



# Increasing your Expertise

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Develop a plan and prepare for an effective training session.

## Increasing your Expertise

### Learning and Motivation

We've still got plenty to learn when it comes to adult education, how people learn, and how best to prepare teaching materials that they will relate to and remember. We haven't learned everything when it comes to the ideal conditions for effecting a permanent change in a learner's behavior, but we will certainly continue to try!

There are master trainers who pass along their favorite tips and tricks, but as Marshall McLuhan observed, "We don't know who discovered water, but we can be pretty sure it wasn't a fish." In other words, master trainers may not always be the best good judges of what it took to turn them into master performers, just as a top performer doesn't always make an ideal manager.

From a variety of sources there does emerge a body of fairly reliable knowledge about adult learning. This body can be divided into three basic ideas about adults in a learning context.

#### **Things We Know About Adult Learners and Their Motivation**

The first thing that we know is that adults generally look for learning when they are dealing with **specific events**. They want learning that is a means to an end and helps them to deal with something specific (such as a change at work or home, new tools or processes, new relationships, or other new challenges). Increasing or maintaining self-esteem and pleasure are strong secondary motivators for engaging in learning.

### Design Considerations

#### **Things We Know About Designing Curricula**

Adult learners tell us that they prefer **single concept, single theory** courses that are practical and applicable to their problems. For example, they want to learn communication skills separately from how to use their new phone or computer.

They need to move through the learning cycle and integrate new ideas with what they already know. Information that conflicts with what they already know and hold to be true is integrated more slowly.

Curriculum designers should know whether the concepts and ideas will be **in concert with** or **in conflict with** learner and organizational values. (For example, in organizations where the pace is hectic, instilling a culture of reflection is often in conflict with organizational values.)

Some adults prefer **self-directed and self-designed** learning projects, rather than those led by a professional. This is in part because they can control pace and stop and start times. Self-direction is a

highly desired state, and it does not mean isolation. In many instances, self-directed projects may involve up to 10 other people as resources, guides, encouragers, etc.

**Technical media** such as eLearning, reading books, podcasting, and television are popular methods of learning. They appeal to self-directed learners and people who have a hard time fitting large chunks of training into their schedule. However, they do not allow for shared experiences with other learners, practice of application in front of peers, or feedback from peers, which is important especially with soft skills learning.

Regardless of media, the adult learner wants a straightforward “**how to.**” Being able to apply learning is important.

In addition, lectures and seminars tend to get high ratings when learners can have **face-to-face interaction** with an expert.

### **Things We Know About the Learning Environment**

Let’s talk about things we know about working with adults in the classroom and other learning environments. The learning environment has to be **physically and psychologically comfortable**.

Some learners view classroom situations as a **risk**. Some activities, questions, and/or role plays may make them feel insecure, or as though their self-esteem and egos are on the line. Create a learning environment where they feel safe stepping outside their comfort zone.

Adults have **expectations**, so it is critical to take time up front to clarify everybody’s expectations. For example, at the beginning of a workshop we can establish ground rules and share objectives before the course gets underway.

Adults bring a lot of **life experience** into the classroom. This is an asset to be tapped and used by asking questions, creating small group discussions, including peer teaching, and so on. As trainers, we need to include sharing and discussion time in the program design.

You might have heard the old saying, “**You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.**” The same is true of people and learning. Adults can’t be threatened, coerced, or tricked into learning something new. They can be ordered into a classroom and prodded into a seat but they cannot be forced to learn.

Although trainers are often faced with adults who have been sent to training, there are some insights to be gathered from the research on adults who seek out structured learning experience on their own.

### **Changing Points of View**

As trainers, we are constantly reviewing the work that we do and looking for ways to do what we do even better the next time. We can help ourselves by looking at the session from a different point of view.

Right now you are a participant, and so you have most likely been considering this course as a learner. Perhaps you have been thinking to yourself, **“What am I learning? What can I take back from and use in my work?”**

Now, we’re going to encourage you to look at this course from the designer’s perspective. Consider what has been happening in our learning environment.

