



# A3: Daily Problem Solving

## Module 3

Reporting tool for resolving daily issues / defects

Online or single module version

Approximate time to complete: 30 minutes

Updated: January 2016

# COURSE INFORMATION

**Title:** A3 Daily Problem Solving – Module 3: Reporting Tool for Resolving Daily Issues/Defects

**Target Audience:** Sharp HealthCare affiliated physicians, pharmacists, and other healthcare providers interested in continuous process improvement

**Educational Objectives:** Following this activity, learners should be able to:

- Conduct basic daily problem-solving steps
- Document your work using the A3 format
- Report and resolve issues encountered in your work area
- Utilize a community approach to problem-solving

**Principal Faculty:** *Kathy Summers*  
Director, Six Sigma Black Belt  
Sharp HealthCare

**Accreditation:** Sharp HealthCare is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

**CME Credit:** Sharp Healthcare designates this internet enduring activity for a maximum of **.5 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits™** after successful completion of the module with a minimum passing score of **100%**. Physicians should only claim credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

**CA Nurse Credit:** The California Board of Registered Nursing recognizes the use of Category I Continuing Medical Education credit toward credit contact hours. Report "ACCME Category 1 Credit" as the BRN Number. No BRN slip will be given.

**Accreditation:** Sharp Healthcare is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education as a provider of continuing pharmacy education.

**CPE Credit:** Sharp HealthCare designates this live **knowledge** activity for a maximum of **.5** contact hours. Partial credit will not be awarded.  
**UAN:** 0571-0000-016-020-H04-P or 0571-0000-016-020-H04-P

**Cultural and Linguistic Competency:** This activity is in compliance with California Assembly Bill 1195 which requires that all CME activities comprising a patient care element include curriculum addressing the topic of cultural and linguistic competency. The intent of this bill is to ensure that health care professionals are able to meet the cultural and linguistic concerns of diverse patient population through effective and appropriate professional development. Cultural and linguistic competency was incorporated into the planning of this activity.

**Type of Activity:** Internet Enduring Material with learning assessment and evaluation

**Release Date:** June 1, 2016

**Termination Date:** June 1, 2017



**Requirements:** Must pass learning assessment with 100% and complete evaluation to receive CME/CPE credit. **Estimated completion time:** 30 minutes

**Hardware/Software Requirements:** OS that supports modern web browser; Browser: IE 11; Google Chrome version 4 or higher; Safari version 10.8 or higher

**Contact Information:** Sharp HealthCare CME at [cme@sharp.com](mailto:cme@sharp.com)

**Tuition:** None

**Commercial Support:** None

# DISCLOSURE



**DISCLOSURE:** As an organization accredited by the ACCME, Sharp HealthCare requires everyone who is in a position to control the content of an education activity to disclose all relevant financial relationships with any commercial interest. The ACCME defines "relevant financial relationships" as financial relationships in any amount, occurring within the past 12 months, including financial relationships of a spouse or life partner, that could create a conflict of interest. Any individual who refuses to disclose relevant financial relationships will be disqualified from being a planning committee member, a teacher, or an author of CME, and cannot have control of, or responsibility for, the development, management, presentation or evaluation of the CME activity.

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***Kathy Summers and the members of the planning committee have no relevant financial relationships to disclose.***

**ASSEMBLY BILL 1195:** As an accredited provider, Sharp HealthCare is required to comply with California Assembly Bill 1195, which states that all CME activities must address cultural or linguistic competency. At a minimum, cultural competency is recommended to include:

- Applying linguistic skills to communicate effectively with the target population.
- Utilizing cultural information to establish therapeutic relationships.
- Eliciting and incorporating pertinent cultural data in diagnosis and treatment.
- Understanding and applying cultural and ethnic data to the process of clinical care.

## Interested in receiving Continuing Education Credits?

Nurses and Pharmacists – Use  
**Learning Center**

**CME Portal** is for  
**Physicians ONLY**

Nurses will be awarded  
credits via the Learning  
Center.

Pharmacist credit will be  
addressed by the CME  
Department.

