

Recommendations for Online Course Development based on Characteristics of Adult Learners

Characteristic	Recommendation
Adults may have some limitations and these should be considered in the design of the online environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use a clear menu structure ✓ Provide practice with feedback ✓ Chunk information into 5-9 bits of information
Adults learning styles need to be considered. In any group of adults there will be a wide range of individual differences, thus the individualization of learning experiences is important in many situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure that students can move through the instruction at their own pace and review previous learning whenever they want ✓ Provide links to a wide variety of web resources ✓ Ensure to allow ample time for students to master the content ✓ Use strategies such as consciousness raising, journal keeping, reflection logs, guided questioning
Adults need to be actively involved in the learning process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage learners to formulate their learning objectives ✓ Provide regular, consistent communication to individual learners and groups ✓ Assure learners that discussion board postings are being read ✓ Provide flexibility in assignments that allow students to work ahead ✓ Divide learning into small manageable units that can be completed in relatively short amounts of time for logical stopping and starting points
Adults need scaffolding to be provided by the instructor.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide resources to assist students to complete tasks

<p>Adults have pre-existing learning history and will need support to work in the new learner-centered paradigm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Encourage all students to post responses to questions, read other comments, and post responses to other people's posts
<p>Adults need the instructor acting as a facilitator.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Use questioning techniques to provoke thinking, stimulate recall, and challenge beliefs ✓ Use participants experience, protect minority opinions, keep disagreements civil, and make connections between opinions and ideas presented by the students ✓ Display student work
<p>Adults need consideration of their previous experience. The instructor should acknowledge this prior experience. Adults need to connect new knowledge to past events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do a needs assessment and a student self-assessment prior to class starting. Recognize the value of experience ✓ Open the class with introductions that include personal and professional background. Instructor should do the same
<p>Adults need to see the link between what they are learning and how it will apply to their lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Incorporate activities in assignments that students can relate to, such as real situation or events ✓ Encourage students to apply their life and work experiences to learning
<p>Adults need to feel that learning focuses on issues that directly concern them so the course should be learner-centered</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Explain how the course information will be of use to the learners ✓ Involve learners in diagnosing their needs to help trigger internal motivation
<p>Adults need to test their learning as they go along, rather than receive background theory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Apply concepts to tasks or problems
<p>Adult learning requires a climate that is collaborative, respectful, mutual, and informal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Individuals may have perspectives and bring these to the classroom; these may be a result of their religion, gender, ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and/or physical abilities. Acknowledge these. ✓ Establish an environment that learners feel safe and comfortable in expressing

	themselves and feel respected for their views
Adults need to self-reflect on the learning process and be given support for transformational learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide ways for learners to engage in metacognitive reflection. Students may benefit from the use of logs, reflective journals, and group discussions within a cooperative learning setting
Adults need dialogue and social interaction must be provided. They need to collaborate with other students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide an area that students can feel free to discuss their experiences ✓ Grade assignments with specific, stated criteria

Cercone (2008, p. 140-141, 154-159).