### **Test Your Knowledge**

**What training techniques have been used?**

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**What trainer/facilitator skills have you noticed?**

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**Is the learning cycle being applied?**

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**Did the trainer establish an environment that is conducive to learning?**

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**What's working well?**

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**What would you change if you were the trainer?**

## Using Existing Materials

### Customizing Courseware

There are numerous options for creating your training materials. One is to research, write, edit, test, and implement a programme that you write yourself. This is often an excellent way to meet the needs of your participants, but it does take a significant amount of time. The ASTD (formerly called the American Society of Training and Development) estimates that it takes about **40 hours to develop each hour of training time**. We find this to be accurate in the development that we do, which translates to 280 hours required to create a seven hour training day.

(Sources: [http://www.astd.org/LC/2009/0809\\_kapp.htm](http://www.astd.org/LC/2009/0809_kapp.htm)  
and <http://www.astd.org/ASTD/aboutus/trainingindustryFAQ.htm>)

#### Extra Information

These links were accurate at the time of printing. We take no responsibility for the content of these sites, whether by inclusion or omission. We are not affiliated with the ASTD nor any related organizations.

On the other hand, there are companies that do an excellent job of creating materials that are current, rich in content, and give you permission to customize upon purchase. Imagine the impact of offering a

course to your clients or employees that you have been able to target very specifically to them, but after only a few hours of customization.

## **What Does It Take To Customize A Programme?**

### **Step One**

Complete a needs analysis for your client or employer to determine exactly what the training needs are.

### **Step Two**

Research and consider the materials available by conducting a web search. For example, if your needs analysis identified that the group would benefit from training on conflict resolution and dealing with difficult people, either call your courseware provider that you normally deal with or do an Internet search. Check the outlines and learning objectives that are listed online, speak with the vendor(s), and make sure you check to see if you can customize their materials under the purchase or licensing agreement.

### **Step Three**

If you are using pre-built courseware, order your materials! Once you have them (or download them), review them and see if there are any gaps between what's available and what you identified in the needs analysis. Sometimes very little customizing is needed; you may want to insert the department name, or company, or simply tweak exercises to reflect your industry. Or, you may want to take things further and create case studies that are very specific.

If you're starting from scratch, it's time to research, write, edit, and if possible, test the materials before you have to deliver them. The bottom line is to make sure you are comfortable with what you are presenting.

### **Step Four**

Prepare for your training session(s) and take it away!

### **Step Five**

Afterwards, evaluate the course that you presented, and make notes or any adjustments for the next time you deliver the course.

## **Copyright Considerations**

When you purchase customizable materials, **check the licensing agreement carefully**. Just because you customize it, you do not then own the copyright for the materials. Usually, copyright stays with the company where the material originates. This includes your obligation to keep their copyright statement at the bottom of each page (see the footer below, for example).

Note as well that just because you customize material, or because you have a license to customize those materials, you do not necessarily have permission to publish them (in print form or on the Internet) as if you had written them. **Always ask permission** to publish from the copyright holder and make sure that you put the permission statement clearly with the published work (including web pages).

As trainers, we often want to make our **visuals** appealing. We want to use pictures, clip art, and features that bring the material to life. When you include those visuals, make sure that you check the licensing agreements to ensure that you can use them in your training in the country where you are working. Copyright rules are quite strict and you want to demonstrate integrity in the work that you do to add to your credibility as a trainer.

## Over-Plan and Over-Prepare

One of our in-house trainers tells the story of a new trainer who was ready to deliver a 3-hour training session as one of her first forays into public training. Within 45 minutes, she was starting to panic, because she had already run out of material and didn't know what to do.

We can read an example like this and have a little chuckle. Sometimes we are simply joyful that it happened to someone else, but not to us! The reality is that it happens more than we want to think. New and inexperienced trainers often plan according to all the steps that we teach in training, but they do not over-prepare.

The opposite (but equally alarming failure) happens when we get to the end of a seven hour day and realize you need another seven hours to cover all your material.

You can build a few safety mechanisms into your training to ensure that you meet the training objectives and that you keep your participants fully engaged. Some ideas:

- Plan for a few extra activities that will assist with the objectives and allow you to stretch time if you need to. These might include language-based activities like word games related to the content, brain teasers, quizzes, or discussions.
- Time yourself. Often, we design our training and include a time period (typically 15 minutes) to a session. But if the content or methodology is new, we don't really know how long it will take to deliver unless we have been delivering training for a long time.
- Practice at least some sessions in front of a few colleagues, a mentor, or even your family. Record yourself and listen to see if you sound rushed or too laid back, and to get a sense of how long something will really take.
- Practice will also help you get a sense of your pacing and the length of time that is actually required for different types of activities.

### Further Reading:

