

Why Should We Care How Adults Learn?

Adults learn differently from children, therefore teaching techniques need to differ from those used in many schools and universities. Because adults already have considerable education, career and life experience, they want to acquire information that is relevant and which will help them. Thus, consider the following when helping adults learn:



Improve adult learning by demonstrating how the information is relevant.

Relevance: Start by helping the group understand why the topic is important and how it could help them.

Experience: Recognize the group already has considerable knowledge. Draw on this experience during the learning session.

Respect: Adults respond better when they feel respected and included in the learning process. Engage and talk with them, not at them.

Self-exploration: Provide time for adult learners to explore ideas (on their own or in small groups). Let them consider how they might use the information. The table shows examples of how to better engage learners.

Learning Mode and Implementation	Impact
Discussion and Questioning: Using a discussion approach, trainers pose a problem, define roles, develop specific Terms of Reference, monitor and assist the discussion, and facilitate and document reports upon completion of the discussions and group presentations.	Discussion and Questioning (in small and larger - plenary - groups) is the optimum teaching method for active learning as it enables participants to share their knowledge, discover solutions and develop critical thinking about the topic.
Activities and quizzes provide the opportunity for hands on exploration and mental engagement. Participants can share and discuss their knowledge with fellow participants.	Activities and quizzes offer adults the chance to test their understanding.
Case studies provide a brief narrative and/or situations that present unresolved and/or provocative issues or questions. Ask participants to analyze or connect to real-world problems.	Case studies challenge adults to analyze, critique, take responsibility, make decisions, develop critical thinking skills, and express opinions.
Role playing provides scenarios that students act out presenting specific situations that contain two or more different viewpoints or perspectives.	Role Play raises questions that require discussion, assessment, negotiation and understanding of the various scenarios and potential decisions and their implications.

(For further reading see: Bender, 1972; Knowles, 2011; Srinivasan, 1993)

Use combinations of the above techniques to create learning experiences that will help participants to retain and apply what they have learned.