## Physicians– Use **CME Portal**

1. Complete the Test/Quiz
2. Complete the Course Evaluation
3. CME Portal will generate a certificate for you – save for your records
4. CME credits will also be noted on your transcript

## QUESTIONS?

Contact Heather Clemons, CME Department  
(858) 499-3518

[heather.clemons@sharp.com](mailto:heather.clemons@sharp.com)

# Leading Performance Excellence

## Lean Six Sigma basics for every leader



### White Belt

#### #1 Introduction

LSS awareness, roles and responsibilities

#### #2 LEAN Basics

How we eliminate waste in our work

#### #3 A3 Daily Problem Solving

Reporting tool for resolving daily issues / defects

#### #4 Team and Meeting Facilitation

How we collaborate and engage talent



### Yellow Belt

#### #5 Change Management

Assuring acceptance and accountability

#### #6 Project Management

Managing time and resources for continuous improvement

#### #7,8,9 DMAIC

'Six Sigma' How we reduce variation and Defects

#### #10 LEAN Thinking and Intermediate A3 Skills

How we eliminate waste and create flow

#### Yellow Belt Workshop

Hands on use of the tools and concepts



# Systematic Approach for Continuous Improvement



Reflection:

Without change there is no innovation, creativity, or incentive for improvement. Those who initiate change will have a better opportunity to manage the change that is inevitable.

[William Pollard](#)



# Course Objectives



At the conclusion of this module, participants should be able to:

Conduct basic daily problem-solving steps

Document your work using the A3 format

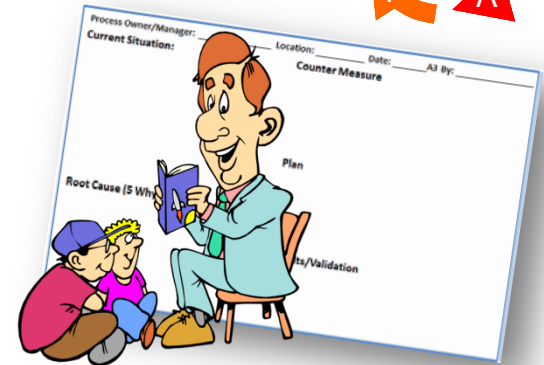
Report and resolve issues encountered in your work area

Utilize a community approach to problem-solving

# What is A3?

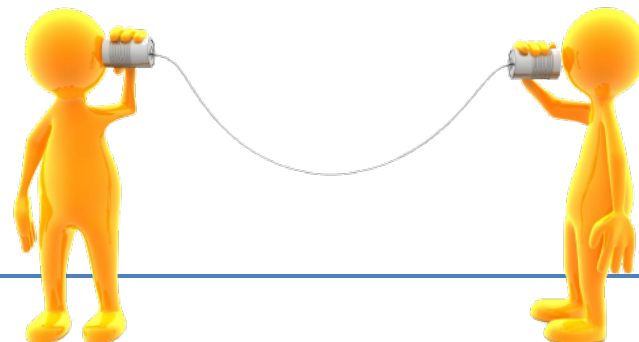


It is a structured **problem solving technique** that communicates a story.



It is a story told by **you** about a problem, why it is happening and how you think we should improve.

The A3 format helps you think about process and communicate it.

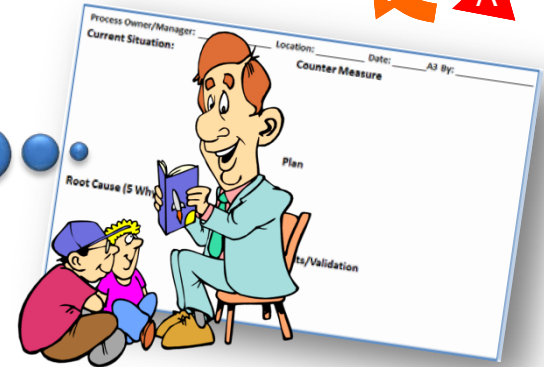




# Expectations



Something happens, sometimes,  
when somebody does something,  
but I do not know when.



## A3 Expectations:

- Communicates a story: Must make sense to others
- Should be visual and extremely **concise**!
- Resolves a problem with measureable success
- Engages and aligns the organization
- It is part of a continuous improvement effort
- The power is not in the form, but in the process and thinking behind it

If at first  
you don't succeed,  
try again!

