

## Chapter 2: The Learning Process

### Overview

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**Introduction** This chapter provides trainers with an overview of adult education principles and a description of the learning process as it pertains to adults in a group setting.

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# Overview to Learning and the Adult

## What is learning?

Learning refers to the process individuals go through as they change or enrich their knowledge, their skills, or their attitudes/values. It implies a change in behaviour.

- Learning is a natural process. It evolves from a felt need. It cannot be started by an outside source. Motivation must be internal.
- Learning occurs inside the learner and is totally controlled by the individual. You may have heard of the old adage: “You can lead the horse to water but you can’t make it drink.” This applies to adult learning in that the trainer can only create a supportive environment and reduce the obstacles to learning. The rest is up to the learner.
- Learning occurs throughout life. We never stop learning.
- Since we are all learners, this section will apply equally to any adult learning: whether learning to drive, to use a computer, to tutor, or to read and write.

## Basic Principles of Learning

Adults learn by doing. Attention spans may be short, and linkages must be made to real world applications, not just theoretical ones. Adults learn best if they can hear it, see it and do it. Adults also need to get involved and they learn best in a two-way process. They must know what to expect and what the outcome is supposed to be. They need clearly defined objectives to measure the success of both the session and their ability to apply the skills introduced.

The basic principles of learning can be divided into four main categories: **Doing**, **Effect**, **Exercise** and **Primacy** (D.E.E.P.)

### *Principle of Doing*

Students do not learn as the result of what teachers do, but as a result of what teachers get them to do. This basic principle is equally important for students and teachers to understand. The student who expects to learn by simply sitting back and listening is likely to be disappointed. The teacher, on the other hand, who relies solely on the “I’ll lecture, you listen” type of teaching, is not likely to see much learning take place.

Why is this? Learning is change — behavioural change in an individual. Behavioural changes don’t truly become a part of a person until they have reinforced them through use. For example, a student can memorize the operation of a piece of equipment or a new word for their vocabulary. But they don’t actually “learn” those things until they practice operating the equipment or using the new word. The student, in short, must be involved in the process of learning.

### ***The Principle of Effect***

People tend to accept and repeat those responses that are pleasant and satisfying, and to avoid those that are annoying. If an adult enrolls in a course expecting to learn to read and quickly finds that they are learning and enjoying the process, they will tend to want to keep returning to class. In short, “nothing succeeds like success”. Students should experience personal satisfaction from each learning activity and should achieve some success in each class period.

### ***The Principle of Exercise***

The more often an act is repeated, the more quickly a habit is established. Practice makes perfect if the practice is the right kind. Practicing the wrong thing will become a habit too — one which is hard to break. It is important for the student to practice repeatedly the skill to be learned and to apply this skill.

### ***The Principle of Primacy***

First impressions are the most lasting! This means that those first classes are all-important. The trainer should stimulate interest and provide subject matter that meets the students’ immediate needs.

## **Learning Styles**

How do you go about learning something new? If you were given a new computer program to learn, would you read the manual first? Would you prefer to jump right in and explore the program on your computer? Or, would you prefer to watch a demonstration by an expert? The approach that you prefer when learning is called your learning style

It is generally accepted that people learn in three main ways: visual, auditory or kinesthetic. While most people use a combination of learning styles, usually one is dominant.

### ***Visual Learner***

This person learns best by seeing things. They like to read books, look at pictures, and do word puzzles. They remember where they have seen something, notice details, like neat surroundings, and will probably draw accurate pictures.

Their preferred learning methods include:

- Reading
- Observing demonstrations
- Making mental pictures
- Viewing visual aids and colourful material filled with charts, diagrams and pictures that support the oral presentation.

### ***Auditory Learner***

This person learns best by hearing things. They enjoy talking, and music or rhythmic activities. They usually remember oral instructions and memorize easily what they hear.

Their preferred learning methods include:

- Repeating things out loud
- Listening to presentations and explanations and then talk through the concepts with others
- Using a tape recorder or other audio aids
- Listening to soft music in the background.
- Participating in group discussions.

### ***Kinesthetic (or tactile) Learner***

This person learns best through hands-on experiences. They like to handle objects, enjoy taking things apart and putting them back together, and are usually well coordinated and good at sports.

Their preferred learning methods include:

- Writing notes to remember something
- Pacing or moving around when problem-solving
- Writing
- Manipulating objects
- Participating in practice sessions with opportunity for hands-on activity.

### **Characteristics of Adult Learners**

Although the actual physiological processes of learning may be similar for children and adults, there are many physical, psychological, social, and situational factors, which make learning in adults different from children.

Adults have acquired knowledge, skills, and values as a result of many life experiences. This can enhance or block further learning. Adults often have insights, which enrich the learning situation. They enjoy making use of their talents and information in the new situation and want their input to be valued. However, preconceived ideas or expectations or “set” behaviour patterns may have to be unlearned in order for new learning to take place. Lack of previous success with a task or a shaky self-concept may create doubts that learning can occur.

