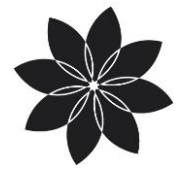


# After Action Reviews

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(from <http://www.kstoolkit.org/After+Action+Review>)

## Brief Description:

An After Action Review (AAR) is a simple process used by a team to capture the lessons learned from past successes and failures, with the goal of improving future performance. It is an opportunity for a team to reflect on a project, activity, event or task so that they can do better the next time. It can also be employed in the course of a project to learn while doing. AARs should be carried out with an open spirit and no intent to blame. The American Army used the phrase "leave your rank at the door" to optimize learning in this process. Some groups document the review results; others prefer to emphasize the no-blame culture by having no written record.

AAR is a form of group reflection; participants review what was intended, what actually happened, why it happened and what was learned. One member of the group facilitates, capturing results on a flip chart or in a document.

AARs can be short, frequent group process checks, or more extended, in-depth explorations. They can be conducted in person, on the telephone or even online, either asynchronously (meaning you don't have to be online at the same time with [email](#) or [web forums](#)) or synchronously (meaning you are online or on the phone at the same time, using tools like chat or [instant messaging](#) – IM). Because these reviews can be valuable throughout processes, they are sometimes referred to as Action Reviews (AR).

## When to use:

- During and after a project to reveal what has been learned, reassess direction, and review both successes and challenges.
- During and after an event.

## How to use:

1. Hold the AAR immediately. AAR's are carried out immediately whilst all of the participants are still available, and their memories are fresh. Learning can then be applied right away, even on the next day.
2. Create the right climate. The ideal climate for an AAR to be successful is one of openness and commitment to learning. Everyone should participate in an atmosphere free from the concept of seniority or rank. AARs are learning events rather than critiques. They certainly should not be treated as personal performance evaluation.
3. Appoint a facilitator. The facilitator of an AAR is not there to 'have' answers, but to help the team to 'learn' answers. People must be drawn out, both for their own learning and the group's learning.
4. Ask **'What was supposed to happen?'** The facilitator should start by dividing the event into discrete activities, each of which had (or should have had) an identifiable objective and plan of action. The discussion begins with the first activity: 'What was supposed to happen?'
5. Ask **'What actually happened?'** This means the team must understand and agree facts about what happened. Remember, though, that the aim is to identify a problem not a culprit.
6. Now compare the plan with reality. The real learning begins as the team of teams compares the plan to what actually happened in reality and determines **'Why were there differences?'** and **'What did we learn?'** Identify and discuss successes and shortfalls. Put in place action plans to sustain the successes and to improve upon the shortfalls.
7. Record the key points. Recording the key elements of an AAR clarifies what happened and compares it to what was supposed to happen. It facilitates sharing of learning experiences within the team and provides the basis for a broader learning programme in the organisation.