



Adult Learning Considerations

The NHI's goal is to optimize training for maximum effectiveness, ensuring that the greatest amount of learning takes place within certain defined constraints. This process involves developing course materials that map to the overall course goal and course outcomes; articulating learning outcomes for each lesson or module that support the course outcomes; and incorporating the principles of adult learning and Instructional System Design (ISD) throughout curriculum development. The contractor shall be guided by the course goal, course outcomes and lesson learning outcomes when developing course materials.

The course shall be structured in an INTERACTIVE format such that the learner is actively involved in the learning experience, rather than a passive recipient of information. The training shall include a combination of instructional strategies such as lectures, facilitated discussions, group exercises, videos, case studies, and the like. ISD methodology as found in Essentials of Learning for Instruction by Robert M. Gagné and Marcy Perkins Driscoll, or Making Instruction Work by Robert F. Mager are strongly recommended.

NHI trains to Kirkpatrick's Level Two (reference Evaluating Training Programs, the Four Levels, Donald L. Kirkpatrick), defined as the participant acquiring added skill and knowledge as a result of the training, which must be demonstrated in the classroom, and confirmed by the instructor. Additionally, NHI recommends Bloom's Taxonomy of performance levels when crafting learning outcomes. Learning outcomes must be written as observable and measurable performance (reference NHI Style Guide for more information). And the International Association of Continuing Education and Training (IACET) has certified NHI as an authorized provider of Continuing Education Units (CEU's).

Before revising, developing or presenting any training program targeted at adult audiences, it is first useful to gain an appreciation of the difference between child-centered learning and adult-centered learning. Almost all of us have experienced 12 or more years of education as children and many of us have experienced additional years of education as young adults. The educational models fixed in our minds are the pedagogical models-- the art and science of teaching children--drawn from those experiences. As adult trainers, it is easy for us to teach as we were taught rather than implement good adult learning principles.

We know the following things about adults learners:

- Adults have a need to know why they should learn something. One of the first tasks of the adult trainer is to develop a "need to know" in the learner — to demonstrate the value of what is being offered to them.
- Adults have a deep need to be self-directed. However, often when they enter a program labeled "education" or "training" they revert back to their conditioning as children, put on their hats of dependency, fold their arms, sit back and say, "Teach me." This puts them at immediate odds with their need for self-direction, causes inner conflict and a resistance to participation in training. To resolve this as adult trainers we must help adult learners make a quick transition from seeing themselves as dependent learners to becoming self-directed.
- Adults have a greater volume and different quality of experience than children. Adults bring into the learning situation a background of experience that is itself a rich resource for many kinds of learning for themselves and others. Adults have a broader base of experience to which to attach new ideas and skills and give them richer meaning. The greater experience, however, also has a potential negative consequence. The greater experience can cause people to develop habits of thought and bias, to make presuppositions, to be less open to new ideas. Evidence indicates that this phenomenon is especially characteristic of undereducated adults.
- Adults become ready to learn when they experience in their life situation a need to know or be able to do in order to perform more effectively and with greater satisfaction. *Adults learn best when they choose voluntarily to make a commitment to learn.*
- Adults enter into a learning experience with a task-centered (or problem-centered) orientation to learning. Adult learning activities are better received when designed around tasks, problems, or life situations. Very often, if they can apply what they have learned to a recent experience or situation, they can better appreciate the newfound knowledge and skills.
- Adults are motivated to learn by both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators. The problem is they may not be motivated to learn what we want to teach them, hence the importance to develop "a need to know" as a basic ingredient of adult training. The most potent and persistent motivators for adults are intrinsic motivators such as self-esteem, broadened responsibilities, power, and achievement.

Implications for Practice

Adult learning concepts-- combined with an understanding of the training need-- suggest the following approach to course design:

- Participants want to have a chance to tailor knowledge to their local situation.
- Participants want to have an opportunity to interact with others during the training session.
- Participants want to understand why something is important.
- Participants have a need for training that will demonstrate the benefits of learning.