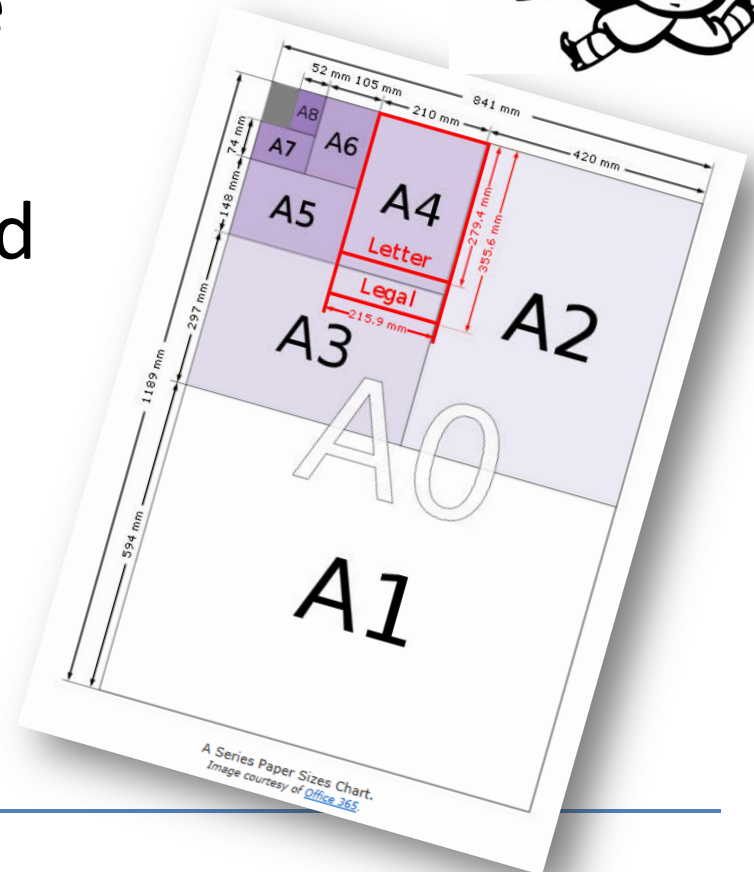
# Why is it called A3?



It was called A3 because it describes the name of the largest size paper that can be faxed.

Anything larger, computerized or multiple pages would not be keeping with the intent to keep it concise and drawn by hand.

It's Amazing,  
Awesome  
Artistic

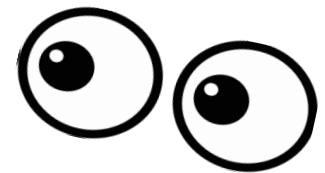




# When is it used?

Let's start with two scenarios:

- 1) **Department Huddle:** An issue is raised at your department huddle. The issue can be assigned to a team member to address using the A3 method. Later the A3 will be used to help explain the issue, the cause, the improvement idea and how well it worked.
- 2) **An Observation:** You observe an issue or waste during your work day. Capturing it on an A3 is a great way to bring it to the attention of owner of the process and or bring it up to the team at the next huddle.



# How to get started



Get a piece of paper and a pencil!

- Letter size or 11"x17"
- Use a preprinted template
- Or, Label blank sheet of paper

[For a template go to SharpNet Six Sigma resources](#)



**You will find three different sizes to meet your needs:**

Small  
(Letter Size)



Large  
(A3 or 11x17 Size)



Large  
(Double Letter Size)



Process Owner/Manager: _____ Location: _____ Date: _____ A3 By: _____	
Current Situation:	Counter Measure
Plan	
Root Cause (5 Whys)	
Results/Validation	



# Start Thinking!

Answer the following questions by going to the place where the Issues occur, observe and talk to the people that do the work!

Left Side: **Current State**

## The A3 Thinking Process

Who owns the problem?

What is the problem? *What are the symptoms? Impact?*

What is the background? *What are you talking about and why?*

What are the current conditions?

What are the root causes of the problem?

Right Side: **Future State**

What is the specific improvement in the performance you need to close the gap?

What are possible countermeasures for the problem?

How will you choose which fix to propose?

