



Adult Learning Principles and Application

Adult learners have different needs than children. Adults are not blank slates, taking in all you have to teach them. They come to the classroom with a lifetime of experience, well-defined beliefs, and ingrained behaviors. Whether you are facilitating a class or just training a new employee, considering the needs of your learner is crucial to the success of both for the trainer and the learner.

Basic Adult Learning Principles and Application:

1. **Adults must feel respected and supported.** Treat your students as equals in your classes. Take the opportunity to learn from them.
 - ✓ Respect their experience by validating their contributions, knowledge, and/or skills.
 - ✓ Respect their time. Be prepared. Start and end on time. Don't have them do activities that are irrelevant. Don't give them "busy work." Don't give them excessive breaks. Finally, make sure you thank them for their time and effort.
 - ✓ Respect their beliefs. Avoid judging their responses. Also, avoid using language and/or examples that could be perceived as biased.
2. **Adults must be actively engaged in learning, not just listening.** As a trainer, it's your job to make sure your students are engaged and responding to you and to the material. Adults enter into a learning experience with a problem-centered approach to learning.
 - ✓ Use technology to enhance instruction. Go beyond the basic PowerPoint. Use audio, video, and/or other types of technology to foster understanding.
 - ✓ Maximize their brain power. To achieve optimal learning, give a short break to allow brains to refocus on learning:
 - Build in time for "brain breaks" or other activities that allow learners to stand up and move.
 - Break information into small "chunks" to help their brains process the new information.
 - ✓ Use a variety of instructional methods
 - Minimize lecture
 - Encourage discussion
 - Use individual and group activities
3. **Adults prefer to be self-directed.** They tend to want to learn only what they need to learn, and they prefer to do it on their own terms. How? Give options and resources.
 - ✓ Encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Clarify your own role, and say something like, "You will only get out of this class what you put into it."
 - ✓ Provide self-assessment activities to allow learners to see how they understand the material.
 - ✓ Give multiple options in activities, so learners can choose what interests them.
 - ✓ Allow learners to choose their own groups, rather than assign them.
 - ✓ Create individual activities, not just group ones.
4. **Adults need opportunities for self-reflection.** This helps them process, relate to, and identify with the material you are covering.
 - ✓ Have learners write about their experiences in the class or with the material
 - ✓ Provide questions that stimulate reflection such as:
 - How can I best use this information?
 - How do I feel about _____?
 - What do I want out of this class?

- How can this material impact me and/or my behavior?
 - ✓ Challenge the material by exploring alternative ways of thinking about it
 - ✓ Encourage learners to journal or to talk about their experiences after class
5. **Adults need to develop a personal, relevant need to learn.** If you want to motivate your students, prove to them that the material will produce a positive change in their lives.
 - ✓ Create realistic goals or outcomes for the course that show the material is applicable and important
 - ✓ Have learners create personal learning goals or outcomes for the material
 - ✓ Help learners make meaning through open discussion of material and its application
 - ✓ Explain the benefits of the class on a practical level
 - ✓ Use job-related example to illustrate the material
 6. **Adults must be able to connect the material to their lives, especially their current experiences.** Using work-related, realistic examples will increase motivation and commitment.
 - ✓ Create interactive, realistic scenarios for learners to work through.
 - ✓ Encourage learners to share relevant life experiences.
 - ✓ Focus on practical application of material, rather than theory.
 - ✓ Create a positive, non-threatening learning environment.
 7. **Adults must be able to transfer what they have learned.** This adds to the relevancy of the material and makes it more meaningful. It also helps individuals, as well as management, see the return on their training investment. To do this, create activities that are:
 - ✓ Relevant
 - ✓ Meaningful
 - ✓ Realistic
 - ✓ Problem-based
 8. **Adults need relevant, meaningful feedback and positive reinforcement.** This shows you value their input and builds trust with your students.
 - ✓ Studies have shown that two positive comments should be given for every one negative comment (2:1) to help learners be more receptive to you and to the material.
 - ✓ Acknowledge the learner's progress. Use statements like "This task was difficult, but you have done a good job with it" or "Your group did really great with this activity."
 - ✓ Provide a context for a wrong answer. Try statements like "When I was first learning this, I also had problems with..." or "That's an easy mistake to make..."
 - ✓ Recognize when learners are working outside of their comfort zones. Say things like "Thank you for sharing. Your input is important to all of us" or "Thank you for taking that risk."