

Adult Learning Techniques

CoreNet Global will give preference to proposals that are learner-centric and which demonstrate state-of-the-art adult-learning techniques. [Malcolm Knowles](#) championed the word "[Andragogy](#)". Andragogy focuses on adult learning strategies and centers attention on the process of engaging adult learners within the structure of the learning experience. Below are links to various articles on Adult Learning principles that may help you as you develop and format of your proposed presentation.

- [**Eight Adult Learning Principles**](#)
- [**Facilitator Of Learning Guidelines**](#)
- [**Andragogy – How Adults Learn**](#)
- [**Stomaching Long Conference Lectures Is Out! Active Attendee Participation is In! - 14 Presentation Techniques That Encourage Maximum Learning, Participation And Memory Retention**](#)

Eight Adult Learning Principles

Here are eight adult learning principles grounded in neuroscience and andragogy, the study of how adults learn, to help guide your presentation.

1. Principle of Active Learning

Active participation through discussion, feedback and activities creates more learning than passive listening or reading. As a presenter, find ways to reduce the amount of content covered and allow the participants to discuss the content with each other.

2. Principle of Problem-Centric

Adults come to your presentation expecting to get their problems solved. They are not there just to get more information. If your presentation does not help them solve their pressing issues, it will be forgotten. Adults are problem-centric, not content-centric.

3. Principle of Previous Experience

New information has to be linked to previous knowledge and experience or it will not be remembered. Allow participants time to discuss with each other how the new information connects with what they already know. As a speaker, sometimes you may need to help them see the connections.

4. Principle of Relevance

If the information being presented is not relevant to the listener's life and work, it will not get their attention. As a speaker, your content must have meaning and immediate relevance. If your concepts are complicated or difficult to understand, the listeners will lose attention.

5. Principle of Emotional Connection

Presentations that connect with a learner's emotions are more likely to be remembered, recalled and learned. Fear is not a good motivating factor for learning as it causes the brain to react in a fight or flight syndrome. Fear actually hampers real learning. As a speaker, debrief participants after emotional stories or experiences so that they can reflect and learn from their feelings.

6. Principle of Self-Learning

Adult learners have some strong beliefs about how they learn. These beliefs, whether accurate or not, can interfere or enhance their learning. As a speaker, always explain why the audience should participate in specific activity and how the process as well as content benefits their learning.

7. Principle of Alignment

Adults expect that a presenter's content, learning outcomes and activities be aligned together. If the learning outcomes do not match the content, the learner feels disconnected and learning is hampered. If the learning activity seems childish or forced, learning is lost.

8. Principle of Fun

Learning should be fun! As a presenter, if you are not having fun presenting your information and facilitating learning, then you should stop. By all means, make learning fun, enjoyable and filled with laughter!

Facilitator Of Learning Guidelines

Here are seven guidelines to help speakers become facilitators of adult learning instead of lecturers.

1. The facilitator sets the initial climate of the learning experience.

Whether overtly or in subtle ways, the facilitator communicates his or her trust in the group, the individuals and the learning process.

2. The facilitator helps clarify the purpose of the presentation as well as extract each individual's own goal.

The facilitator allows participants the freedom to state why the topic is important to them.

3. The facilitator elicits each participant's purpose and leverages the motivational force behind that learning.

Even if the participant's desire is to be guided and led by another, the facilitator can accept that need and provide a course of action. The facilitator is able to leverage the participant's own motivation to learn.

4. The facilitator regards his or her own identity as a flexible resource for the group.

The facilitator acts as advisor, coach, counselor and one with experience in the field. The facilitator is able to express his or her own feelings and beliefs that are not seen as judgments or the only way to think.

5. The facilitator sees each participant as a resource with experiences and knowledge.

As the climate becomes established, the facilitator is increasingly able to also become a participant learner.

6. The facilitator accepts both intellectual content and emotional attitudes from participants.

The facilitator aims to give each contribution the appropriate amount of emphasis. He or she also accepts rationalizing and intellectualizing.

7. The facilitator helps participants exploit their own experiences as related to the new topic.

The facilitator gears the presentation to the participants' level of experience. The facilitator helps participants apply new content to their own knowledge and experience, thus integrating it.

Andragogy – How Adults Learn

Malcolm Knowles championed the word “**Andragogy**” to describe how adults learn in contrast to how children learn or “pedagogy.” Andragogy focuses on adult learning strategies. It centers attention on the process of engaging adult learners within the structure of the learning experience.

14 Andragogy Principles

Here are 14 andragogy principles based on a research that should be used to ensure a successful learning experience.

1. Learning is fundamentally social.

Learning is about more than the process of acquiring knowledge. Successful learning is often socially constructed and can require unlearning old ways. It may require changes to one’s identity and core beliefs, which can take time and is challenging, yet powerful.