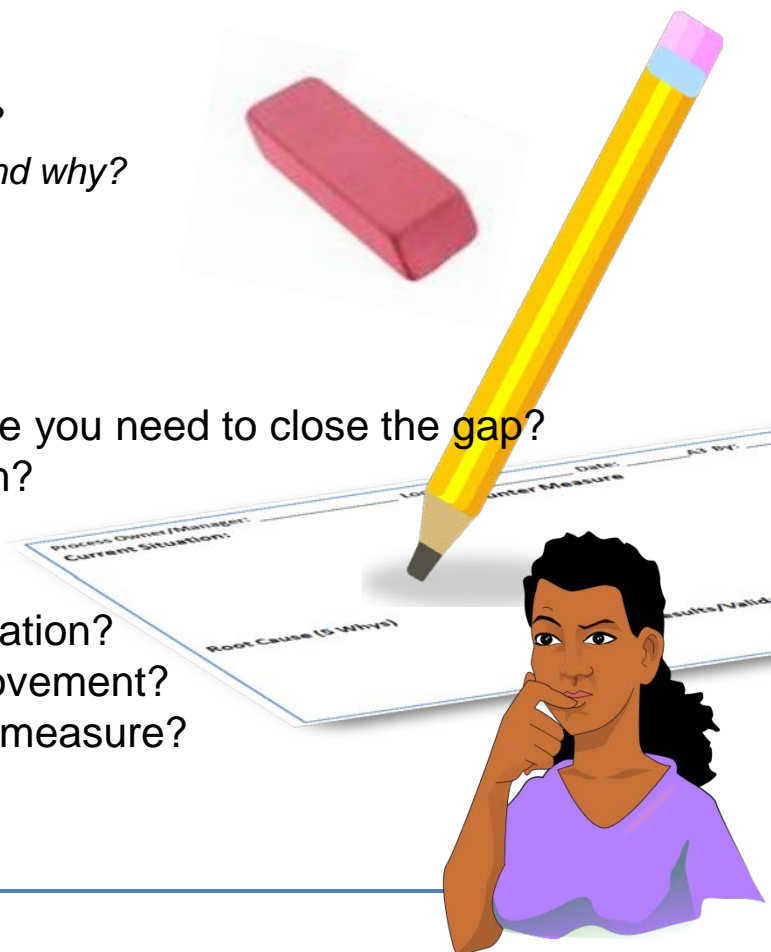
What is the implementation plan and schedule?

What problems are likely to occur during implementation?

How will you ensure follow up and continuous improvement?

What is the cost and benefit of the selected countermeasure?

How will you know if your plan is working?



# Why use a Pencil?

You can erase as you better understand the issue  
Gives others a sense of your openness to ideas





Process Owner/Manager:

Location:

Date:

A3 By:

Current Situation:

Counter Measure

Date Started and who is leading the A3

Department name or best description to find where the issues occurs.

## Step 1: Understand who is the process owner.

This is person who needs to know about any change to the process.

You will be letting this person know about the issue and your plan to work on it.

They may know of others already working the issue or other important things to know.

You will need their approval to move forward with any counter measures.

Root Cause (5 Whys)

Results/Validation



## Current Situation:

### The A3 Thinking Process

What is the problem?

*What are the symptoms? Impact?*

What is the background?

*What are you talking about and why?*

What are the current conditions?

**Hint:**

*Better understand  
by direct observation  
and walking  
the process*

**Hint:**

Describe the situation that  
generates the issue or defect  
using a diagram or picture to show  
who, what, when,  
where and how...

## Root Cause (5 Whys)

What are the root causes of the problem?

**Hint:**

What is the step within  
your control where the issue  
first starts?

## Counter Measure

What is the specific improvement in the  
performance you need to close the gap?

What are possible countermeasures for the problem?

How will you choose which fix to propose?

**Hint:**

Using a diagram or picture  
show what the new process  
should look like for who, what,  
when, where and how...

## Plan

What is the implementation plan and schedule?

What problems are likely to occur  
during implementation?

How will you ensure follow up and  
continuous improvement?

**Hint:**

*Validate by showing  
your A3 to those who  
are involved in the  
process*

## Results/Validation

What is the cost and benefit of the selected  
countermeasure?

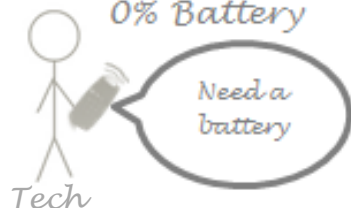
How will you know if your plan is working?

