

## Five Principles to Enhance Adult Learning

Now let's consider how the adult brain determines what information and skills are worth retaining.

In the 1960's, Malcolm Knowles conducted a series of studies to identify the factors necessary for adults to learn. Additional research has confirmed that - in any situation where they are presented with new information – adults learn best when circumstances meet the following principles:

<p><b>Respect</b></p>	<p>Adults are more open to learning new things when <b>they are acknowledged for the wisdom, skills and resources they bring</b> to the new situation. The root word for respect is the same as that for "spectacles." Respect can be literally translated as "I see you."</p> <p>To show <b>respect</b> in a learning environment, acknowledge people for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who they are,</li> <li>• What they know and do, and</li> <li>• What they bring to the present situation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relevance</b></p>	<p>When you were in school and a teacher introduced a complex theory or some historical minutia or a difficult algebra equation, do you remember anyone asking, "why do we have to know this?" That question represents the learner's desire for <b>relevance!</b></p> <p>It's the same for adults, except that adults are in charge of their own lives – so if a "teacher" doesn't make the information relevant to the adult learner, that learner will decide it is unimportant and leave the information behind.</p> <p>To ensure relevance in a learning environment, <b>ask people what they would like to learn and how that information will be useful to them.</b> Then you can work together to find the answers to their questions.</p> <p>Sometimes people don't know what they don't know. In such cases, you can help the adult learner to take in new information by explaining how the information will be useful in their lives.</p>

<p><b>Immediacy</b></p>	<p>For adults to retain new information, they must be able to see a <b>useful application for the information – right away – in their own lives</b>. Immediacy builds on relevance, giving the adult learner a way to put their new knowledge to work for them.</p> <p>To incorporate immediacy, <b>you will need to know something about your learners</b> so that you can point out how they can put the information you present to use - right away - in their situations. Often, if you have done a good job of demonstrating respect and relevance, the learners will figure out the immediate applications for themselves (these often look like “aha” moments).</p> <p>You can also ask about plans for the near future. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Do you already have a plan for how you'd like your first night with your new puppy to go?"</li> <li>• "What else can I help you with to get your relationship with your new cat off on the right foot?"</li> </ul>
<p><b>Safety</b></p>	<p>Learning takes a lot of energy and requires focus. People are more capable of learning when it is safe enough to do so. While there are many variations in how people like to learn, generally a <b>safe learning environment is</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive,</li> <li>• Free from threat of physical or emotional harm, and</li> <li>• Meets at least some of the learners’ needs for concentration (not too loud or chaotic, etc.) and comfort (not too warm or cold, ample seating, etc.).</li> </ul> <p>To practice safety, look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to <b>praise learners for their accomplishments</b></li> <li>• Ways to correct mistakes that <b>help people retain their dignity</b></li> </ul> <p>Safety doesn’t mean there will be no challenge or no corrections; it means only that there will be <b>no dumb questions</b>.</p>
<p><b>Engagement</b></p>	<p>Engagement is <b>closely related to the 20/40/80% retention concept</b>. An old proverb speaks eloquently of engagement: “Tell me...and I will forget. Show me...and I may remember. Involve me...and I will understand.”</p> <p>People learn best when they are <b>actively involved in acquiring the information</b>. Active involvement can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicing a new skill right away</li> <li>• Using new information to solve a problem</li> <li>• Having a meaningful dialogue about the ramifications of the information</li> </ul> <p>To reach that 80% of retention – to really engage your learners – look for ways to get your learners to <i>do</i> something (right then and there) with the information you’re providing.</p>