Adults have maturity. They approach learning with a sense of who they are and what they want. They resent being talked down to or treated like children. They like to be involved in the learning process.

Adult learning needs are usually related to current life situations. Learning will occur to the extent the material is perceived as relevant. They are intolerant of “busy work” which doesn’t have direct application to their objectives. They want to apply what they have learned as soon as possible.

Adults have individual learning styles. They often know what helps them to learn best from past experience. Some rely more on concrete sensory experiences (visual, auditory, or kinesthetic); others rely more on abstract thinking. They learn at different rates.

Adults have many other commitments and concerns. They may have other work or family priorities which interfere with learning. They may be fatigued when they attend class. And time may be a precious commodity — they may have time for learning only what they need and become impatient with what they perceive as time wasting.

Adults have stronger, longer-lasting emotions than children, but they may mask them better. Often they experience excessive anxiety at the outset of a learning activity, and may not react well to time pressures.

Adults may have decreased vision, hearing, and reaction time. They may require more constant and ideal environmental conditions in order to work efficiently. However, their overall ability to learn does not diminish.

Adults are usually voluntary learners. They come to the learning situation because they want to. They may also stop attending if interest is lacking. If students feel pressured by any external conditions to attend class and feel they don’t have free choice in the matter, learning will not be productive.

## Adult Education Principles and the Learning Environment

An effective trainer is aware of a number of fundamentals that are directly related to how adults interact, learn and process information — on an individual and on a group level. These fundamentals are known as the principles of adult education. They have been observed and tested over time and are accepted standards. When applied to the learning environment you and the individuals attending your workshops will have greater success.

The table below presents these principles and the implications they have for action on the part of the trainer.

Learners need ...	So the trainer should...
To feel that they are being heard and that their ideas and concerns are recognized as worthy contributions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Listen attentively to all learners and maintain eye contact with the speaker.</li> <li>∨ Respond to all learners and perhaps record their comment on a flipchart for all to see.</li> </ul>
To feel validated as equal members of the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Acknowledge their statements.</li> <li>∨ Make linkages between and/or among learners so as to illustrate relationship(s).</li> </ul>
To feel accepted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Provide an opportunity for learners to introduce themselves, even when they know one another.</li> <li>∨ Focus on positive information: their accomplishments, successes and strengths.</li> </ul>
To feel a sense of trust and safety in the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Show respect</li> <li>∨ Provide opportunity to share views</li> <li>∨ Ensure that no one is interrupted in mid-sentence and that negative comments and/or behaviour are dealt with in a prompt and respectful manner.</li> </ul>
To know that their life experiences are valuable resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Allow for expression of experiences. (For example, case studies, role-plays, and discussion groups allow learners' experiences to be shared – a traditional lecture precludes such sharing.)</li> </ul>
Processes that allow the free disclosure of opinions and thoughts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Ensure that the pace of the workshop allows for discussion and reflection.</li> <li>∨ Watch for non-verbal expressions of disengagement and then make attempts to draw these learners into the discussion.</li> </ul>
An atmosphere in which they are taken seriously but that also allows for appropriate humour, errors and flexibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Promote fun as an important part of the learning session. If learners are enjoying themselves they are likely to be open to new ideas.</li> </ul>

Learners need ...	So the trainer should...
Processes where conflicts are resolved without one learner “winning” at another’s expense.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Recognize the valid parts of differing opinions. (In a situation where two learners’ opinions are in conflict, it is not helpful to choose a “right” answer.)</li> <li>∨ Remember that all opinions are aspects of a continuum.</li> </ul>
The opportunity to evaluate their learning, to express satisfaction, dissatisfaction and make suggestions for improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Encourage feedback throughout the session.</li> <li>∨ When in doubt, check it out! Ask the learners if their progress is satisfactory and invite suggestions for improvement.</li> </ul>
To feel that they are engaged in meaningful and important activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Explain to learners the purposes of learning activities.</li> <li>∨ Show how both content and process relate to the goals of the session.</li> </ul>
To have a chance of pace. (Even the best learning plans will not hold the attention of adult learners 100% of the time.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Observe the attention levels of adult learners to gauge how well things are going.</li> <li>∨ If the group appears to be fading, inject energy by switching gears (e.g. from large to small group discussion).</li> </ul>
To understand the sequence of activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Post an agenda and refer to it frequently. The agenda – and reviewing it from time-to-time – will serve as a guide to the process.</li> </ul>
To have responsible control of their time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Have an agenda but be flexible. If the learners indicate the need to spend more time than planned on a given topic, point out the implications and negotiate feasible adjustments.</li> </ul>
Evidence that their efforts to shape their learning are respected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Have options prepared in the event that the planned agenda needs revision to better suit the learners’ needs.</li> </ul>
A comfortable physical environment in order to learn effectively.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Ensure that the lighting, heating and ventilation are adequate.</li> <li>∨ Maintain an environment that is free of distractions and disruptions.</li> <li>∨ Provide comfortable chairs.</li> </ul>
To have a sense of forward progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∨ Keep the group focused and on track.</li> <li>∨ Summarise often, retrace what has occurred, and indicate what will happen next.</li> <li>∨ Ask the learners to review major points, and then post these (on flip chart or other) to build a sense of progress.</li> </ul>

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# Learning Group Process

In all learning interactions, there are two major ingredients: content and process.

