

## Characteristics of adult learning

During your lessons you must be aware that the people you are teaching are adults. The way that they learn is different from children as they have a well developed sense of self and a wealth of experience behind them, if you do not take account of this you risk alienating your class in which case learning will not take place.

This document will cover:

- Teaching styles, pinpointing those appropriate for adult learners.
- Name factors that impact on motivation to learn
- Ways that adults learn
- What to take into account when training

What we wanted you to establish is:

- By being yourselves – adults with opinions, who have learned and know the community – you already have a lot of essential knowledge.

There are 2 distinct teaching styles:

### Pedagogy

**Definition:** An educational approach characterised by teacher-centred instruction.

- The teacher is viewed as an authority figure who imparts knowledge and skills to the students.
- Students are not generally involved in decisions or actions in regard to learning.
- Method generally follows a lecture structure with students recording the information and compounding it through individual exercises.

### Andragogy

**Definition:** A learner-centred educational approach.

- The participant's needs and wants are central to the process of teaching.
- Learning is self-directed: participants are responsible for and involved in structuring their learning.
- A humanist philosophy underlies this teaching style, it considers personal development as the key focus of education.

Andragogy is considered the most effective way of teaching adults. It takes into account their already well developed sense of self and prior knowledge. It also encourages practical activities and participation. Try to think about this when you are planning your lessons, limit teacher talk and include student experience.

***...let's look closer at adult learning theory.***

These are the key central points of adult learning theory:

1. Adults will commit to learning when the goals and objectives are considered realistic and important to them.
2. Adults want to be the origin of their own learning and will resist learning activities they believe are an attack on their competence.
3. Adult learners come to learning with a wide range of previous experiences, knowledge, self-direction, interests, and competencies.
4. Adult learning has ego involved. Development must be structured in such a way as to get support from peers and to reduce the fear of judgment during learning.
5. Adult learners need to see that the learning and their day-to-day activities are related and relevant
6. Adult learners need direct, concrete experiences in which they apply the learning in real life
7. Adults need to participate in small-team activities during the learning to move them beyond understanding to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Small-team activities provide an opportunity to share, reflect, and generalize their learning experiences.
8. Adults need to receive feedback on how they are doing and the results of their efforts.

Four key words to remember and refer to when teaching adults are READINESS, EXPERIENCE, AUTONOMY, ACTION.

**Readiness (see points 1 and 5 above)**

Adults must themselves be ready and willing to learn before teaching can increase knowledge.

*Implications for Trainer:*

You must ensure that the course is designed for the participants. This pack covers a great deal of topics, hold a meeting before you start to outline the topics available and see which people are interested in and teach those. Later, interest in previously rejected topics may arise at which point you should teach them relatively quickly before the interest wanes.

Even though the students requested the topics upon starting the teaching you must clearly show that:

- the course is for participants' benefit
- the training can help solve or avoid a problem
- the new knowledge will provide new opportunities

**Experience (see points 2, 3, 4 and 7 above)**

Adults already have a wealth of knowledge and experience.

*Implications for Trainer*

- take account of this; otherwise risk losing participants' interest and insulting them.
- exploit this unique resource: provide opportunities for participants to contribute and share their experiences

**Autonomy (see points 1 and 2 above)**

Adults have the power to make their own choices.

*Implications for Trainer:*

- allow as much autonomy as possible; otherwise participants may feel undermined and alienated.
- provide lots of opportunities for participation in the training session. e.g. games, simulations, discussions etc. where participants can figure things out for themselves, reflect on materials and potential uses, etc.

**Action (see points 5,6,7,and 8 above)**

Adults need to see how new skills will be put into action in their work. If not, they will lose interest; learning will decrease.

*Implications for Trainer:*

- clearly explain how and when skills learned can be applied to the participants' own lives.
- incorporate environments from the participants' lives into practical exercises.

**Summary:**

Adults respond best to learning that is:

- Experience-based
- Active
- Recognizing them as experts
- Independent
- Real-life centred
- Task-centred
- Problem-centred
- Solution-driven
- Skill-seeking
- Self-directing
- Internally and externally motivated