

# GRAB AND GO LESSON

## Understanding Adult Learners

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### Education and Training

**Purpose:** This handout provides three good practices for offering training to adult learners.

Understanding adult learners is a major component in successfully implementing quality training. Adult learners pursue training because they have a common interest in a topic and want to expand their knowledge or skills. They are often referred to as non-traditional students, adult students, mature learners, and various other titles. Regardless of the title, they are quite different from your traditional student. Therefore, it is important to know general good practices when offering training to adult learners.

### Adult Learning Good Practices

Adult learners are typically 25 and older, usually employed full-time, and have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge. Many participants attend training with some knowledge about the topic from other sources or from their life experiences. Using open-ended questions throughout the training allows you to find out what they already know. It also provides an opportunity for the participants to learn from each other.

Adult learners are usually goal-driven, relevancy-oriented, and practical. They want to know how the training content is going to benefit them upfront. They usually attend training with a purpose in mind, such as how this training can help them to:

- Do their job better
- Get additional skills and knowledge for a new job
- Manage job challenges more effectively

Many need to see the connection between the content's objectives and their personal career goals. When this connection is not clearly presented, some will face challenges following the training and applying the content. Providing practical information and learning activities that strengthen job skills is key for overall success.

Adult learners learn best when they are actively involved. Lecturing throughout the entire training can negatively impact information retention. Including opportunities to not only listen to the information, but also talk, observe, write, move around, and participate in hands-on activities is best.

Here are some tips for making trainings for adult learners successful:

- Make it relevant. Adult learners need to be able to see the relevancy of what they are learning.
- Include activities and assignments that encourage adult learners to explore. Allow them to be active participants in their own learning process.
- Consider the experience and educational background of the adult learners. Share their life experiences and accumulated knowledge to enhance the training.
- Offer immediate feedback to any questions or mistakes, when possible.
- Incorporate emotionally-driven content. If they feel emotionally connected to the subject matter, then they are more likely to be engaged.

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- Emphasize the real-world benefits. This will allow them to realize the purpose and the benefits of the educational experience.
- Keep cognitive overload in mind when creating content. Break up trainings with physical activity breaks and use smaller sessions for heavier subject matter.
- Use storytelling to draw in participants as this makes it more interesting and relatable.
- Create tangible outcomes that can be completed quickly and conveniently. Allow them to leave the training with action steps and a plan moving forward.

### References

- Institute of Child Nutrition. (2017). *Foundations for training excellence instructor's manual*. <https://theicn.org/training-2/>
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