*Content* refers to the subject matter, whereas *process* refers to what is happening between and among group members during an activity. Group process deals with morale, feelings, atmosphere, influence, participation, leadership struggles, conflict, competition, and cooperation, among others.

Sometimes, not enough attention is paid to process – even when it is the major cause of ineffective group work. Sensitivity to group process enables the early diagnosis and resolution of group problems. Trainers can help groups to maximize their effectiveness by increasing their awareness of the group process and the underlying behaviours.

## Phases of group process

The Forming- Storming-Norming-Performing theory, developed by Bruce Tuckman in the 1960s is an elegant and helpful explanation of group development and behaviour.

Phase	Description
<b>1</b> <i>Forming</i>	In this phase, there is a high dependence on the trainer for guidance and direction and little agreement on the group's aims other than received from the trainer. Individual roles and responsibilities are unclear. The trainer must be prepared to answer lots of questions about the group's purpose, objectives and external relationships. Processes are often ignored.
<b>2</b> <i>Storming</i>	In this phase, clarity of purpose increases but some uncertainties may persist. Cliques and factions may form and there may be power struggles. The group needs to be focused on its goals to avoid becoming distracted by other issues. Compromises may be required to enable progress.
<b>3</b> <i>Norming</i>	Roles and responsibilities become more clear and accepted. Commitment and unity is strong. The group may infuse some fun and social interaction to the activities.
<b>4</b> <i>Performing</i>	The group is more strategically aware, has a shared vision and is able to function independently. The group is able to work towards achieving the goal, and also to attend to relationship, style and process issues along the way.

## Observation guidelines

Here are some observation guidelines to help trainers analyze group process behaviour.

Behaviour	Questions to ask yourself
<p><b>Participation</b></p> <p>Look for differences in the amount of verbal participation among group members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are the high participators?</li> <li>• Who are the low participators?</li> <li>• Do you see any shift in participation (such as highs becoming quiet, or lows suddenly becoming animated)? Do you see any possible reason for this in the group's interactions?</li> <li>• How is silence interpreted? How are silent people treated?</li> <li>• Who talks to whom? Are cliques forming in the group?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Influence</b></p> <p>Influence and participation are not the same. Some members may speak very little, yet they capture the attention of the whole group. Others may talk a lot, but generally are not listened to by other members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which members are high in influence?</li> <li>• Which members are low in influence?</li> <li>• Are there shifts in influence?</li> <li>• Are there any rivalries within the group?</li> <li>• Is there a struggle for leadership? What effect does that have on other group members?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Styles of influence</b></p> <p>Influence can take many forms. It can be positive or negative. Influence can enlist support and cooperation, or it may alienate. How one member attempts to influence another may be crucial in determining how open or closed others will be toward being influenced:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does anyone impose their will on other group members?</li> <li>• Who evaluates or passes judgement on group activities?</li> <li>• Who eagerly supports other group members' decisions?</li> <li>• Are any members withdrawn?</li> <li>• Does anyone make a point of involving others in all group decisions?</li> <li>• Who expresses feelings and opinions openly and directly, without judging others?</li> <li>• Which members attempt to deal with conflict in an open, problem-solving way?</li> </ul>

Behaviour	Questions to ask
<p><b>Task function</b></p> <p>Task functions illustrate behaviours that are concerned with getting the job done (accomplishing the task the group has before them).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does any member make or ask for suggestions about the best way to proceed in a task?</li> <li>• Does any member attempt to summarize what has been covered?</li> <li>• Is there any giving or asking for facts, ideas, opinions, feelings, and feedback or searching for alternatives?</li> <li>• Who keeps the group on task?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Maintenance functions</b></p> <p>Maintenance functions are important to the morale of the group. They maintain harmonious working relationships among members and create a group atmosphere that maximizes each member's contribution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who helps other members get involved in the discussion?</li> <li>• Who cuts off other members or interrupts them?</li> <li>• How well are members getting their ideas across? Are some members preoccupied and not listening?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Group Atmosphere</b></p> <p>The way in which a group works creates an atmosphere. Members differ in the kind of atmosphere they like in a group. Insight can be gained into the atmosphere preferences of a group by finding words that describe the impressions held by group members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who seems to prefer a friendly, congenial atmosphere?</li> <li>• Who seems to enjoy conflict and/or disagreement?</li> <li>• Do any members provoke or annoy others?</li> <li>• Do members seem involved and interested?</li> <li>• Is the atmosphere one of work or play, of satisfaction and harmony?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Membership</b></p> <p>A major concern of group members is the degree of acceptance in the group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any sub-groupings (cliques) forming?</li> <li>• Are there insiders and outsiders?</li> <li>• Do some members enter and exit the group as the process unfolds?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Feelings</b></p> <p>In any group situation, feelings are generated by the interaction between members. These feelings seldom are talked about openly.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What signs of feelings do you observe in the group members? (You may have to make educated guesses based on tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and many other verbal and non-verbal clues.)</li> </ul>

