
The Challenge of Helping Adults Learn: **Teaching Strategies to Help Adults Learn Technical Information**

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One of a series of workshop handouts made available by LearnerAssociates.net¹

There are many different teaching strategies that can be used to help learners gain the understandings that you'd like. The following list/description presents some of the strategies that can be particularly helpful when trying to teach adult learners. These strategies can be used individually or in conjunction with each other.

Demonstration

Demonstrations can be classified in two ways:

Result Demonstration shows the results of some activity, practice or procedure through evidence that can be seen, heard, or felt.

Method Demonstration illustrates how to do something in a step-by-step fashion.

Demonstrations are most effective when the learners are concerned with an issue or problem and are looking for an answer. In such cases the demonstration can deal directly with their concern. It is important that the person doing the demonstration knows the content very well and is able to answer questions as they arise during the demonstration.

Lecture

The lecture is the most commonly used instructional strategy for working with groups of learners. Ideas for improving the effectiveness of lectures include:

Be organized - plan your lecture ahead of time and be logical in your order of presentation.

Allow for periodic breaks - don't have the learners sit and listen too long. Provide frequent breaks when they can relax and informally discuss the ideas that have been presented.

Use visuals - charts, slides and overhead transparencies all help by allowing the learners to see what they have been hearing.

Allow for questions - periodically provide a time for questions and answers. Try to respond to each question in a way that lets the learner know that you appreciate that he/she has asked the question.

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Arrange the seating - try to arrange the seating so that it is less formal and allows the learners to see each other along with seeing the instructor. This can allow for more interaction between the learners.

Provide opportunities for small group discussion - once or twice during the lecture provide a question or two that can be used as a discussion topic for small groups. Allow the groups 5-10 minutes to discuss the topic and then have them share their ideas with the total group. When appropriate continue your lecture.

Note Taking Guide

If you are presenting detailed information it is usually most helpful to provide the learner, at the beginning of the presentation, with an outline or guide by which they can follow the material being presented and also take notes when appropriate. The note taking guide doesn't have to be exceptionally detailed but should provide the structure to help the learner progress through the content that you are presenting.

Group Discussion

Group discussion is an organized opportunity for the learners to discuss selected topics/issues/ideas in a group setting. Group discussion allows more of the learners to actively participate and therefore can help to increase learning. Before organizing a group discussion it is important to make sure that the learners have a certain level of understanding that will allow them to share their ideas in the group. A group discussion that is held too close to the beginning of an instructional program may not work effectively since the

members of the group may not have the basic information to be discussed.

Group discussion often works better with a group leader. This can be assigned by the instructor or selected by the group members.

Exhibit

An exhibit is a collection of materials that are displayed to help people learn. Exhibits can be very helpful as a strategy to help learners gain new understandings without the necessity of a formal course or training program. Exhibits should be set up in areas that are frequented by the learners. It is often helpful if the exhibit includes a selection of objects or pictures and also appropriate signs and written information. In addition, handouts and printed material available for the learner to take along with them is most beneficial. Don't forget to periodically change the exhibit - don't let it stay there too long.

Field Trip

A field trip is usually a well planned visit by a group of learners to some place or organization that can provide new ideas and insights to the learners. Field trips can be planned around the visiting of experts/specialists on a certain topic, manufacturing facilities, demonstration programs, and other locations that can't come to the learners. Field trips are often used to show the results of a certain practice.

Case Study

Used to allow the learners to examine or analyze a specific situation that they may be facing in the future. Usually the situation is prepared ahead of time and distributed in written form. The learners, often working in teams, discuss how they might solve the situation that has been presented. This strategy can be very helpful

following the presentation of technical information whereby the learners can then apply the information to specific problems/situations. It is also helpful for allowing the learners to assess how much they have learned and how comfortable they will be in using the information to solve problems in the future.

Brainstorming

Used when you'd like to encourage the learners to freely share their ideas. All ideas are accepted at the beginning of the process and no response, regardless of how useless or impractical it may seem, is omitted from the first stages of brainstorming. As ideas are contributed by members of the group, they are listed for all in the group to see and discuss. Discussion can include the development of spin-off ideas, the refining of ideas, the combining of ideas and reinforcing of existing ideas. Brainstorming can be excellent to help a group of learners think creatively of new ideas to solve difficult problems.

Movies/Slides/Transparencies

Visual aides to instruction can help learners better understand the ideas that are being presented. Try to make sure that the visual aides clarify the ideas that are being presented and don't confuse them. Use the same words in your presentation as are used on the visuals.

Role Playing

When learners will be expected to interact with other people as a key part of effectively using the technical information, role playing can be most helpful. In role playing two or more learners are provided with a role to play and a situation in which they are involved. The learners then act out their roles and try to solve the situation. Role playing can be done as a demonstration in front

of the total group or, if it is a large group, role playing can be done simultaneously by small groups. At the conclusion of role playing the learners should be given an opportunity to talk about how they feel, what they observed, what they learned, and what they'll do differently the next time.

Independent Study

Most adult learners do most of their learning through independent study. Independent study allows the learner to select the content that he/she is most interested in learning and also to select the best time for learning. In addition the independent study learner can move through the content at his/her own pace. An instructor can help learners do independent study by providing study materials, resource guides, self-testing materials, and by being available to answer questions as they arise.

Newsletters

A periodic newsletter that reinforces the key ideas and concepts that you want to teach can be very helpful. The newsletter can also introduce ideas that will be the focus of upcoming training sessions.

Tutorial

A tutorial learning situation is most helpful when a single learner is needing specific help. The focus for a tutorial is usually the specific problems or concerns of the learner. The teacher then becomes a form of consultant to the learner and attempts to assist in helping the learner deal with his/her concerns.

SELECTING THE APPROPRIATE TEACHING STRATEGY

	Doesn't Require Reading	Concrete Ideas	Abstract Principles	Draws on Learner Experiences	Stimulates Dialogue/ Discussion	Problem- Focused
Demonstration	++	++	+	++	++	++
Lecture	++	+	--	--	--	-
Note Taking Guide	--	++	+	--	+	-
Group Discussion	++	-	++	++	++	++
Exhibit	++	++	-	-	-	-
Field Trip	++	++	-	+	++	++
Case Study	-	++	++	++	++	++
Brainstorming	+	+	++	++	++	++
Movies/Slides	?	++	-	-	-	-
Role Playing	++	-	++	++	++	++
Independent Study	--	++	+	++	-	++
Newsletters	--	++	-	+	-	+
Tutorial	+	++	+	++	+	+