2. Knowledge is integrated in the life of communities and the connections we maintain.

Developing shared values, perspectives, and ways of doing things creates communities of practice and purpose. Learning is about optimizing our connections to people within our communities of purpose that matter to us.

3. Learning is an act of participation.

The motivation to learn is the desire to become an accepted member of a community of practice. It’s about building and maintaining person-to-person connections that bring value.

4. The depth of our learning depends on the depth of our engagement.

We glean knowledge and retain more information from active participation in many different situations and activities. The more we are actively involved, the more our brains’ hardwiring is fired-up and the more we learn. Thus, passive listening is the lowest form of engagement, next to reading information. (You’re reading this now. That’s why leaving comments on a blog, requires the brain to become engaged in more depth and to process this information differently. You have to think about how to respond and how it applies to you before you type.)

5. Engagement is joined at the hip with empowerment.

We perceive our identities in terms of our ability to contribute. We want to have a positive impact on the life and growth of communities and be seen as resources to the connections we have. Engage us and we feel empowered.

6. Exclusion from active participation equals failure to learn.

Learning requires access and the ability to contribute. Fill a conference with one-way lectures and you increase learning failure.

7. WIIFM (what’s in it for me) is critical.

We want to learn subjects that have immediate relevancy to our work. If we don’t get WIIFM quickly through the marketing material or at the beginning of the presentation, we disconnect and lose attention.

8. Big picture first, then the details.

We often don’t return from the presenter’s rabbit trails. Don’t take us into the weeds, as our minds are fickle. If it doesn’t fit within our context and we don’t understand why we need to know the information, you won’t earn our attention. The details should support the big picture ideas.

9. Where does this new learning fit in relation to the other stuff I know?

We rely increasingly on our prior knowledge, experiences, failures and successes. That’s why listening to other adults’ experiences help us build fresh frameworks for newly acquired knowledge. We like to ask others questions, especially those that have different experiences from us. It increases our attention.

10. Sell me on why I need to know this.

We must know the why before we know the how.

11. We are problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

Adults are oriented toward solving problems and making instant application. It must meet my relevancy factor. If your content doesn't resolve my issues, I don't care.

12. Remove the obstacles and barriers to my learning please.

Don't turn the lights down or off during the presentation. You'll lose my attention and I want to see to take notes or type. (Like it or not, our vision and hearing decline as we age). Pay attention to the surrounding environment. Are there physical objects that limit my view? Are there any other environmental factors that will create a barrier to learning through the five senses? Can I see the faces of other participants or just the back of their heads?

13. Repetition increases my retention of critical information.

Use common experiences to relate new and difficult information. It provides a bridge to familiar encounters. Short-term memory decreases with age. The more critical learning points need to be repeated in a variety of ways so, it will move from short to long-term memory.

14. Let me decide how I'll learn it.

Informal learning is critical. I'll get bored quickly if you expect me to sit through another panel dialogue or another hour of a talking head. Provide me with options on learning it. If I want to passively sit and checkout, that's because I've been up too late the night before, or I've reached my saturation level. On the other hand, I prefer to be actively involved. And as far as I'm concerned, you as the presenter are guilty until proven innocent. If you use activity to promote involvement, it stimulates interest; retention and I'll trust you more.

Stomaching Long Conference Lectures Is Out!

Active Attendee Participation is In!

14 Presentation Techniques That Encourage Maximum Learning, Participation And Memory Retention



Today, many conference attendees will no longer tolerate the same old lectures, the conference committee's poorly-planned-everything-for-everyone-panel or sessions that have no real meaning to their work.

Younger generations will not endure classes that could have been learned at their desks in 30 minutes and other wasteful conference presentations that older generations have stomached in the name of courtesy and manners.

Attendees want engagement. They want to engage with the presenter, with each other and with the content. They want to be actively involved in their learning.

Active learning in conference sessions is a necessity that conference organizers can't afford to exclude.

What is active learning?

Active learning occurs when the learner is involved in more than just listening to a lecture. It involves discussion with others (not just the presenter), structured note taking, problem solving and participation in some form.



Active learning also stimulates cognitive learning and the use of higher level thinking skills like analysis, evaluation and synthesis. It does not include participation for participation's sake. Active learning does not mean just moving a part of the body so retention increases. It means instructional activities where attendees do something and are involved in critical thinking while doing it. It does not mean punching a button on an audience response system. It means transforming traditional conference session practices like lectures into problem-based learning, collaborative, and activity based approaches with guidance from the presenter.

While active learning strategies may require more up-front work by the presenter, ultimately, research shows that these strategies increase attendee's learning and retention of knowledge and skills. So practically speaking, what does active learning look like in today's conferences and workshops?

