

Creativity and Innovation in Adult Education

Liepaja, 2016

- To be effective in teaching adults, it's important to know your audience and have a general understanding of how adults learn.

- ***Adult learning is selective.*** This means that adults learn what is meaningful for them. They are “not very inclined to learn something they are not interested in, or in which they cannot see the meaning and importance” (Rubenson, 2011, p. 49).
- ***Adult learning is self-directed.*** Adults take responsibility for their own learning. Malcolm Knowles defined self-directed learning as “a process by which people identify their learning needs, set goals, choose how to learn, gather materials, and evaluate their progress” (Rubenson, 2011, p. 53).
- ***Adult learners also bring years of previous knowledge and experience*** to the classroom, as well as an established system of values and beliefs governing their thought (Jarvis, 2004, p. 144). They expect to be treated as adults.

- **Adults often have a problem-centered approach to learning**, and are interested in content that has a direct application to their lives. They want to see immediately how the course content is relevant to their current problems or situations (Rochester Institute of Technology).
- Finally, **adult learners have been away from formal schooling for many years**, and may have had negative experiences with school. These adult learners may be reentering schooling with anxiety and low self-esteem (Rubenson, 2011, p. 53). Adults may also associate traditional classroom environments with something that is appropriate for children, therefore they may “prefer to learn in contexts that are... as little like ‘school’ as possible” (Davis, 2013)

To best reach adults, there are five key factors you should focus on in the development of your training:

- The material presented should have immediate usefulness to the learners.
- The material presented should be relevant to adult learners' lives.
- The training environment should be welcoming so that all learners feel safe to participate.
- The training presentation should be engaging.
- The training should be presented in a respectful manner, where learners have an opportunity to share their experiences.

Try to at least learn the answers to these three questions:

- **Who are you going to teach?** Get names and titles of your attendees, or at least the names of their places of employment.
- **What is their background?** If you can determine the students' educational backgrounds, this will help in determining the depth of information to cover in your class.
- **Will some people need more training than others?** In cases where there are extreme differences in skill levels, you might consider holding several sessions at different levels of expertise—for frontline workers versus managers, for example.

According to Robert Mager, a world-renowned expert in instructional design, the simplest way to start writing learning objectives is by answering three questions:

- What will participants be able to do as a result of the course, training, or class?
- What are the conditions or circumstances where the participants will perform this activity, and what knowledge or materials does he/she need to do this effectively?
- What level of proficiency is needed to perform the task or skill successfully or apply this information?

What kind of training should I develop?

How intensive, basic, or elaborate your training will be depends on determining the following:

- What resources are available?
- What are some potential challenges to this training (for example, format, class size, minimal resources)?
- What content needs to be created?
- What evaluation instruments need to be created?

**Complete the process below
for each of your learning objectives for the
course or training:**

- Identify one of your clearly stated learning objectives.
- Determine what kind of learning domain the outcome involves (knowledge, skill, or attitude).
- Choose an instructional method (activity, hand-out, team project, etc.) This helps participants accomplish your stated learning objective by doing.
- Explain how this learning experience will help your students meet the learning objectives you have identified.

Methods

Case studies, role plays, and small group discussions help

- participants discover learning points themselves and practice skills used in interactions.
- Best used to practice newly acquired skill, to experience what a particular situation feels like, to provide feedback to participants, or to apply new knowledge to a specific situation.

Classroom training, lectures, and lecturettes

- convey information, when interaction or discussion is not desired or possible.
- Best used to convey information in a short time, to communicate the same information to large numbers of people, or to provide basic information to a group.

Experiential learning

- lets participants try new concepts, processes or systems in a controlled environment through supervised coaching, practicum, or internship, which includes debriefing and reflection.
- Best used in structured and mentored settings.

Games, table-tops, and simulations

- provide non-threatening ways to present or review course material and can be used to recreate a process, event or set of circumstances, usually complex, so that participants can experience and manipulate the situation without risk and then analyze what happened.
- Best used to integrate and apply complex skills, to elicit participants' natural tendencies and provide feedback, to provide a realistic job-related experience, to help grasp total program content, to present dry material in an interesting way, or to add a competitive element to a session.

