



HOW TO GUIDE: The Cookie Experiment

OVERVIEW: Fun exercise to get into an evaluative thinking frame of mind.

OBJECTIVES:

- Provide an introduction to the process of evaluative thinking:
 - 1) Recognize your assumptions.
 - 2) Be clear and thoughtful about the results you want, and how to achieve them.
 - 3) Ask thoughtful questions.
 - 4) Gather, value and use evidence.
 - 5) Make informed decisions and take action.
- Get participants thinking about types of evaluation, including informal self-evaluation

ACTIVITY:

- 1) Gather participants in a group setting to offer 3 types of chocolate chip cookie for tasting.
- 2) Before starting the taste test, pose the question: “What are some existing assumptions or biases that could come into your assessment of these cookies?” Examples could include: pre-existing taste preferences, allergies or food sensitivities, bias based on how the cookie was prepared, assumptions based on visual first impression, different perspectives based on culinary skill/ knowledge etc.
- 3) Again, before allowing participants to taste the cookies, pose the question: “What are the attributes that we’re looking for in a cookie?” This question is meant to get at the “2) Be clear about the results you want and how to achieve” step of the evaluative thinking process. Examples could include: taste, texture, appearance, smell, temperature etc. Ask participants to think about how they would measure these attributes and about comparability in measurement between individuals.
- 4) Get participants to taste the cookies. Start a discussion about the attributes of the cookies. Encourage qualitative and quantitative description of the cookies.
- 5) Now, participants must use the information gathered to make a decision about which type of cookies will be provided at hypothetical future events. Discuss factors other than the attributes of the cookies that could factor into this decision. For example: cost of the cookies, effort required to bake, organizational healthy eating policies.



- 6) Discuss the process of evaluating the cookies. Ask questions such as “Were all participants heard?”, “Were some cookie evaluations deemed worthier than others?”. “Were there any important factors that were not considered?”
- 7) As a follow up, discuss the food tasting metaphor to describe the different forms of evaluation. The activity just complete was summative evaluation- tasting and judging the completed product. Evaluation can also happen at other stages. Formative evaluation takes place as the cook tastes the food while cooking, and decides to make modifications to the recipe. Developmental evaluation happens even earlier on in the process, when the cook is deciding what to make and developing a recipe based on the ingredients and cooking tools available as well as the needs and preferences of his or her guests. The key message is that evaluation can happen at any stage of the program process, can be informal, and does not need be done by an evaluator.



Adapted based on: EvalU. Capacity Canada's first evaluation session finds its sweet spot.
<https://capacitycanada.ca/blog/capacitys-first-evalu-session-finds-its-sweet-spot/>