: action register

Three actions from the fictional pilot: two changes and one practice to keep.

#	Keep or change	Trigger: when it applies	Owner (said yes)	By when	How we will know
A1	Change: assign practice rooms at 10:30 from the people present, not from the registration list.	Every online session with pre-assigned rooms	Producer	Before the second delivery	No single-person rooms in the next platform log
A2	Change: post the evaluation link at the start of the action segment, whatever the clock says. Write the cue as a segment in the run of show.	Every session with an end-of-session evaluation	Facilitator	Before the second delivery	Link time in the chat log; reply count recorded
A3	Keep: open the demonstration with a weak note from the participants' own kind of work.	When the group shares one type of handover	Co-trainer	Before the second delivery	The example is in the facilitator guide

Facilitator run of show

1 Set the rules for the review | 5 minutes

Say: “We compare the plan with what happened and decide what we keep or change. We talk about decisions and conditions, not about who is to blame.” Say who will see the notes. Ask the most senior person to speak last in each round so that other views come first. Confirm the end time.

2 What did we plan to happen? | 7 minutes

Read the plan aloud: the purpose, the success measures, the times and who did what. Ask: “Is this what each of us understood the plan to be?” Record any difference in understanding as a finding. Write the success measures as numbers where the plan had them, such as attendance, timing or evaluation replies.

3 What actually happened? | 10 minutes

Give three minutes of silent writing: each person adds times and events to the timeline. Then walk through it in order for seven minutes. Mark each entry as recorded, such as a platform log, or remembered. Include what went better than planned as well as what went worse. Do not discuss causes yet.

4 Why was there a difference? | 10 minutes

Choose the two or three largest differences between the plan and the timeline, including one that went well. For each, ask “What conditions made this happen?” and collect at least two possible explanations before you choose one. Keep an explanation marked as possible when nobody can check it.

5 What will we keep or change next time? | 8 minutes

For each difference, write one thing to keep or one thing to change, with the trigger for when it applies. Choose no more than three for the action register. A useful action changes a checklist, a template, a time or a role; “be more careful” is not an action.

6 Name owners and close | 5 minutes

For each action, the owner says yes aloud, gives a date and says how the team will know it was done. Read the register back. Agree where the review sheet is stored and who checks the actions before the next delivery. Thank people for the facts they brought.

Reference tables

The four after action review questions

Ask them in this order. Agree the facts in questions 1 and 2 before anyone suggests a cause.

Question	What to record	Example from the pilot workshop
1. What did we plan to happen?	Purpose, success measures, times and roles, and any difference in how people understood the plan	Rooms of three at 10:35; at least 12 evaluation replies
2. What actually happened?	A timeline with times, each entry marked recorded or remembered	Rooms opened at 10:39; 7 of 16 people replied

Question	What to record	Example from the pilot workshop
3. Why was there a difference?	At least two possible explanations for each large difference, and for one success	Rooms were assigned from the registration list, not from arrivals
4. What will we keep or change next time?	No more than three actions, each with a trigger, an owner, a date and a sign it was done	Assign rooms at 10:30 from the people present

The 30-minute version

For a review straight after a session, when one person has filled in the timeline beforehand. The minutes add up to 30.

Minutes	Part	What changes from the 45-minute review
0–3	Rules	Read the rules aloud; no round of expectations
3–8	What did we plan?	Show the plan on screen; discuss it only if someone understood it differently
8–15	What happened?	Start from the prepared timeline; people add corrections only
15–22	Why the difference?	Take the largest difference and one success
22–27	Keep or change	Choose one or two actions
27–30	Owners	Owner, date and sign of completion, read back once

After action review, lessons learned or retrospective?

Question	After action review	Lessons learned review	Retrospective
When	Within 48 hours of one event, session or exercise	At the end of a project or milestone	At a regular interval, such as every two weeks
Who takes part	The people who ran the event	People from across the project and the team that receives the lessons	The team that works together
What it produces	No more than three actions for the next delivery	A register of lessons for other teams	Changes to how the team works
Related kit	This template	Lessons learned template	Retrospective template

Debrief and next steps

Questions for reflection

- Which difference came from people understanding the plan differently, rather than from doing it differently?
- Which success do we want to repeat on purpose, and what conditions made it work?
- Which action changes a checklist, a template, a time or a role, and which only asks people to try harder?

Adapt the session

- For a solo trainer, answer the four questions alone in 15 minutes straight after the session, using the platform log and the evaluation count. Ask the sponsor or one participant to read the timeline and add what they saw.
- For participants after a practice exercise or simulation, run the four questions in groups of three for 12 minutes and collect one action per group. Keep the focus on the exercise, not on grading people.
- For remote reviews, keep the timeline on a shared screen, collect silent writing in a document or chat, and read each entry aloud for people who use a screen reader. Make cameras optional.
- If a safety issue, a serious incident or a complaint about a person comes up, stop that topic and use the proper organisational process. An after action review is not an investigation.

After the session

Store the review sheet with the plan or run of show for the event. Before the next delivery, the owner of each action confirms that the change is in the checklist, template or plan. After that delivery, add one line to the register: was the action used, and did the difference happen again? Close an action when it was used, and drop it on purpose when it no longer applies.

Questions people ask

What are the four after action review questions?

What did we plan to happen? What actually happened? Why was there a difference? What will we keep or change next time? The four-part structure comes from the US Army, which describes after action reviews in training publications such as TC 25-20, A Leader’s Guide to After-Action Reviews (1993). The wording on this page is our own.

How long should an after action review take?

30 to 45 minutes for one event. This page has a 45-minute plan and a 30-minute version for use straight after a session, when one person has filled in the timeline beforehand.

Who should attend an after action review?

The people who ran the event and the person who can approve changes, 12 people at most. Bring the participants’ view in through attendance, evaluation counts and comments rather than inviting everyone.

What is the difference between an after action review and a lessons learned review?

An after action review happens within a day or two of one event and produces a few actions for the same team’s next delivery. A lessons learned review happens at the end of a project and records lessons for other teams. Use the lessons learned template for that.

Do I need the Excel file?

No. The PDF holds everything you need to run the review on paper. The Excel workbook calculates how many minutes each segment ran early or late and counts open actions in the register.

What is included in the free and editable files?

The open PDF has the review sheet, the timeline, the action register, filled examples of all three and the 45-minute review plan. Subscribers also receive the editable Word file, the Excel workbook and a CSV of the example action register.

Use and sharing

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