



ADAYANA®



White Paper

Training

Principles of Adult
Learning

Solution Design Group

Principles of Adult Learning

A comprehensive understanding of adult learning principles is critical to developing successful education programs that result in participant engagement and the facilitation of learning. Adults have special needs and requirements as learners.

1. Adults are autonomous and self-directed.

Adults need to be free to direct their own learning. If the learning engagement is classroom-based, the facilitator must actively involve adult participants in the learning process. Specifically, they have to be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with all of the facts. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for their learning and engage them in discussions, presentations and group-based tasks. If the learning engagement is an e-Learning course, the course should be designed to allow participants to explore topics in greater detail and choose from multiple learning activities.

2. Adults bring knowledge and experience to each learning activity.

Over their lives, adults have accumulated a wealth of life experiences and knowledge. This may include family memories, work-related experiences, and previous education. Linking new material in a course to learners' existing knowledge and experience creates a powerful and relevant learning experience. Relating theories and concepts to the participants and recognizing the value of experience in learning are two important factors to keep in mind as well.

3. Adults need learning to be relevant and practical.

Every day, the human brain takes in hundreds of thousands of sensory inputs. As the brain processes these inputs, it begins to sort out information it deems relevant and important. Relevancy increases the likelihood information will be retained. Adults must see a reason for learning something and the learning must be applicable to their work or other responsibilities in order for it to be valuable for them. Therefore, learning engagements must identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins. By nature, most adults are practical about their learning. Typically, they will focus on the aspects of a program most useful to them in their work. Participants must know how the content will be useful to them.

4. Adults are goal-oriented.

Adults primarily participate in learning programs to achieve a particular goal. Therefore, they appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined learning objectives. These need to be communicated early in the course.

5. Adults are problem-oriented and want to apply what they've learned.

Adult learners want to be able to apply their learning to their work or personal life immediately. Using examples to help them see the connection between classroom theories and practical application; utilizing problem-solving activities as part of the learning experience; and creating action plans together with learners are important concepts that enable life application.

6. Adults are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

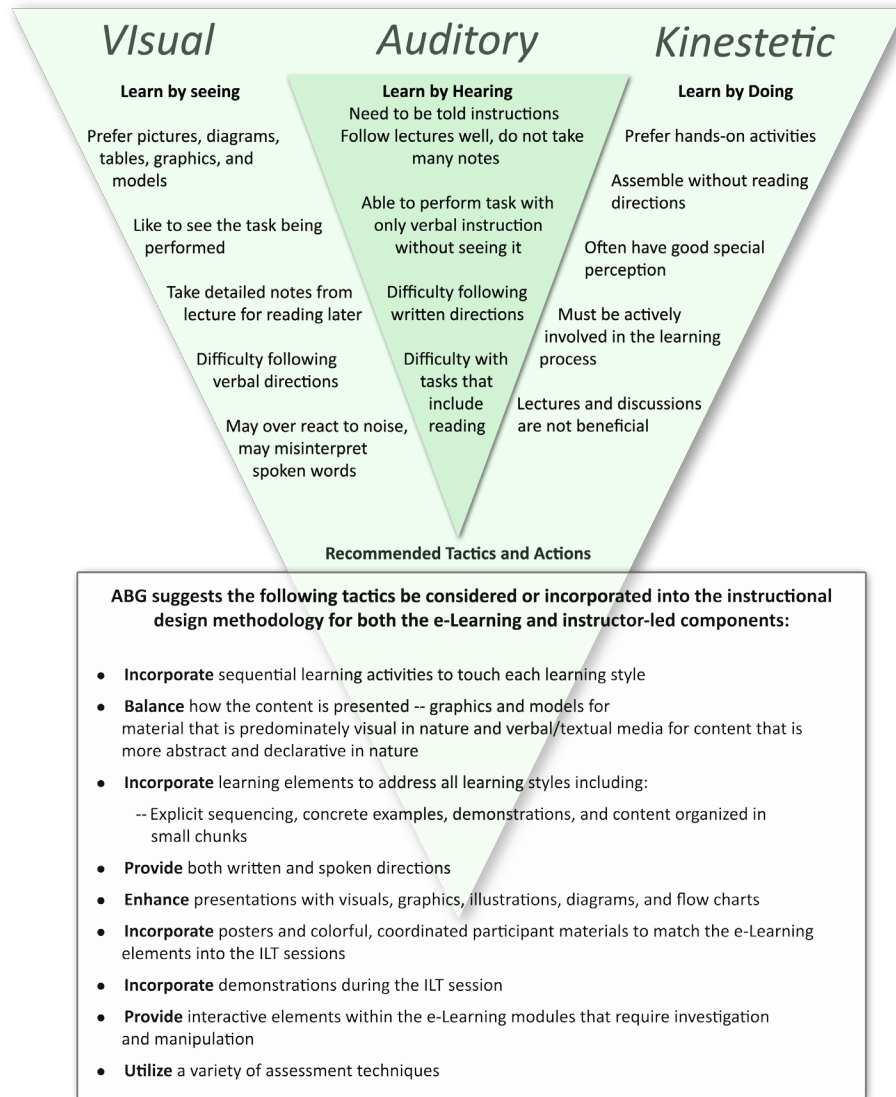
Learning is driven by participant motivation – the more motivated someone is to participate in training, the more he or she is likely to learn and retain information. Adults are motivated by both internal and external factors. During the first several weeks on the job, adults are highly motivated to learn. Similarly, motivation is high when they are faced with learning a new work process or approach to a problem. However, as they become more familiar with the content, learners' motivation to learn may wane until a specific need arises.

7. Adults are pressed for time.

In today's fast-paced world, adults have to juggle demanding jobs, family responsibilities, and community commitments. Even if they are highly motivated to learn, the pressures of life often limit the time many adults can invest in learning. Therefore, in many cases, learning must be available when it is convenient for the learner and delivered in "manageable chunks." These may come in the form of modularized e-Learning programs, podcasts, or webcasts or may be strategically delivered through informal training initiatives.

8. Adults have different learning styles.

A learning style refers to how a person learns, categorizes, and processes new content. Each person may have multiple preferred learning styles. In training, each of these styles should be considered when delivering content.



Summary

A principle, philosophers say, is the beginning of action. In order to facilitate actions that result in learning among adults, it is critical to have a fundamental knowledge of all of the above principles as well as an understanding of how to implement them in the design of learning and training initiatives.

For nearly 30 years, Adayana has utilized its knowledge and understanding of adult learning principles in the development of highly effective learning programs. These programs work to maximize business performance for clients by enhancing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of employees and channel partners.

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