

# How Adults Learn

## I. Physical characteristics.

1. Adults are more sensitive to their surroundings and to discomforts. Ask the learners if they are comfortable.
2. Adults are declining physically, they can no longer hear and see as well as children. Set-up the room so everyone can see and hear.
3. Learners will engage in discussion and learn more if they can see each other.

## II. Mental characteristics of the adult learner.

1. Adults attend because they want to learn.
2. Problem orientation is important. Adults want to learn to solve a problem. Adults are more satisfied if learning applies to everyday experiences, that are practical and current.
3. Time is important to the adult learner. Adults are concerned with specific, narrow topics of relevance rather than broad, general subjects.

## III. Social characteristics.

1. Adults have a variety of life experiences. Drawing on life experiences can make a class exciting and interesting.
2. Generally it is best to reduce the number of associations with formal schooling in the style and approach of the teacher.

*Things that are certain about the adult learner...*

1. It is the individual's responsibility to learn.
2. A teacher can help or hinder another's attempt to learn.
3. By facilitating learning and helping the learners you can be a positive influence.

*A good teacher of adults ...is people-centered, more interested in people than things, more interested in individuality than conformity, and more interested in finding solutions than following rules. The teacher must be understanding, flexible, patient, humorous, practical, creative, and prepared.*

*How to Teach Adults*, William A. Draves, 1984; The Learning Resources Network



**Source:** Training Curriculum, Family Nutrition Program, Purdue University Cooperative Extension, 2001.