Behaviour	Questions to ask
<p><b>Norms</b></p> <p>Norms are the ground rules that develop in a group and that influence the behaviours of its members. Norms express the beliefs or desires of the majority of group members as to what behaviours should or should not take place in the group. Norms may be clear to all members, or they may be recognized by only a few. Norms are most often “unsaid”. Some norms facilitate and others hinder group process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are group members overly polite with one another?</li> <li>• Are only positive feelings expressed?</li> <li>• What happens when members disagree?</li> <li>• Do you see norms operating with respect to participation or the kinds of questions that are allowed?</li> </ul> <p>✓ It may be helpful to establish a set of “group norms” with the participants as part of the workshop process.</p>

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## Facilitating the Learning Process

The different terms that can be applied to your role during the workshop may include trainer, workshop leader, instructor, teacher or facilitator. While all of these may represent what you do at different times throughout the workshop, one of the fundamental roles is as a facilitator of the learning process.

The trainer role can range from being directive and focusing on content (via presentation or lecture) to a participatory and student-centered approach focusing on student goals, self discovery, personal understandings and real world application. In any given module, the trainer can impart information and also help the student to understand how knowledge, skill or attitude will help them to accomplish a goal, relate it to their past experiences, give specific direction in accomplishing it, and then allow the workshop participant to try it out and discover meaning or application themselves.

These two approaches are complementary and the strong trainer will use both in varying degrees depending on the material, the workshop participants, and the learning situation.

The example that you set and how you manage your workshop will become a model for the workshop participants as they prepare for tutoring in their community. Trainer experience in workshops held over the years has led to the identification of a number of key elements that are an integral part of an effective workshop experience. A number of these elements are highlighted below. Many others are contained throughout the various chapters and sections in the Literacy Trainers Manual.

### **General Guidelines**

In general, to provide an effective workshop experience you should:

- **Have a thorough knowledge of the subject area**

Gaining knowledge of the subject area is an important aspect of becoming an effective trainer. This can be accomplished through tutoring experience, web-site research, attending training conferences and/or keeping up to date on literacy matters in your community, your province and across Canada.

- **Prepare and plan.**

Along with the knowledge and practical experience that you have gained from tutoring, thorough preparation and planning of your workshop will enable you to demonstrate self-confidence, provide clear explanations and instructions and answer any questions that may arise. Proper preparation and planning will ensure that the workshop flows smoothly and that the objectives remain clear throughout the day.

**Demonstrate an efficient use of your time.**

Have the room set up before the participants arrive and have all presentation supplies ready for use beforehand (for example: posters, overheads, handouts, exercises). This will avoid wasting any time and will create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere for workshop participants.

• **Maintain flexibility.**

You should be prepared to adapt the schedule to the needs of the group or to improvise if unexpected situations arise. Your schedule should be planned with flexibility in mind and you should be prepared to change direction if the participants indicate that something different or something more is required throughout the day.

• **Facilitate the learning process.**

Getting to know the workshop participants, understanding their needs and creating an environment in which learning can occur is an important part of the trainer's role. Combined, these tasks refer to how learning is facilitated and the steps that can be taken to ensure that learning is taking place. (This topic is further developed later in this section under the heading *Guidelines to Help with the Learning Process.*)

• **Provide personal experiences when appropriate.**

The experience that you have gained from tutoring, as well as your knowledge of the subject, will enable you to include interesting anecdotes and stories throughout your workshops. These stories enrich the learning process and can be more easily translated into potential real life situations.

• **Demonstrate respect and sensitivity throughout the workshop.**

- Begin and end sessions promptly.
- Use effective communication skills (not just one-way communication).
- Provide ample opportunity for reinforcement and clarification of information.
- Remain receptive to comments and observations.
- Handle any identified participant limitations with tact and patience.
- Provide constructive feedback in a non-threatening and de-personalized manner and guide or direct others with respect and dignity.
- Provide sufficient breaks, variety and opportunities for participation.
- Avoid putting anyone "on the spot".

