

# How do I know how adults learn?

## Topic focus

- characteristics of learners who are at post-secondary education level
- implications for teaching at this level

## Topic outcomes

- you will be able to reflect on how you can better meet the needs of adult learners

***'I can remember my teachers at school. But do adults learn differently? I am now working in an adult learning environment. I can't assume that what works for school aged learners will work for adults. Or can I?'***

### Take a moment to reflect on this issue.

What challenges does this pose for *your* teaching? .....

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## Possible solutions

1. Shift your emphasis from a teacher centred approach of information transfer to a facilitation of student centred learning conditions.
2. Tap into adult students' life experiences and help them to build on these.
3. Build on adult student motivation to learn by creating/using interesting learning materials and activities.
4. Encourage an increasing shift of responsibility for learning from teacher to student.
5. Avoid the threatening and punitive approach to teaching sometimes evident in secondary school teaching and learning.
6. Create an environment which is non-threatening, supportive and goal based.

## More help

Here are some resources from which you may seek some advice. They are all annotated so as to assist you in making judgements about what might be useful advice for your particular teaching context. By exploring some or all of these resources, you may well be able to generate strategies to suit your particular circumstances.

1. <http://adulted.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fagelesslearner.com%2Fintros%2Fadultlearning.html> - a useful site which contains an overview of adult learning theory, a list of books about how adults learn, links to other websites about how adults learn, and a brief list of other key adult learning resources.
2. <http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/adults-2.htm> - contains a brief discussion of the principles of adult learning, what motivates adult learners, and some tips to improve teaching

3. <http://www.learnerassociates.net/workshop/> - offers a range of practical tips and strategies for helping adults to learn, set out in easy to follow 'worksheet' format.
4. <http://agelesslearner.com/intros/andragogy.html> - is a basic discussion of the difference between pedagogy (child) and andragogy (adult).
5. <http://archon.educ.kent.edu/~nebraska/curric/ttim1/aaal.html> - succinctly summarises assumptions about adult learners.
6. <http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/ltia/issue5/artess.shtml> - provides a generalised overview of learning theories, how adults learn and different learning styles. Doesn't address practical strategies for teaching adults.
7. <http://www.nald.ca/clr/demyst/chapter5.htm> - a practical and concisely written reflection on teaching adults.

## **Alert !**

The term 'adult learner' is used here in its broadest sense. It does not only mean adults who are returning to study after a break from formal education. It refers to all students with whom we may come in contact at tertiary level.

## **Related topics**

- *How do I cater for different learning styles?*
- *How might my students approach their learning?*
- *How do motivate my students to learn?*