

Adult Learning Styles

Adults like to be involved in their learning process by directing it themselves.

A class or workshop for an adult audience can be a fantastic avenue for thoughtful questions and meaningful discussions. In order to connect with this audience, a facilitator must consider the general learning styles for individuals and possess the necessary skills to engage adults.

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Adult learners have a wealth of life experiences and knowledge that has shaped and established their values, beliefs and opinions. Thus, marriage and relationship educators must recognize their participants' expertise and life experiences:

- Ask about their needs, expectations and interests.
- Acknowledge their accomplishments.
- Recognize the diversity of the group members and respect their views.
- Act like a collaborator as opposed to an "expert."

Keep in mind that adults like to be involved in their learning process by directing it themselves. Stay away from long, non-interactive lectures; activities and discussions are the best paths to adult learning. Brief them on the benefits of the lesson and how it applies to real life before the lesson begins.

Visual learners enjoy pictures, videos and illustrations. "Show me" is their motto. They often sit in the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstructions. Visual learners think in color, size and

shape. They create diagrams of what they hear in their minds. Visual learners also like to have a broad overview of the presentation before they get down to the details. Instructors can best communicate with visual learners by providing handouts, using white boards, chalkboards, and flip charts. Use phrases such as, "Do you see how this works?"

Auditory learners respond to all of the sounds associated with the learning process. Their motto is "Tell me." Auditory learners will actively participate in discussions. An instructor can best communicate with them by speaking clearly, asking questions, and using phrases such as "How does that sound to you?" Auditory learners prefer facts, details and clear vocal presentations. They pay close attention to the speaker's voice, including the tone, energy, pitch, level of enthusiasm and rates of modulation. While participating in a class, auditory learners prefer a calm pace, detailed descriptions, detailed hand outs, and to talk out loud.

Kinesthetic learners need to physically do something to understand and process what they are learning. Their motto is "Let me do it." They want to actually touch what they are learning. They enjoy role-playing. A facilitator can best communicate with kinesthetic learners by involving volunteers in their presentations and using phrases such as "how



do you feel about that?” Key words for kinesthetic learners are “Do it.” During class time, kinesthetic learners like quizzes and fill-in-the-blank handouts. They like to stand, move around and stretch. They learn best when they can practice what they are learning.

Facilitators need to understand how individuals with different learning styles process information. Connect with all three general learning styles in each class session or workshop by following these general guidelines:

- Use a mix of media.
- Provide structured and unstructured activities.
- Allow opportunities for individual reflection, class discussion and small group interaction.
- Offer imaginative visuals and handouts.
- Give detailed, clear and factual explanations.
- Supply fill-in-the-blank handouts and self-assessments.
- Allow for individual physical movement.

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Using video clips: Tell participants how long the clip is so they know how long they are expected to pay attention. Explain the purpose of using the video and give a synopsis of the situation, the characters, and its relevance to the class. Stop the video at major points to facilitate discussion. After watching the video clip, process the key learning points.

Introducing a new topic or segment of the class: Use a relevant anecdote or story to illustrate key points. Discuss why the topic is important and applicable to the participants’ learning experience. Allow plenty of time for questions and group discussion.

Facilitating discussion and participation: Ask questions that everyone can answer. Do not respond to one or two people’s questions the majority of the time; try to rotate whose questions you answer. Listen carefully to the whole question before responding. Repeat the question or paraphrase it for the group. Control your body language and facial expressions. It is important to look directly at the person who asks the question but you should speak to the whole group when you answer.

Combine the three general learning styles with the skills to engage an adult audience for the best training environment.

Presenting icebreakers and other activities: Describe the activity, the role of the participants and the objectives of the exercise. Process the results in terms of what occurred, what the experience was like and what was learned from the activity. Give participants time to reflect on the exercise and think of ways to apply the knowledge to real life activities and events. [Click here to see Activities.](#)

Using a learning styles

assessment tool for your class:

Combine the three general learning styles with the skills to engage an adult audience for the best training environment. Solicit your group’s

life experiences and thoughts and respect their opinions. Allow for adults to direct their own learning experience by giving them opportunities to interact with the group, ask questions and practice their new skills.

The best way to ensure that you are reaching everyone in your audience is to use a variety of teaching methods that will apply to all three general learning styles. It is also important to draw out your participants’ expertise, recognize their accomplishments and respect their life lessons and the way in which they view the world. Finally, be your audience’s collaborator, not the “expert.” These methods combined will provide an interesting and innovative group learning experience.