**Demonstrate a personal commitment to training tutors and helping adults learn to read and write.**

Your enthusiasm and commitment for the work you are doing will be demonstrated in your voice, mannerisms and overall behaviour:

- Maintain good eye contact and move around the room.
- Appear relaxed and comfortable.
- Be approachable and open to receiving questions.
- Demonstrate a sense of humour when appropriate and in the appropriate context.
- Provide on-going encouragement by demonstrating your personal satisfaction in the learning achievements of others.
- Understand that you are there to guide the process and to also learn and benefit from the experiences of others.

**• Be open to change and growth in the training process.**

You should make an effort to seek out and apply new training methods and approaches. In order to develop your leadership skills in this area, keep yourself up-to-date on current training standards and trends in adult education and to the extent possible, attend courses, seminars or conferences.

**• Strive for Continual Learning.**

Remain open to receiving constructive feedback from the workshop participants and the training team. This will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your workshop presentations and make any adjustments, enhancements or revisions as required. Self-assessment, following the workshop, is another useful way to assess your performance to determine your strengths and any areas for improvement.

**• Work cooperatively with other workshop team members.**

Part of the training experience involves working with a variety of volunteers, and collaborating with members of the training team and the workshop coordinating team. This cooperative approach ensures that the workload is shared and that all team members are supported and encouraged.

## **Guidelines to Help with the Learning Process**

The following are suggestions and guidelines to help with the learning process.

### **• Meet the needs of the workshop participant.**

- Provide an environment that is comfortable with adequate light, heat, air conditioning, ventilation, acoustics and refreshments.
- Ensure that all participants can see and hear adequately.
- Ensure that there are no distractions.
  
- Provide housekeeping information early on, including location of washrooms, information about the breaks and lunch, as well as workshop hours.
- Provide adequate breaks during the workshop.
- Reduce fatigue by limiting the length of the workshop day.  A maximum training day should be no more than six hours in length.
- Respect the workshop participants time by beginning and ending on time.
- Give clear directions and explanations to help the participants understand what they are doing and why. Understanding the processes involved often leads to better learning.
- Ensure that all workshop activities are purposeful and related to the objectives in some way.
- Do not allow participants to sidetrack or monopolize discussions.
- If applicable, review the homework assignment with the workshop participants by linking the homework's relevance to the learning experience.

### **• Encourage participation.**

A workshop should be an environment of “learning by doing”. To involve the workshop participants follow these guidelines:

- Actively involve participants in the learning tasks. Give them plenty of opportunity for practice, and a chance to discover for themselves through observation, discussion, questioning, and research. Be sure to share any discoveries with the full group.
- Obtain feedback about the progress on workshop goals and activities both during the workshop and at the end.
- Provide opportunities to apply new learning to hypothetical or real situations.

· **Make the workshop as relevant and realistic as possible.**

- √ Invite someone from the local program to explain how the local council works and the support that is available to tutors.
- √ To make your case studies relevant, reflect some common student traits such as nervousness and apprehension.
- √ Reflect the local situation in any skits or role-plays used.
- √ Develop a segment that includes a guest speaker focusing on needs of a special student group.
- √ Invite a student to attend as part of the student interview segment of the workshop.
- √ Choose reading for living materials that relate to common student goals. For example: job advertisements, job application forms, other.
- √ Use the actual lesson planning forms and assessment reports that the participants will be working with. This will provide concrete real-world application.
- √ Include segments on self-management or incorporate these issues into case studies.
- √ Introduce materials commonly used by the students for reading, writing, spelling, math or ESL. Use actual materials where appropriate.
- √ For sensitivity exercises practice with the materials that would be most often used with students.
- √ Provide time for practice teaching (EOTO) with materials and techniques most commonly used.
- √ Point workshop participants to other available resources for specific student

group(s). · **Create a supportive and safe learning environment.**

It is important to convey your belief in the participants and to show appreciation for their willingness to become involved in tutoring. This can be achieved through encouragement, reinforcement and support.

- √ Provide the workshop participants with an opportunity to interact with each other. Encourage them to mingle and to feel part of a literacy group.
- √ Reduce the initial feelings of anxiety and stress by introducing an icebreaker to the group.
- √ Do not use technical jargon. If descriptions, technical terms or acronyms are brought into the discussions, ensure that all participants are aware of their meaning.
- √ Because the tutoring experience is largely one-on-one, the environment that you create in the workshop should reflect the degree of personal interaction that will be required in the “real world” application. To that end, it is important that your workshops contain a high degree of personal interaction and participation.
- √ Remember that you will be learning as well throughout the workshop. This two-way learning will demonstrate to the participants your commitment to new experiences and will ensure that you are not set apart from the group as the “subject matter expert”.