# A3 Example

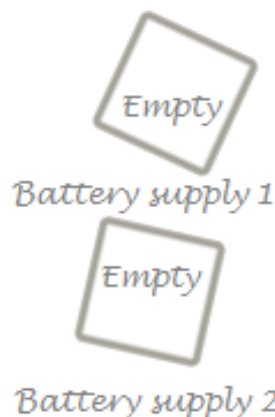
Process Owner/Manager: Mary Smith Location: ABC Dept. Date: 11/21/15 A3 By: Suzie Hall

## Current Situation:

Often out of batteries  
0% Battery



We run out and don't  
reorder in time



## Counter Measure

Add a reorder card  
(Kanban) with notes to:

- 1) Reorder when last package is opened.
- 2) Give card to supply clerk at reorder point.



## Plan

- 1) Determine reorder quantity.
- 2) Work with supply clerk on process to order when receive card and to replace card when the new stock arrives.
- 3) Share new process/A3 at team huddles.

## Root Cause (5 Whys)

Why do we run out of batteries?

Because we do not reorder in time.

Why do we not reorder on time?

Because it takes 1-2 days for delivery after we use the last one.

Why don't we order before we get too low? Good Question...

## Results/Validation

At huddle staff satisfaction was up.

Fewer patient delays.

No reports of issues for 3 months.

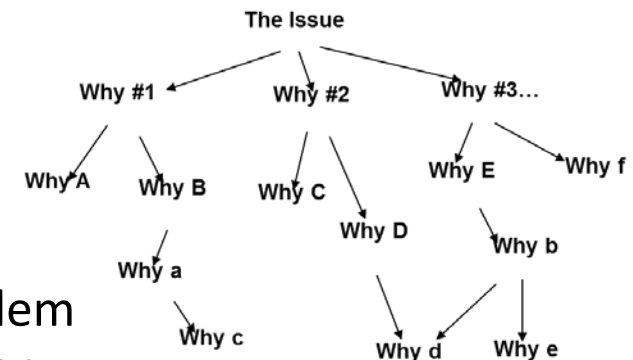
# Root Cause Analysis

Simple yet effective version!

## “Five Whys”



Ask, five times, why the failure has occurred in order to get to the root cause or causes of the problem



- Simple way to get to root cause
- There can be more than one cause to a problem
- Must involve the team involved with the problem
- No special technique is required - Just practice!
- Key is to look for what is in your control to improve!



# 5 Whys Video

View 5 Whys Video: [HERE](#)



## Use '5 Whys' to Get to the Root of the Cause

There is bird poop on the Jefferson Memorial!

- Why? Because birds are flying into the structure.
  - Why? To eat the spiders.
    - Why are there spiders? They eat the gnats.
      - Why are there gnats? They fly in at dusk?
        - Why at dusk? Because the bright light attracts them.

*Turn the light on one hour later--- gnats are inactive for the night, no gnats, no spiders, no poop!*



## 5 Whys: Medication Administration Example

**Why** did the RN give the wrong drug?

RN inadvertently grabbed the wrong elixir

**Why** did RN grab the wrong elixir?

There were several look-a-like medications bottles stored next to each other  
She got interrupted as she was checking 5Rs

**Why** was she interrupted during her task?

Medication administration is not respected as a critical activity

**Why** is medication administration not respected as a critical activity?

**Good question!!**

**Why** were look-a-like medications stored next to each other?

No pt-specific separate bins available in the refrigerator

**Why** are there no patient-specific bins in the fridge?

Space limitations

**Why** are there space limitations in the med room?

**Good question!!**

**Focus Here!  
The Root Cause**

# A3 Sample Conversations



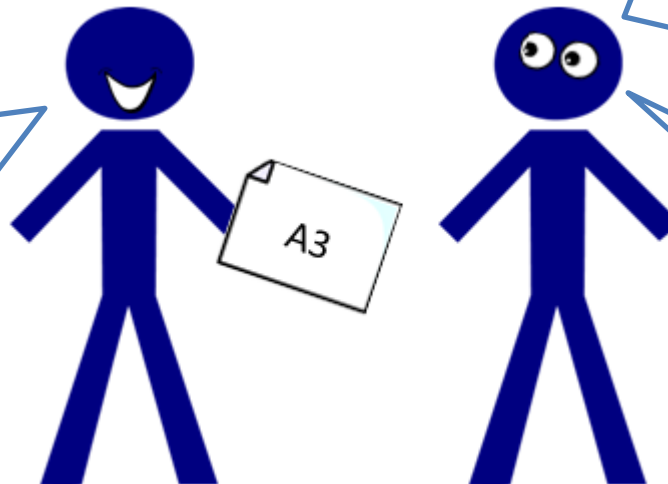
I would like your input on my A3. I brought up the issue at today's Team Huddle and my Manager gave me the green light to work on it.

