5 Things You Should Know About

adult learners

1. **Give them choices.**

   Adults are more likely to be self-directed. They expect to be treated as peers and they are likely to take responsibility for their own learning. Adults are accustomed to making decisions about their lives—where they will live, the type of career they will pursue, and how they will spend their time. When possible, allow adult learners to make choices about the types of projects they will pursue; let them tailor projects to their particular work interests. Let them help decide how the class will be structured. Provide a relaxed and comfortable classroom environment.

2. **Integrate their experiences.**

   Adult learners bring life experience to the classroom and they want their experiences to be valued. Integrate the experiences of adult learners by having them share how they might apply course concepts to their own work experience. Encourage dialogue in which learners can benefit from each other’s experience. Capitalize on their life experience as a resource for learning.

3. **Focus on solving problems or achieving goals.**

   Adult learners are usually internally motivated. Adults tend to seek out learning opportunities in order to solve problems or reaching concrete goals. Unlike children, who may have general curiosity about all kinds of things, adults are usually more goal-oriented. Design your instruction around specific problems, tasks, or goals. To engage adult learners, teach concepts enroute to a clearly defined objective. Help them connect course content to their own practice. Make sure that the instructional process provides feedback to adult learners that they are achieving instructional objectives. Rather than focusing on general subject areas, adults want instruction to focus on and be relevant to life problems or work tasks. They want to know that their time has been well spent.

4. **Help them feel comfortable in an academic environment.**

   Adult learners may have been out of school for a while and may bring a greater anxiety level about their performance and their ability to learn. Adult learners are no longer accustomed to taking tests and may not have used a course management system such as D2L. Help them identify resources that they can use to become familiar with technology. Make sure that the expectations for assignments are clear. Provide reassurance and tips to adult learners who are re-entering an academic setting.
Consider learning activities that mirror work tasks.

Consider experiential or problem-based learning that is similar to the types of tasks that learners encounter or will encounter on the job. Consider action learning, which involves working on projects that may result in products that can be used at work.