Here are 14 presentation techniques that encourage maximum learning, participation and retention.

1. Body Voting

This simple activity is great as an icebreaker or intro to a subject. It helps the presenter and attendees quickly gauge the experience or knowledge level of a group. Body voting is simply the process of asking the audience to take an action based on a series of questions. Example: Have everyone stand. Then ask the following questions: If you've been in this industry for more than one year, stay standing. Those that haven't please take a seat. If you've been in this industry for more than five years, stay standing. Those that haven't please sit. Repeat the process until only a few are standing. Use this process with industry or content specific questions. Why use this over audience response systems? Because people need the chance to move around, especially if they've been sitting for several hours at a conference. You also don't have to incur the costs of ARS or projection for this type of activity.

2. Case Studies

Case studies are written accounts of real or fictitious situations or problems. Some case studies are left unsolved so that participants can analyze job-related situations and arrive at their own conclusions. They are designed to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills. They are not intended to be prescriptive or to prove a point. Case studies may be from two to ten pages in length. For small groups, ask participants to discuss possible solutions and outcomes. Or provide a list of questions to help facilitate a conversation.

3. Critical Incidents

Similar in design to case studies, critical incidents are much shorter, usually a paragraph in length.

4. Fishbowls

Fishbowl activities have garnered a lot of attention since [Samuel Smith's use of it at Event Camp 2010](#). One variation of Smith's procedure is forming a circle within a circle. The inner circle discusses an issue while the outer circle listens and takes notes on group dynamics, process or content. After a set time, the outer circle shares their observations. Then the groups switch and the process is repeated.

5. Human Spectrogram

The presenter starts by making a statement. Attendees then stand along one wall where one corner represents strongly agree and the opposite corner represents strongly disagree. Attendees are asked to stand along the wall where they rate their level of agreement with the statement. Some may choose to stand in the middle. Some may stand closer to one corner. The presenter can pose a variety of statements with different variables to see how the majority of the audience feels about specific issues.

6. Jigsaw Grouping Brainstorming

The attendees are divided into separate groups each with a pre-established topic, facilitator and flip chart. The participants brainstorm the topic of their group while someone keeps notes on a flip chart. After a prearranged time, members of the group separate and go to other tables where that table's topic is discussed and the flip chart shared. The facilitator at each table helps start the brainstorming where the previous group ended. At the end, all charts are shared with the attendees.

7. Lecturette

Short ten to fifteen minute lectures spoken or distributed via handouts that frame a conversation, situation or theory. Lecturettes are intended to establish some common language between presenters and attendees about a model, principle or process. They are a perfect fit before an activity or to segue into a different topic.

8. Mind Maps (sometimes referred to Mind Webs)

Often used to help individuals and groups to think globally and creatively, mind maps help attendees analyze, classify, evaluate, generate, list, structure and visualize important ideas. Attendees draw diagrams representing words, ideas, issues, tasks, etc., around a central idea.

9. Open Space Session

Modeled on author Harrison Owen's Open Space Technology, open space is an umbrella term describing a variety of meeting formats where participants define the agenda with a rigorous process. All attendees contribute to the scope of the session, the agenda, the groupings and the topics. Often used as problem solving tool or peer-engagement process.

10. Pair-Squared

Attendees are asked to form a pair, turn to a neighbor on their right or left and discuss a specific issue, question or topic. Each attendee is given a specific time period to speak while the other attendee listens. Then roles change and the process is repeated. After both attendees have played listener and talker, they find another pair. Then attendee A tells the other pair what attendee B said while the three listen. Then attendee B tells the other pair what attendee A stated while the three listen. The process repeats for the other pair.

11. Peer -To-Peer Round Table Discussions

A structured system to provide peer engagement around specific topics. Attendees enter a room and each table has an established topic and facilitator. The facilitator follows a set of instructions to allow each table participant to help guide frame the discussion on three important ideas.

12. Role Plays

Role plays allow participants to create manageable versions of situations in which they can practice new behaviors and try on new forms of communication. Participants can make and correct mistakes in a safe environment while preparing them to be more effective in real world situations.

13. Structured Note Taking

Structure note taking is providing some type of graphical representation that frames the lecture, discussion or reading. Some presenters intentionally omit important words or phrases from handouts to allow attendee to write them in the spaces provided. For most people, learning and retention trumps going green and omitting handouts, especially structured note taking. To stay environmental-friendly, close the recycling loop and used recycled paper.

14. World Cafe Model

The World Cafe is a conversational process about questions and issues that matter. Using a specific method of integrated design principles to guide conversations for business and social issues. Conversations build and link with each other as participants move from group to group creating a collaborative, cross-pollinated approach to problem solving.