

Part I: Teaching and Learning Styles

- utilize a variety of teaching modalities, such as small group process, lecture, and experiential activities
- be flexible and meet each learner's needs
- provide information that will overlap with information learners already have
- reiterate and reinforce information throughout the session

TYPES OF LEARNERS

To understand how to move from passive to active learning, it is important to understand the different types of learners. There are four primary learning styles: visual, auditory, read-write, and kinesthetic. People learn using a variety of these methods, but one method is usually predominant. Familiarity with the characteristics of each learning style and associated strategies allows you to address the needs of each type of learner.

Visual Learners

Visual learners are characterized by the following:

- They tend to be fast talkers.
- They exhibit impatience and have a tendency to interrupt.
- They use words and phrases that evoke visual images.
- They learn by seeing and visualizing.

Your teaching strategy for visual learners should include the use of demonstrations and visually pleasing materials, and you should make an effort to paint mental pictures for learners.

Auditory Learners

Auditory learners are characterized by the following:

- They speak slowly and tend to be natural listeners.
- They think in a linear manner.

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- They prefer to have things explained to them verbally rather than to read written information.
- They learn by listening and verbalizing.

Your teaching strategy for auditory learners should sound good and should be planned and delivered in the form of an organized conversation.

Read-Write Learners

Read-write learners are characterized by the following:

- They prefer for information to be displayed in writing, such as lists of ideas.
- They emphasize text-based input and output.
- They enjoy reading and writing in all forms.

Your teaching strategy for read-write learners should include writing out key words in list form. The learners will learn by silently reading or rewriting their notes repeatedly; writing out in their own words the ideas and principles that were taught or discussed; organizing any diagrams, graphs, other visual depictions into statements (e.g., “The trend is . . .”); and putting reactions, actions, diagrams, charts, and flowcharts into words. They like multiple-choice tests.

Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic learners are characterized by the following:

- They tend to be the slowest talkers of all.
- They tend to be slow to make decisions.
- They use all their senses to engage in learning.
- They learn by doing and solving real-life problems.
- They like hands-on approaches to things and learn through trial and error.

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Your teaching strategy for kinesthetic learners should include hands-on demonstrations and case examples to be discussed and solved.

Can You Identify Your Predominant Learning Style?

There are a variety of types of learners in a single classroom. Therefore, it is important to incorporate multiple teaching methods. It is also important to know what your own predominant learning style is, because when you teach, you may unintentionally favor your learning style and shortchange other types of learners in the classroom.

An active learning process involves listening, demonstrating, interacting, and understanding in order to engage all learners. Adult learners tend to have a need to interact and share with others. Well-designed training and educational programs use both active and passive methods. There needs to be some information transfer, but information that is only shared in a passive learning format is likely to become boring or seem irrelevant to learners. The key to teaching adults is to provide new information that is relevant and usable within a relatively short period of time. A good framework to keep in mind is the active training credo:

What I **hear**, I *forget*.

What I hear and **see**, I *remember a little*.

What I hear, see, and **ask questions about** or **discuss** with someone else, I begin to *understand*.

What I hear, see, discuss, and **do**, I *acquire* knowledge and skill.

What I **teach** to another, I *master*. (Silberman, 1996, p. 1)

As a teacher, your goal is not only to present information that learners need but also to facilitate experiences that will help them gain and master the knowledge and skills that they need to know and practice. By using a variety of teaching techniques and by actively involving learners in the experience, we increase the chances that they will retain and use the information.

I always try to take into consideration what I call the *Sesame Street* factor. Most Generation Xers and Millennials grew up on *Sesame Street*, which uses short vignettes that are usually no longer than one or two

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minutes. Children who watched *Sesame Street* are now adults who want their information in short and quick forms. The average adult attention span is between six and twenty minutes, but this varies greatly depending on factors such as the initial interest in the topic, the heat of the room, the time of day, and the energy level of the learner (Johnstone & Percival, 1976; Middendorf & Kalish, 1996). A change of pace at least every seven to ten minutes can give participants the chance to refocus and renew their interest in the topic (Jones, Peters, & Shields, 2007). Thus it is important that the pace of the teaching correspond to the attention span of the learners.

For teachers who are more comfortable with the lecture-only teaching style and learners who are more comfortable with passive learning, group involvement and active participation may seem problematic. Instructors may feel that they lose control of the class when they allow exercises to dominate classroom time. Learners may feel they would be learning more if they could get the information through lecture or readings. As teachers, we must remember that learners are capable of cognitively understanding a great deal of information, but they can only retain segments and will only experience a value change based on some of that learning experience. We can increase retention and behavior/value change by utilizing multiple training styles such as lecture, experiential activities, and small and large group activities, and by repeating the information throughout the session.

FACTORS AFFECTING LEARNING

Learning is not an automatic process. There are a number of factors that can inhibit the process. These may include one or more of the following:

- Learner feels he or she is at least as competent in the subject matter as the instructor.
- Learner resents authority figures such as the instructor.
- Learner is fearful of being seen as inferior or of being embarrassed.
- Learner is anxious.
- Learner has had a bad learning experience in the past.

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- Learner comes to the session with other problems on his or her mind and is unable to focus.
- Learner is in class against his or her will and resents this.
- Learner is interested in the material but is constrained by time and focused on other priorities.
- Learner has personal barriers or biases to learning about the topic. For example, a learner may be resistant to learning about a topic (e.g., evolution) that contradicts his or her religious beliefs.
- Learner has culturally based inhibitions to discussing or learning about the topic.
- Learner focuses on an annoying mannerism of the instructor.
- Learner is uncomfortable with the learning technique being used; this is common when learners are being introduced to technology for the first time.

Although it is difficult to address everyone's needs, it is important to meet as many needs as possible. To accomplish this, the instructor should assess learners' needs and issues. One way to do this is to simply ask the learners what their expectations are for the class session. There are more sophisticated assessment tools as well. Any of the ten methods described in part II can be used as a formative evaluation measure to make sure that a topic was understood before the class moves forward to the next topic. I prefer to use continuous evaluation mechanisms throughout the learning session to provide opportunities for learners to reflect on the content that was covered and answer questions while they are fresh in the learners' minds. Sometimes learners have questions about issues that are beyond the scope of the instructor's responsibilities. The value of the question should be acknowledged, but you should politely tell the learner that the question is beyond the purview of the course. However, you may still be able to establish the value and relevance of the questions to the entire course.