I have some ideas about the root cause and what we can do to control it.

I like the plan, thanks for sharing. Show this to Jane. I think she has some thoughts about this too.

This reminds me, I should do an A3 on the missing tools that are also an issue.

This diagram I drew describes what I see is the situation when we have the problem. What do you see?



I would save this great idea for when we share our accomplishments

# Conversation with the Process Owner



Take a look at my findings. Should I proceed?

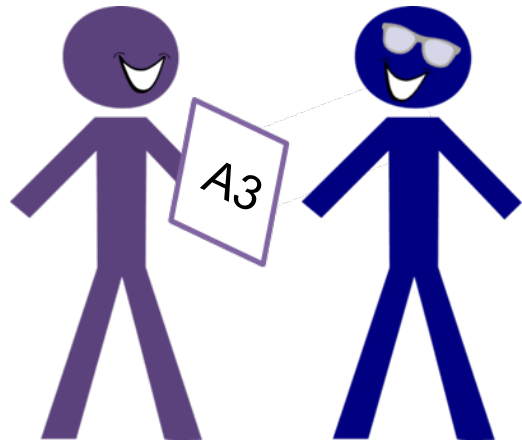
Have you had a chance to go to where the work is done to observe and talk with the team?

Thank you for working on this issue. Please proceed and keep me updated on what you come up with.

Are you confident that we have hit upon the best root cause to focus on?

I appreciate you working on this. Nice work.

Is there something more we can do to eliminate waste and make this a part of our standard work?







# What issues are right for A3?

A3 method is a great starting point to explore any issue that needs problem solving.

However, not all wastes/issues can be confined to a specific situation or set of circumstances.

You may need to:

- Make a parent A3 and break up the issue into manageable efforts.
- Bring the issue up to resources that can address issues that need data to resolve the root case.



If your work won't fit on one page, up to 11x17" sheet, you should attempt to break it down to smaller elements or promote the opportunity as a project.

# Three Common Mistakes



1. **Assuming** you know what the problem is without seeing what is actually happening.
2. **Assuming** you know how to fix a problem without finding out what is causing it.
3. **Assuming** you know what is causing the problem without confirming it.



In other words – Not Grasping the Situation.

And when do we grasp the situation?

When you are in the actual place that the work is being done.

# Traps for the Unwary



- Fixing things that should not be happening at all
- Not understanding the larger process this is a part of
- Jumping to the countermeasure without having a deep understanding of the problem
- Not clearly understanding the needs of the organization
- Focusing on symptoms, not root causes
- People viewed as the problem instead of the process being the problem



# If you only remember one thing:

Learn to ask why  
something is  
happening before  
determining how it  
should be fixed.



# Next Steps to be a White Belt:



Complete the requirements of this module:

- Complete the Module 3 quiz.
- Print the “A3 Template”, or use a blank sheet of paper.
- Determine with your leader what waste or issue you should work on.
- Complete an A3 Problem Solving Tool and review with your leader.
  - Pick a waste from your Waste Walk!  
[Click here to print A3 template](#)

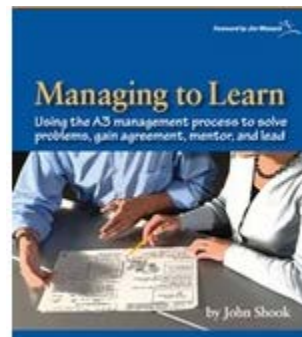




## Recommended Resources:

**If you are interested learning more about A3 and Lean check out the following resources.**

- Managing to Learn: Using the A3 Management Process
- Lean.org search for A3
- SharpNet- Six Sigma Resources:  
Template and further information



**Learning Strategies**

