



# Adult Learners



## **Practical Tips for Teaching**

**Wendy MacColl**

Instructional Design

# [ Objectives... ]

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- Defining the Adult Learner
- Identifying Key Characteristics
- Discussing Practical Techniques to reach this audience of Learners

# [ Who are Adult Learners? ]

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- Generally defined as over 25
- Most likely enrolled in graduate level courses, but non-traditional students may be in Undergrad programs
- Often working full-time and pursuing a degree program

# [ How are they different? ]

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- Research shows that Adult Learners share some Key Characteristics
- Awareness of those characteristics can enable an instructor to tailor the teaching experience to enhance learning for this group

# [ Pre-test! ]

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- Let's take a quick test to check your knowledge of Adult Learning Theory...

<http://www.cals.ncsu.edu/agexed/aee523/pretest5.html>

# [ Key Characteristics ]

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- **Motivation** (intrinsic vs. external reward/punishment)
- **Learner Orientation** (more self-directed)
- **Experience** (foundation for individual and for group sharing)

# [ Key Characteristics ]

- **Orientation to Learning** (task or problem centered vs. subject oriented)
- **Need for Feedback** (expect and value feedback - recognition & guidance)
- **Relate concepts** (to everyday experience)

# [ Key Characteristics ]

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- **Relate new ideas** (tie to previous knowledge)
- **Prefer Facilitative style of instruction** (rather than authoritative)
- **Learn best** when content is related to examples



# [ Key Characteristics ]

- **Expect** more detailed feedback & appreciate sources for supplementary information



# Practical Techniques for Teaching Adult Learners

- *Adults are autonomous and self-directed.* ➡ Teachers should act as facilitators, guiding adult learners to their own knowledge rather than just supplying them with facts. Show how the class will help them meet their goals.

# Practical Techniques for Teaching Adult Learners

- *Adults have a foundation of life experiences and knowledge.* ➡ To help connect learning to this base, strive to draw out students' experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic, and relate theories and concepts to those life experiences.

# Practical Techniques for Teaching Adult Learners

- *Adults are goal-oriented.* They appreciate an educational program that is organized & has clearly defined elements. ■ Show them how your class will help them attain their goals, early on in the course.

# Practical Techniques for Teaching Adult Learners

- *Adults are relevancy-oriented.*  
Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them. ➡ Identify objectives before the course begins, and relate theories & concepts to a setting familiar to them. Also, allow them to choose projects reflecting their interests.

# Practical Techniques for Teaching Adult Learners

- *Adults are practical.* They focus on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them at work. ■ Tell them explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job, or in the real world.

# Practical Techniques for Teaching Adult Learners

- *Adults need to be shown respect (as do all learners).* ■ Acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult learners bring to the classroom. Treat them as equals in experience and knowledge and allow them to freely voice opinions.

# [ In Conclusion... ]

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- We must recognize that adults want their learning to be problem-oriented, personalized, and accepting of their need for self-direction and personal responsibility.