- Use effective listening and communication skills.
- Set a relaxed pace and provide early opportunities for success.
- Never try to “catch” someone by asking what they do not know. Bolster confidence early in the workshop and ensure success by asking what you are sure they do know.
- Do not put a participant on the spot or embarrass them by asking them to do something new and unfamiliar in front of the group (for example: demonstrate a chart).
- Before asking for volunteers for a demonstration, the trainer should first provide a demonstration for the participants.
- Always ask for volunteers to come forward vs. randomly selecting from the workshop participants.
- Draw from the knowledge and experiences in the classroom and encourage the participants to share their ideas, opinions, and questions. Use these experiences to enrich the class.
- Draw on your workshop participants’ knowledge or experiences to answer other participants’ questions or to relate to a point being made.
- Listen and acknowledge all contributions.
- Give genuine praise or recognition when it is deserved. Find a variety of ways to say “good for you!” This is an important element in this workshop as the tutors themselves will be modeling this with their students.

### ▫ **Measure the success of your learning methods and teaching strategies**

A good way to get to know your group, to discover how the workshop is going and to assess what participants are learning is by careful listening and observation.

- Listen and acknowledge all contributions.
- Walk around during practice sessions.
- Watch faces as you demonstrate charts or lead a discussion.
- Mingle during coffee breaks and really “hear” how they are feeling about the training. ▫ Identify when learning is not taking place and be prepared to change your approach. ▫ Join in the small group discussions.
- Pull information together and help participants to articulate the connections that are being made.
- If you hear a number of participants expressing confusion or asking questions, take a moment to check in or review with the group.

# Gaining Interest and Participation

The following are some tried and true techniques that trainers use to gain and retain the interest of a group.

## **Tell a Story**

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication, and it provides an excellent vehicle for disclosing ideas.

Develop a collection of anecdotes to assist in presenting new concepts or processes to participants. These can be collected from newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and the Internet and filed according to potential applications in a learning session.

Here are some tips on how to use storytelling in a learning session:

- √ Select stories that have a point that is directly related to the topic at hand.
- √ Tell stories about organizations, situations, colleagues, friends and yourself. Everyone can identify with real-world examples.
- √ Encourage the thinking process by telling stories that require the participants to guess at the ending or to solve the problem.
- √ Tell a story about a famous person. This can enhance the credibility of a topic area.
- √ Never tell a story that might contain personal or confidential information that could embarrass anyone.

## **Cite a Startling or Informative Statistic**

One of the best ways to promote discussion is to present an unusual statistic. People frequently like to question the validity of statistics, so ensure that your research is well founded. Here are some tips for using statistics:

- √ Be ready to manage the variety of opinions and reactions.
- √ Make sure that you are prepared to link their opinions and reactions through a coordinated discussion.

## Use Memorable Quotes

Well chosen quotes can spark a discussion, generate interest, or reinforce a learning point. Here are some tips for using quotes in your learning session:

- ✓ Invest in a book of quotes, such as *The Little Book of Zen* (D. Schiller) and *3,500 Good Quotes for Speakers* (G. Lieberman).
- ✓ Ensure that credit is given for the quote.
- ✓ Take care that the quote you use has a clear bearing on the learning in question. For example, when training participants to practice the art of effective listening, you could present the following quote on the flip chart:

**“We have two ears and one mouth. Therefore, we should listen twice as much as we speak.”** — *Source: Unknown.*

## Use Current Affairs

People tend to be more receptive to information with which they are familiar or have seen before in a different context. Scanning the front page of the newspaper often provides a trainer with information about events and situations that are relevant to a learning session. Using current events can also relate the learning point to a real-world situation. Here are some tips to using current affairs to support a learning point:

- ✓ Avoid issues that may cause the discussion to digress into areas outside of the purpose of the learning session.
- ✓ When facilitating in other cities, try to find information on local current events that you can incorporate into your learning session.

*Source Unknown: Adapted by St. F.X. and Laubach Literacy of Canada.*

## Participation Styles and Strategies

The following section deals with strategies for involving participants and managing their participation. The information in the table below focuses on the behaviour that the participants may be engaged in and the strategy that the trainer can use to successfully manage their participation.

Behaviour	Strategy
<p><b>Overly talkative</b></p> <p>Certain participants may be “eager beavers”. They may be well-informed and anxious to demonstrate it, or just naturally active and involved.</p>	<p>Do not embarrass them; you may want to call on their participation and input later on.</p> <p>Ask thought provoking questions or interject with “That’s an interesting point; now let’s see what the group thinks of it.” As others become more vocal the problem will be resolved.</p>
<p><b>Argumentative</b></p> <p>A participant may be confrontational or want to heckle. This individual may resent being in the session or be upset by a personal situation that they are dealing with.</p>	<p>Keep your feelings in check. Remember that the behaviour is not personal and that there is likely something else under the surface.</p> <p>Do not allow other participants to be influenced by the behaviour.</p> <p>Try to find merit in one of their points – express your agreement or get agreement from the rest of the group – then move on.</p> <p>If the individual makes an obviously incorrect statement, turn it back to the group and let them deal with it.</p> <p>Talk to the individual privately during a break to find out what is bothering them.</p>
<p><b>Overly Helpful</b></p> <p>This participant is interested in contributing in a positive way, but over participation makes it difficult for others to get involved.</p>	<p>Use eye contact and questions to get others involved.</p> <p>Thank the helpful participant, but suggest that you would like to hear from others.</p> <p>Use the helpful participant’s talents to summarize occasionally.</p>
<p><b>Rambler</b></p> <p>Ramblers talk about everything <i>except</i> the topic at hand. They will sometimes get sidetracked or will focus the discussion on personal issues/concerns or stories.</p>	<p>When the participant pauses, express your thanks.</p> <p>Refocus attention by restating the relevant points, then move on.</p> <p>Acknowledge the contribution, but point out that the session is getting off topic.</p>

