

Exams

Exams are an element of the educational approach used in Shaping the Parish. Most of the elements might be called action-learning. You do something, reflect on it in a disciplined process, draw learnings. Frequently you then do something similar, giving you the opportunity to apply your learning. Action-learning methods include group work followed by feedback and/or group reflection, role-play, and skill development exercises.

As part of the mix, exams have proven to be a useful learning tool. We have used them in other programs over the years. They create a situation in which participants come to the program ready to enter into the action-learning process with a base of knowledge. That allows us to spend less time on presentations and more on application. We have seen a significant increase in learning since exams have been introduced in these programs.

There has been research over the years suggesting that exams not only test learning but facilitate it, and do so better than other methods.

An article in the New York Times reported that *students who read a passage, then took a test asking them to recall what they had read, retained about 50 percent more of the information a week later than students who used two other methods.*

It went on to say, *Why retrieval testing helps is still unknown. Perhaps it is because by remembering information we are organizing it and creating cues and connections that our brains later recognize.*

'When you're retrieving something out of a computer's memory, you don't change anything — it's simple playback,' said Robert [Bjork](#), a psychologist at the [University of California, Los Angeles](#), who was not involved with the study.

But 'when we use our memories by retrieving things, we change our access' to that information, Dr. Bjork said. 'What we recall becomes more recallable in the future. In a sense you are practicing what you are going to need to do later.'

It may also be that the struggle involved in recalling something helps reinforce it in our brains.

For the whole article in the NY Times – [“To Really Learn, Quit Studying and Take a Test”](#)