



Conducting a 4-H Skill-a-Thon

What Is a 4-H Skill-a-Thon?

Skill-a-Thon is a method of involving 4-H'ers in challenging, non-competitive, learn-by-doing activities. This method of helping 4-H'ers develop both personal and project skills is designed as a series of mini-learning stations with an assistant at each station. The participants rotate from station to station attempting to perform the task they are given. The assistants allow all team members to test their knowledge and ability before giving them any hints. This technique is referred to in 4-H as *learning by doing*, however, 4-H'ers are supported by the assistant when they falter.

Not only does a Skill-a-Thon work well during a project meeting, but also works well at the 4-H club meeting. It is an excellent way to involve several project groups at one time in the program. By asking various project groups to set up one or two learn-by-doing stations, the entire club can be actively involved at the same time. In addition, you will be giving recognition to the project groups and their leaders.

This guide briefly outlines how to plan and conduct a 4-H Skill-a-Thon. A checklist for the planning committee, the role of the station assistant, examples of situations and tasks, plus an overview of an achievement day Skill-a-Thon are included.

What 4-H Members May Accomplish

- Given a situation and a task, the 4-H'ers will evaluate their ability to solve the challenge presented.
- They will learn to work together as members of a team.
- They will discover for themselves what they need to know to do the activity.
- They will receive recognition for their efforts.

Achievement Day Skill-a-Thon

Because of the learn-by-doing nature of 4-H projects, any single project or a combination of projects could be used to put together a successful Skill-a-Thon. Normally, six to 10 stations make up a Skill-a-Thon. However, fewer or more stations could be used depending upon the subject at hand. When using combinations of projects, consider those projects that have some relation to each other. For example animal science, beef, veterinary science and livestock judging could be used for a Beef Skill-a-Thon or topics dealing with dairy foods, bread, food preservation, nutrition and consumer economics could be used for a Foods Skill-a-Thon.

Signs at each station plus the awarding of ribbons and certificates to all of the participants add to the fun

Checklist for a Skill-a-Thon Committee

1. Decide on the stations wanted. Consider time and resources available.
2. Create a realistic situation and task for each station.
3. Decide on the equipment or supplies needed at each station.
4. Decide who will be in charge of each station.
5. Delegate responsibility for gathering supplies.

6. Ask someone to be in charge of dividing the group into teams of two to four members.
7. Ask that same person to assign each team to a work station, and explain the process of rotating from station to station every 10 minutes.
8. After all of the teams have rotated through the stations, have each team give a short presentation of how they solved the task at a particular station. Allow the teams to volunteer their presentation.
9. Praise everyone's efforts.
10. Ask the station assistants to review the major problems at their station and offer their solutions to each.

Responsibility of the Station Assistant

The station assistant may find it challenging and rewarding to be a helper at one of the Skill-a-Thon stations. The extent to which the participants develop project skills and life skills depends largely on how successfully you relate to them. Here are suggested steps:

1. Become familiar with the topic and any available project materials, supplies, and training aids.
2. Compile a list of questions to ask each team. Remember: do, reflect, and apply.
3. Set up your station to include a stand up situation, task sign, and necessary supplies.
4. First allow the team members to discover for themselves how to accomplish the task instead of telling or showing them how.
5. Facilitate the learning situation for each team in the following manner:
 - a. Set up the station and make supplies available to the teams.
 - b. Provide the 4-H'ers with a realistic situation and task so as to encourage a response.
 - c. Step back and allow the members time.
 - d. Respond to 4-H'ers questions with questions so the answers can come from the members.
 - e. Listen to the members' answers and presentations.
 - f. Accept their solution.
 - g. Ask questions to help them build on what they presented. Word questions to help lead members to a better or more correct solution. Think of questions to help youth process what they did and apply the knowledge and/or skills to different situations. Refer to LG783 Learning by Doing.
 - h. Reinforce their efforts with praise.
6. After the teams have concluded, review with all the teams the major problems and review appropriate solutions.
7. Ask 4-H'ers how they would set up and conduct this same activity at a project meeting.
8. Following the Skill-a-Thon, take an inventory, and pack up all equipment, materials and signs for use again.

Station Information

Some possible topics and suggestions for presenting each topic at individual stations are included below. Station topics are limited only by your imagination and interest. At all stations, try displaying the situation and task on an 8½ inch x11 inch stand-up display card to facilitate the process as they solve the task.

The challenge of the station assistant is to provide the members an opportunity to discover for themselves how to accomplish the task instead of telling or showing them how. A few questions to help stimulate each team's thinking may be helpful after an initial waiting period. Members, junior leaders, and adults would all enjoy being a station assistant.

Skill-a-Thons and Positive Youth Development

Skill-a-Thons help contribute to positive youth development. It is a way to have youth and adults interact while having fun. The adult can serve as a guide and mentor for the youth as they rotate through the stations. Stations can create a safe way for youth to try new things and experience success. Youth cannot help but make connections of understanding as they work with the materials to demonstrate knowledge and skills. As youth gain experience, they become in the manner of proficient practitioners building knowledge, skills, and attitudes. With gains in competency, youth discover their potential. Like so many of our other well tested and successful teaching techniques (e.g., demonstrations, public speaking, and exhibition), Skill-a-Thons help youth grow and develop as they have fun learning.

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