Behaviour	Strategy
<p><b>Personality clash</b></p> <p>Two or more participants – or the trainer and a participant – may clash. This could divide the group and create a poor learning environment for everyone.</p>	<p>If the clash is between you and a participant, remember that it takes two to clash; so as the trainer you will need to examine your own behaviour.</p> <p>Emphasize the points of agreement and minimize disagreement.</p> <p>Draw attention back to the objective.</p> <p>Ask direct questions regarding the topic, and bring a positive group member into the discussion.</p> <p>Point out that it is not necessary for everyone to agree, but that all participants should have a chance to air their views.</p>
<p><b>Obstinate</b></p> <p>This individual will not budge from a particular viewpoint, despite contrary opinions expressed by the trainer or other participants. This may be the result of personal philosophy or simply not seeing or understanding the point.</p>	<p>Offer the participant’s view to the group. Allow an opportunity to debate the issue.</p> <p>Point out that time is short, but that you will be glad to discuss it further after the session or during a break.</p> <p>Suggest that “We agree to disagree” and move on.</p>
<p><b>Wrong subject</b></p> <p>This participant does not ramble, but is simply off topic.</p>	<p>Take the responsibility yourself by saying “Something I said must have led us away from the topic.”</p> <p>Restate the last point given that was relevant to the topic at hand.</p>
<p><b>Side conversations</b></p> <p>Side conversations may or may not be related to the topic at hand, but become a problem when they are distracting to you or other participants.</p>	<p>Call on one of the participants involved in the side conversation by name and ask an obvious question, or restate the last point made and ask them for their opinion.</p> <p>Pause until the discussion is over, or until those involved realize that the full group is awaiting their return.</p>
<p><b>Inarticulate</b></p> <p>Inarticulate individuals lack the ability to put their thoughts into a cohesive message quickly. They may be following the discussion, but are unable to express their ideas clearly.</p>	<p>Say, “Let me paraphrase that.” Then express what you think the participant was trying to say. Get their agreement that the message has been understood clearly and correctly.</p> <p>Try not to change the intent of the message, but rephrase their choice of words so that it makes more sense.</p>

Behaviour	Strategy
<p><b>Definitely wrong</b></p> <p>Sometimes a participant will contribute a comment that is obviously incorrect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v · Try to handle this situation with tact. You do not want to offend the individual.</li> <li>v · Request a rephrasing of the comment to verify that you have understood their intent.</li> <li>v · Ask a leading question or two to try to get them to rethink their comment.</li> <li>v · Make sure that, in the end, the full group understands the <i>correct</i> answer or fact.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Insists on facilitator's opinion</b></p> <p>There is nothing wrong with participants seeking your professional opinion on a topic or issue. It becomes difficult, however, when you feel that a participant is trying to test you or to put you on the spot.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v · Generally avoid solving participants' problems for them.</li> <li>v · Solicit opinions from the group before giving your answer.</li> <li>v · Sometimes, you may need to simply give a direct answer and move on.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Won't talk</b></p> <p>This individual may be bored, indifferent, timid, or insecure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v · Develop interest by seeking their opinion.</li> <li>v · Draw out the participant in the next seat; then ask for the quiet person's views on what has been said.</li> <li>v · If seated near you, ask for an opinion so that they feel that they are talking to you – not to the full group.</li> <li>v · The first time they talk, thank them.</li> </ul>

*Source Unknown: Adapted by St. F.X. and Laubach Literacy of Canada*

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## Questioning and the Learning Process

Questioning is a favoured means of processing facts or opinions in a learning session and is also a helpful way to engage participants and to draw out information and/or challenges that are being experienced. As you progress through the workshop sessions, the use of questioning will provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on and make sense of the information and/or data that is being collected or conveyed. Questions can probe for meaning, connection and conclusions.

The art of good questioning is a key tool that a trainer will develop. Skill in questioning techniques permits you to be effective and efficient in the learning process and will ensure a participatory approach to your workshops. There is a close relationship between a person's ability to use questions effectively and their knowledge of the subject area.

