

Ask most professionals about their CPD and you will hear a number: 20 hours, 35 hours, whatever their employer or professional body asks for. It is an easy figure to track and an easy one to hit. But it tells you very little about the thing that matters: whether you are better at your job than you were a year ago.

This article looks at why counting hours falls short, what to do instead, and a simple routine that takes about ten minutes a week.

The problem with tick-box CPD

Tick-box CPD has a familiar pattern. Development happens when something convenient comes up. Nothing is written down until the end of the year, when there is a scramble to remember what was done. The record lists attendance: a webinar, a conference, a course. And then it is filed away.

The trouble is that attendance is not the same as learning. Sitting through a session is only development if something changes in what you know, what you can do or how you work. A log full of hours can hide the fact that nothing has changed.

It also leaves you short when it matters. In an appraisal or a promotion conversation, "I did 30 hours of CPD" is a weak case. "I learned to quantify risk, ran my first workshop, and the sponsor released contingency earlier" is a strong one.

Think of CPD as a cycle

A better model is a loop. You reflect on where you are, plan what to develop, do it, record and evidence what happened, then evaluate what changed. That evaluation feeds the next round of reflection.

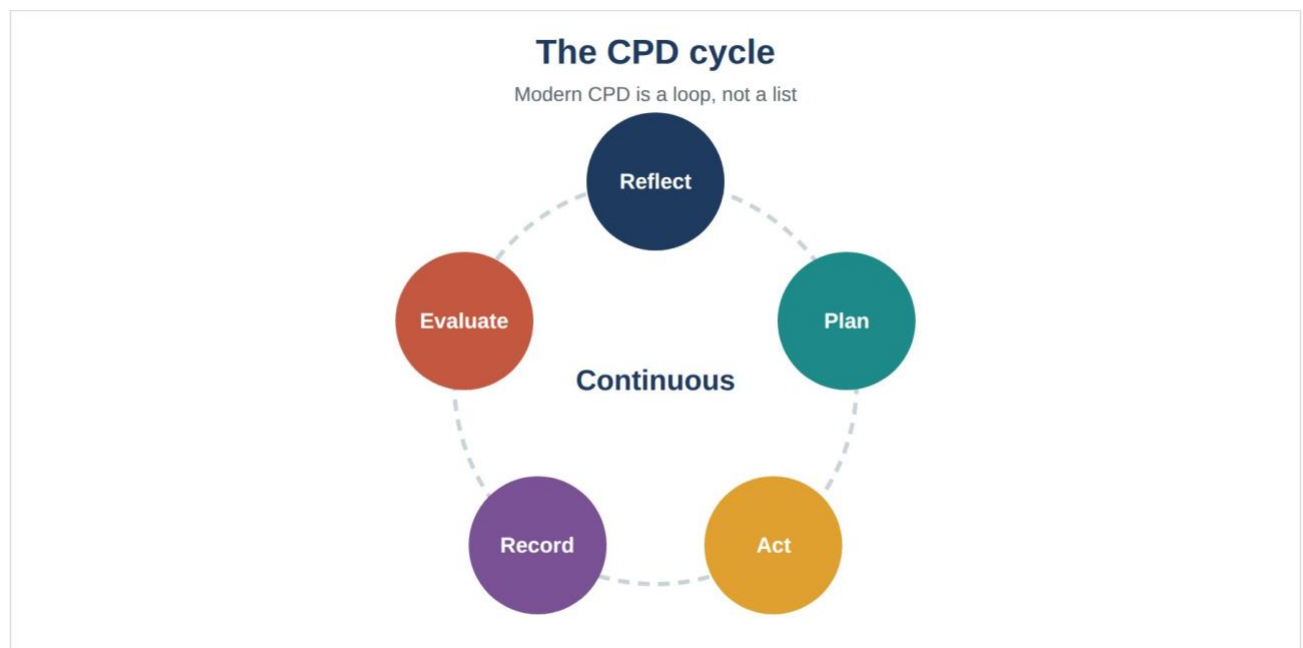


Figure 1 The CPD cycle. Each stage feeds the next, and the cycle repeats.

The key difference from tick-box CPD is the beginning and the end. You start from a real need, not from what is on offer, and you finish by asking what changed.

What a good CPD entry looks like

A useful entry takes an extra minute and answers a few questions: what you did, why you did it, what you learned, how you have used it, and where the proof is.

Weak entry: "Attended risk webinar, 1 hour."

Strong entry: "Attended webinar on quantitative risk analysis (1 hr). Learned how to use three-point estimates to express schedule uncertainty. Applied it to our Q3 plan and presented to the sponsor. Evidence: updated plan and sponsor email."

The second version is something you can use in an appraisal, a CV or a professional body review. The first is not.

Link it to competencies and evidence

Two additions turn a record of activity into a record of growth.

First, link each entry to a competency, meaning the mix of knowledge, skills and behaviours that a role needs. Many professional bodies and employers publish frameworks that describe these, often with levels from awareness up to expert practice. Rating yourself honestly against those levels shows where you are strong and where you are not.

Second, keep evidence. A good competency claim has three parts: the claim itself ("I work independently at practitioner level in stakeholder engagement"), the evidence (a plan, feedback, an outcome) and a short explanation of how the evidence shows it. Save evidence when it is created. Finding it a year later is much harder.

A routine you can actually keep

The best system is the one you will use. A light routine is enough:

- Weekly: ten minutes to log what you did and what you learned
- Monthly: fifteen minutes to check progress against your plan
- Quarterly: an hour to review your competency ratings and goals Each year: a
- full reset before your appraisal

It also helps to choose activities from a gap analysis, comparing where you are with where you need to be, rather than from whatever is advertised. A widely quoted guideline, the 70-20-10 model, suggests most development comes from experience on the job, some from other people, and a smaller share from formal learning. It is a rule of thumb, not a law, but it is a useful reminder that a stretch assignment can teach more than a course.

Three common mistakes

- Logging only at year end. Detail fades quickly. A short weekly slot captures far more.
- Recording attendance, not outcomes. Always write what changed.
- Doing too much. Two or three clear goals for six months will beat a long list that never gets finished.

Try this this week

1. Write down three things you learned at work in the past month, including things that went wrong.
2. Turn one of them into a full log entry, covering what you did, what you learned, how you applied it and the proof.
3. Save the proof in a folder with a clear name and date.

It takes about twenty minutes, and you will have started a CPD record that is more useful than most.

Key points

- Hours show activity. Outcomes show development.
- Treat CPD as a cycle: reflect, plan, act, record and evidence, evaluate.
- Link every entry to a competency, and keep evidence as you go.
- A ten-minute weekly habit beats an annual scramble.
- Check your own professional body's current CPD requirements, as they differ and change.

Find out more

If you would like to build a complete CPD system, including a log, competency map, gap analysis, development plan and evidence pack, access the complete professional CPD Development Platform app and then take the free course CPD for Modern Careers. It is self-paced, has 12 modules, and ends with a quiz (80% pass mark) and a course completion badge.

<https://cpdapp.twc-ltd.uk>

<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=21249>