



WORKING

WITH ADULT
LEARNERS

New Tutor Training #2



Working with Adult Learners

Working with adult learners is not the same as working with children. The attached article explains why this is true and compares the characteristics of children and adults as learners. Please take the time to read this article before continuing on, as the need to understand this concept is critical.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

- Have established values and beliefs. These are core to each individual and not easily changed.
- Possess a wealth of knowledge about life, work, business, sports, politics, and many other things as well. This “prior knowledge” serves as a rich basis for conversation, comprehension of reading materials, and inspiration for writing.
- Have multiple responsibilities that restrict the time available for studying. Therefore, the focus becomes teaching those skills most critical to the learner’s immediate needs.
- Are independent learners and prefer to work at their own pace. Adults need to feel self-directed and want to control the pace at which they learn.
- Are afraid of failure/making mistakes. They may also lack confidence in their ability to learn new skills.
- Have their own learning style.

Learning Styles

People learn in different ways. These ways, or styles, are used by everyone. No one learning style is better than another. Although we use all the styles in our individual learning, one may become a “favorite” or more dominant.

Types and Description

- 🎬 Visual (learn by seeing)
- 🎬 Auditory (learn by hearing)
- 🎬 Kinesthetic/Tactile (learn by doing)

Visual learners take in, remember, and retrieve information when they see it or read it themselves.

Auditory learners take in, remember, and retrieve information when they hear it.

Kinesthetic/Tactile learners take in, remember, and retrieve information by writing it down, handling things, or using other type of activities.

Determining the Style of Your Adult Learner

Knowing the learning style of your adult learner can help him/her learn faster. You can structure your class time accordingly and have the tools ready to best meet your learner's needs.

One way to determine your learner's style is to simply observe, listen, and watch for patterns. This may be the best approach for those learners with limited English skills. For higher-level learners, the "Vision, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Survey" may be used. Your Site Supervisor can assist in determining whether this survey would be appropriate to use with your adult learner. Copies are available from your Site Supervisor.

Motivating Adult Learners

Adult learners are basically motivated by a need, interest, or desire to learn. For example:

- 🎬 Be able to better communicate with neighbors, co-workers, doctors, etc.
- 🎬 Prepare for a better job
- 🎬 Help children with homework/attend parent-teacher conferences
- 🎬 Understand American culture

In other words, adults are already motivated learners. Keeping the adult learner motivated, however, is critical as they go through the ups and downs of the learning process. Here are some strategies:

- 🎬 Show a genuine interest in your learner's success. This includes coming to class each week and being on time.
- 🎬 Provide frequent feedback to your learner, including praise and encouragement.
- 🎬 Make learning fun. Use a variety of activities, including games, to teach or reinforce a concept.
- 🎬 Give your learner the opportunity to make choices. It can be as simple as, "Should we begin today with reading comprehension or work on vocabulary?"
- 🎬 Be flexible. If your learner brings something to class and asks for help understanding it (such as a letter from school, a bill, a summons, etc.), take the time needed to explain what it says or means. These occasional deviations from the prepared lesson plan are not unusual. Just be sure to document what you did on the lesson plan for that week.
- 🎬 Keep your learner focused on his/her semester goal. Ask questions, request weekly updates, and offer assistance/ guidance when needed.

These are only a few suggestions. Use your own creativity to find other ways to keep your adult learner motivated!

Conditions that Interfere with Learning

The learning process itself is filled with its own set of challenges and series of ups and downs. However, some adult learners may be experiencing outside challenges or conditions that affect their ability to learn. These may include problems with vision, hearing, or learning disabilities.

Here are some signs to watch for:

Vision

- 🎬 Holding reading material very close or far away
- 🎬 Inability to read small print

- Squinting
- Complaining of developing a headache during class
- Losing one's place while reading or skipping lines on a page

Hearing

- Talking loudly
- Turning one ear toward a speaker
- Not hearing what was said without direct eye contact
- Asking someone often to repeat what they said
- Appearing confused when listening to directions

Learning Disabilities

- Difficulty focusing when reading
- Can do some things very well/other things poorly
- Deficits in spoken and/or written language skills
- Deficits in reading, decoding words, and comprehension skills

Talk with your Site Supervisor if you suspect your adult learner may be experiencing any of the above problems.