

Guidelines for Teaching in Professional Education
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Adult learners are not like the 18-25 year olds who we normally teach in class. They are less interested in theory, more application driven, and more used to being actively engaged in their learning. Sensitivity to this difference and respect to them as professionals is key to building credibility and managing effective learning. This note gives some suggestions about how to teach professionals.

Learning outcomes: Professionals participate in our programs because they want to learn something that they can take back to the job and apply. We should be aware of the learning outcomes our learners expect, and design our education so those outcomes can be achieved.

Attention span: Professionals will turn off within 15 minutes if they are not engaged, and/or if the material does not appear relevant. Plan to talk no more than for 15 minutes at a time, then ask a question, pose a problem, solicit their input, or lead a discussion.

Theory: Generally theory is only valuable if it helps motivate or guide application, and is not of direct value on its own to adult learners. Minimize the delivery of theory, and talk about applications primarily. Link ideas, principles, concepts and theories to the practical problems they face.

Examples and Stories: Adults like to learn by hearing about self-contained mini-cases (aka examples and stories) that make an important point. Tell stories and use examples.

Respecting their input: When you teach adults, you have to assume that someone among the learners will know more than you about any specific topic. Ask for their input, and be respectful as they tell their stories. Retell their story to make your point, or if it is not germane to your point, acknowledge their input and politely move on.

Questions for them to discuss – pair and share: It is a good idea to stop and ask a conceptually rich question to the group. Then ask them to discuss with a neighbor to arrive at an answer to the question. You can then solicit input representing the consensus. Another option is to give learners a read ahead, and ask them to come to class with several questions. Then the pair and share gives them the opportunity to discuss their questions and seek your input.

For international learners: when addressing a group of international learners, the lecturer needs to speak at a slower pace than normal, by about 10-20%. This both allows better comprehension, and allows for lags in translation. Second, the lecturer should speak clearly and in *Standard American English*, with complete sentences and as little jargon as possible. If there is to be translation, it is a good idea to meet with the translator and another bi-lingual expert before the session to assure the proper translation of key words and phrases.

Adopting this advice, a typical one-hour session might follow the following pattern:

- 5 min. Introduction, motivation, application or problem to be solved
- 10 min. Theory, or alternatively some theory, some application
- 5 min. Pair and share – two learners discuss a question
- 10 min. Application, or a bit more theory, then application
- 5 min. Discussion or Pair and share-about how theory or application applies to them
- 10 min. Application and related methods and tools
- 10 min. Mini-project to apply what they have learned
- 5 min. Reflection on learning by them and summary by you

Remember the objective is not covering content, but assuring learning of key ideas!