Questioning serves a wide range of purposes:

- To stimulate thinking, to relate cause and effect, to consider implications, to form judgements, etc.
- To assess what is known and what is not known
- To emphasize or reinforce significant points (e.g. review)
- To encourage the exchange of opinions and ideas, thereby developing new appreciations and attitudes, and
- To stimulate interest and curiosity, thereby motivating students.

### **The Art of Good Questions**

- ✓ Questions should be carefully sequenced to lead to some understanding. They should aim at fitting various pieces of information into a meaningful whole. Prepared or written questions may be helpful in doing this.
- ✓ Open-ended questions (those requiring more than a “yes” or “no” answer) and “how” and “why” questions are more likely to challenge thinking and stimulate discussion.

#### ***A good question is***

- clear
- concise
- thought-provoking
- limited in scope, and
- within the learner's experience and knowledge.

#### ***Avoid questions that are***

- vague and general (“What about...?”)
- double-barrelled (two questions in one)
- embarrassing or too challenging.

## **Sample questions**

### ***To lead off the workshop***

- What do you need to know about...?
- What are your expectations for...?
- What is the worst/best that could happen regarding...?

### ***Following a learning exercise***

- What happened in terms of...?
- Were there any surprises about...?
- What did you observe in terms of...?
- What were you aware of regarding...?

### ***After responses received***

- What does that mean to you?
- Why was... significant?
- How do these fit together?
- What conclusions might we draw from...?
- What does that suggest to you about...?

### ***To show relevance and encourage application***

- How could you apply...?
- What might you do to help apply...?
- How will...be useful to you in your professional role?

## **Facilitating the responses**

- ✓ Pause long enough after a question has been asked to allow time for thinking to occur.
- ✓ Avoid giving the answer to your own question. (Inexperienced trainers may become uncomfortable during a pause and break the silence themselves.)
- ✓ If after the pause there are no responses, prompt the participants by asking a follow-up question, by asking the question in a different way, or by providing an example.
- ✓ Acknowledge any responses that are received.

*Source: St. F.X. Reproduced and/or adapted by Laubach Literacy of Canada.*

## **Handling responses**

Whenever you ask a question of workshop participants, it is out of your control as far as the responses you receive and the manner in which they are conveyed. A skilled trainer has experience in managing the exchange of information. The following are some tips for you to use when receiving or fielding responses.

### ***Incorrect response***

- Avoid using the words “no” or “wrong”. Correct the misconception, seek out any parts of the response that may be correct and then continue on by asking others in the group for the correct answer.

### ***Partially correct response***

- Give recognition for correct parts of the response. “Almost” or “you’re on the right track” are good comments. Then ask the group to add to the answer.

### ***Too lengthy a correct response***

- Actively seek an opportunity to break in tactfully and thank the person for their contribution.

### ***Correct response***

- Provide recognition and confirmation by saying “Thank you” or a confirming “Yes” or “Well said!”.
- Ask others if they have anything further that they would like to add (build on responses).

## **Answering questions from participants**

Most people ask questions to gain further information, to get clarification on a point, or to satisfy their curiosity. Often questions will express a general concern of the group or lead you into the next topic. Be sure to schedule time for and encourage questions from the participants.

The most common questions asked by participants cover a wide variety of topic areas, including the following:

- Tutor commitment
- The students
- Mechanics of tutoring
- Use of the materials
- Tutoring problems that may arise
- Support services available.

Answers to most questions can be found in this manual or in the Laubach Way to Reading series. Some answers will depend on local procedures. You may want to jot down questions that frequently come up during workshops. A compiled list of questions will help you to identify the areas of your workshop presentation that require more elaboration.

The following are some tips for responding to participant questions:

- Ensure that you and the group understand the question. If necessary, before responding, paraphrase the question back to the individual that posed it.
- Answers should be thoughtful, specific and concise. Always follow up with the participant to ensure that you have answered their question.
- Never ignore a question. Each question must be responded to in some form. For example: If the question is on material that will be covered later, make the group aware that this topic will be coming up. You may want to create a “question parking lot” on a flip chart to ensure that all questions have been responded to by the end of the session.  
  
*Note:* If there is any part of the question that may pose a barrier to learning before it is responded to, you can cover that portion but do not spend time on material that will be covered at a later time.
- If you do not know the answer to a question, a helpful strategy is to turn the question to the group and ask for their input. If the question cannot be answered, make a commitment to find the answer and report back to the group as soon as possible. As a learning opportunity, you may assign researching the answer to one or all of the participants.
- Occasionally, participants may ask questions to argue a point or to stray off subject. It is important to avoid these traps as you will run out of time for other important aspects of the workshop. You might say something like “That is an interesting question and I wish we had time to go into it, but let’s get back to the subject at hand.” You might suggest discussing it further with the participant after class.