## Skillathons: Showing What You Know

**A skillathon is…**

* a fun, active, and challenging learning tool for a group of almost any size, age, or ability.
* a competitive, noncompetitive, learning-by-doing activity. This teaching method helps youths develop both life and project skills. The skillathon works well at a project meeting, club meeting, camp classes, after-school sessions, in the classroom, or at a mall or fair.
* a series of learning stations with realistic situations and tasks to do. Teams attempt to complete tasks before being told or shown. The station facilitator follows with questions to help the teams build on their experiences.

Setting up a skillathon is an excellent activity for youths to practice developing their leadership skills. People and materials need to be organized, decisions made, and signs prepared. To help guide the planning committee, some tasks that should be considered are listed below. Skillathon stations can be set up on almost any curriculum, e.g., Identifying Breeds of Animals, Preparing a First Aid Kit, Finding Your Way, How Long Does It Last?, What Makes an Ecosystem?, Fabric Durability, Identifying Woodworking Tools, or Water On the Move.

Skillathon Preparation

* Decide on the stations needed, considering time and resources available
* Make up a realistic situation and task sign for each station so that teams don’t

require additional directions

* Decide who will be in charge of each station
* Decide on the equipment and supplies needed at each station
* Delegate the responsibility for gathering supplies

Station Facilitator

* Be familiar with the skillathon topic
* Develop several questions to ask participants
* Allow participants to discover for themselves how to accomplish the task,

instead of telling or showing them how

* Help the learning by using the steps of the skillathon model

Skillathon Model

* Form teams of 2 to 5 participants
* Make supplies available
* Provide the teams with realistic situations and tasks
* Step back and allow the teams time to discover their own solutions
* Respond to teams’ questions with questions so answers are their own
* Listen to teams’ presentations
* Accept the teams’ solutions
* Ask questions to help them build on what they presented
* Reinforce their efforts with praise

## Experiential Learning Process – for learners and leaders

**Experience***:* *(Doing)*

Youths do before being told or shown how. Experiential learning focuses on the learner not the group leader. Youths test and discover their own solutions while practicing one or more life skills. The group leader’s challenge is to observe and encourage, instead of showing or telling how.

Depending on the size of the groups and the number of stations, divide the members into teams of two to four. Start each team at a different station. Rotate the groups through all stations. Allow about ten minutes at each station. Then ask each team to select a station and give a short presentation on how they solved that task. Follow with questions about the overall activity.

**Share***:* *(What Happened)*

Youths describe the result of the experience and their reactions. Helpers ask questions such as, “What did you do? What happened? How did it feel?” and encourage everyone to reflect on their individual experiences.

# *What was it like to plan and conduct a skillathon? What was hardest for you to do? Easiest?*

**Process***: (What’s Important?)*

Youths discuss what was most important about what they did. Learners expand on common themes and ideas discussed in the Share stage. They discuss both project subject matter and life skills practiced.

*What did you learn from this activity that you didn’t know before?*

*What difference did you notice about how different teams did or did not work together?*

*Why is it important to take time to plan carefully?*

**Generalize** *(So What?)*

Youths relate the project and life skill practiced to their everyday experiences. Key questions include: “So what? What does this mean to you? What similar experiences have you had?” Again, the discussion should focus on both the subject matter and the life skill.

*How did teaching and learning this way compare to what happens in classrooms?*

*What did you learn about being a leader that will help you in working with groups?*

**Apply***: (Now What?)*

Youths share how they could use the new life and project skills and knowledge gained from the experience. Ideally this stage leads directly to building on the experience by youths doing another activity and intentionally using what they learned. Thus, the cycle begins again.

# *If you were going to conduct another activity, what aspects of planning would you do differently?*

West Virginia University 4-H [4-hyd.ext.wvu.edu/learning/publications/skillathons](http://4-hyd.ext.wvu.edu/learning/publications/skillathons) , 2008.