

A THINK-ALOUD GUIDE FOR SUPERVISORS

What is a Think-Aloud?

Think-Alouds are an effective method of training apprentices (or any employee) that involve supervisors “thinking aloud” as they do specific tasks or review processes that they want apprentices to learn.

Supervisors narrate (out loud) whatever comes into their minds as they complete the task. This might include what they are **looking at, thinking, doing, and feeling**. This gives apprentices insight into the supervisor’s cognitive processes throughout the entire process or task, instead of just seeing the final product/result. It allows apprentices to see how you decided to do something a certain way, why you did steps in a certain order, or why you sought certain information or resources before responding to others. ***You should not have to do anything other than work you are already doing - just explain it aloud as you work.***

Make the Implicit Explicit

- ▶ Apprentices may or may not have previous work experience. This means that they will need to learn many new tasks that supervisors regularly do on auto-pilot.
- ▶ Think-Alouds help supervisors break down each task or process that might be invisible to the apprentice without any verbalization into bite-sized steps as they go along.
- ▶ This process will hopefully make what is implicitly known to the supervisor, explicitly known to the apprentice.

Examples of Tasks for Think-Alouds

- + **Reviewing your email inbox** (*which email do you open first/ why?*)
- + **Assembling a piece of machinery** (*which step do you do first/why?*)
- + **Crafting a response email to a group of people** (*what is your tone, who do you include, how soon do you need to respond, etc.?*)
- + **Creating a PowerPoint presentation** (*how to start from a blank slate or utilize slides from a previous presentation, how do you decide how to organize it/why?*)
- + **Writing lines of code** (*what goes first, what happens if there is an error, etc.?*)
- + **Researching something on the internet** (*how do you phrase searches, filter reputable sources, etc.?*)
- + **Learning about accounts payable** (*outline different processes and break down what they will learn today*)

Language prompts for Think-Alouds

- I think... (what I’ll do first today is because...)
- In this next part, I believe... (that this how I want to approach this project...)
- I predict that... (if I do X, then Y will happen so...)
- I wonder why... (John sent me an email about...)
- I see... (an error in this code and it’s causing...)
- I picture...
- I feel... (frustrated or inspired when X happens...)
- My favorite or least favorite part of X is...
- I get confused by...
- I’m not sure of...
- I didn’t expect Y...
- This is mainly about...
- The most important idea/step is...
- I learned that I’ll do X next time
- I realized that...
- I wonder if...
- This reminds me of...
- This is similar to...
- If it were me...
- This part doesn’t make sense to me...
- When I don’t know how to X, I seek answers...
- I’m going to re-read the instructions so I can...
- This part of X is interesting because...

STRUCTURE FOR THINK-ALOUDS

Your first Think-Aloud with your apprentice(s):

1. Introductions: tell apprentices about your career journey and “how I got to my job at XYZ company” or what lights you up about your job.
2. Have each apprentice introduce themselves on the virtual platform (if training is not in person or done in a larger group/supervisor), have them put their name in the Zoom/Google Meet window, if applicable.
3. Explain the Think-Aloud process and that you’ll be meeting with them for 45 mins - 1 hour each week (or however often) as part of their training with you.

Ongoing Think-Aloud Sessions:

1. **Explain what you are working on** that day and **why it’s important**
2. **Ask them to take notes and write down any questions** they have for the end
3. Begin the Think-Aloud while **sharing your screen** so apprentices can observe what you are doing
4. Feel free to **pause after smaller tasks or parts of a bigger project** and try to relate it to any coursework/related instruction, if possible (again, this is not required)
 - a. **How do you decide what to write** in an email response to someone?
 - b. **Where you get resources** if you need to know something (both internally and externally)
 - c. **Explain things that are tricky for you** (sharing that even adults are always learning new things and have challenges!) or that you enjoy about that task/project/process
 - d. **How do you calendar a meeting** to follow up on something and how know whom to include?
5. **Allow apprentices to raise their hand if they have a question, or ask questions at the end.**
6. If you feel comfortable or equipped, you can **ask if they have any questions about their coursework/related instruction** so far.

I do, We do, You do

- ▶ First, **apprentices will observe supervisors doing daily tasks (*I Do*) while explaining their thought processes.** Ask the apprentices to take notes about the process, what steps the supervisor took and in which order, and write down any questions they have. Allow time throughout the process, or at the end of the process, for apprentices to ask questions.
- ▶ Second, **apprentices will do the activity together with the supervisor (*We Do*) or while a supervisor observes them doing the task.** Have apprentices repeat out loud their thought processes and reasoning. Allow apprentices to use their notes the first few times. After this step, have apprentices reflect on how it went and ask questions to increase their learning. Ask them if they are open to feedback. Share what they did well and what they could do more effectively or efficiently going forward.
- ▶ Lastly, **apprentices will eventually be able to do the task on their own (*You Do*).** Ensure that the apprentice (and supervisor) both feel comfortable that the apprentice understands the task or process on their own, knows who to contact if they get stuck/have questions in the future, and have regular check-ins about their progress!