- **Projects and writing tasks** help participants reflect on their understanding of concepts, information, and ideas, and allow them to work individually or in small groups with the content. Best used to test for participants understanding or to provide for individual input.

Self-study

- allows an individual to acquire skills and knowledge through self-learning, guided by structured materials.
- Best used as computerbased modules, CD-ROM/DVD learning, and web-based virtual labs.

What delivery method should I use?

Delivery Method	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
In-person learning	Classroom setting, traditional, formal learning	Effective when sharing information with large group, build bonds	Establishes a “tell-me” mindset, places burden of learning on teacher
E-learning	Computer-based, often distance-based	Provides training when learners need it, flexible	Loss of personal contact, computer-based tasks can be time-consuming for some, issues of access for those with disabilities.
Problem-based learning	Problem comes first and learners work through it, often in teams	Actively involves participants, stimulates peer group learning, promotes critical thinking	Can lose focus, can challenge inclusivity of group, can be difficult if there is a wide variety of skill sets among members
Blended learning	A hybrid of in-person and e-learning	Combines the best from multiple types of delivery methods	May be difficult for some learners to follow, may need additional reinforcement to stay on task
Nonformal learning	Most closely associated with skill or certificate programs	Structured learning environment, intentional to specific skills, or professional development	Often takes places outside of an academic organization, may not lead to recognized certification or licensure

Facilitation Tips

- Build trust
- Model positive attitude
- Give supportive feedback
- Stick to a schedule
- Create a “parking lot” for deviations off topic
- Ask open-ended questions
- Respect every student’s feelings

Case Studies, Role Plays & Small Group Discussions

- Participants discover learning points themselves. The individual assumes roles other than his/her real ones or is thrust into settings that are different from the current one.
- **Sample applications:** Problem-based learning, psychodramas, sociodramas, group role play, practice in handling social interactions.

Classroom Training, Lectures & Lecturettes

- The individual acquires skills and knowledge through guidance from an instructor in a formal group setting, not in the workplace. In the case of distance learning, webinars, and webcasts, the individual may be at the work site, but the session is not usually a part of work activities.
- **Sample applications:** Seminars, conferences, workshops, lectures, demonstrations, Internet-based classes, video and audio conferences, webinars, webcasts, certificate programs

Experiential Learning

- Individual or group participates in structured debriefing sessions to reflect on the experiences encountered and draws conclusions.
- **Sample applications:** Practicum, structured and mentored internship, field placement with coaching, on-the-job practice and work sessions, and supervised transitional work settings following training

Games, Table-Tops & Simulations

- The individual performs as she/he would in real life. The setting, however, is an artificial creation designed to resemble the natural environment.
- **Sample applications:** Physically realistic simulators, virtual reality environments, psychologically realistic settings, in-basket exercises, structured games, virtual labs, assessment centers.

Projects & Writing Tasks

- Participants reflect on their understanding of concepts, information, ideas and allow them to work individually or in small groups with the content.
- **Sample applications:** Reports, PowerPoints, articles, postings, larger writing projects

Self-Study

- The individual acquires skills and knowledge through self-learning, guided by structured materials ranging from print to electronic systems.
- **Sample applications:** Directive instruction, computer-based modules, web-based virtual labs, CD-ROM/DVD learning modules, web explorations

Online Learning

According to Ke & Xie, online learning for adults has several distinct characteristics:

- “Social interaction and collaboration with peers
 - Connecting new knowledge to past experience
 - Immediacy in application
 - A climate of self-reflection
 - Self-regulated learning” (2009)
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- The online learning environment is also defined by self-direction, where learners are responsible for setting their own goals and strategies to meet those goals. Critical thinking is encouraged through the development of learning communities, discussions, and interactions between students and the instructor (Milheim, 2011).

Online Discussion

- In an online discussion, learning should be allowed to “emerge from a discussion of viewpoints, not a delineation of right and wrong.” The instructor must be aware of different perspectives and keep their personal views at bay while fostering discussion. The instructor should also be careful to “question if a particular discussion is ethnocentric, dismissive or offensive to other cultures” and to provide alternative material, such as from popular culture or current events, to serve as a foundation for discussion (Milheim, 2011).