

How do adults learn?

Issued by [Wits Plus](#)

7 Nov 2022

Most adults will do some form of learning after secondary school, whether it's on-the-job training, workshops, informal classes, or formal education. That learning tends to follow the same approach as what we're exposed to as children. While a chalkboard, worksheets, and a person talking at the front of the room may be what many of us experienced in school, the question is if this is an appropriate approach to adult learning.



The role of learning domains

Research shows that most adults learn best through a blend of activities that promote the three learning domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Cognitive refers to knowledge (e.g. lectures, discussions) or a body of subject matter; affective refers to attitudes and beliefs (e.g. consensus-seeking activities); and behavioural refers to practical application (e.g. role plays, simulations). A good learning (including training) programme incorporates tasks that promote a combination of these domains, while including an adult's prior experience and knowledge, thereby facilitating a more successful learning experience for the adult learner.

Adult learners' experience

Unlike children, all adults come to learning with prior knowledge, whether from formal or informal education or from life and work experience. Adults tend to gain more from learning/training when they can draw on their past experiences and knowledge and validate their learning based on what they already know, which adds greater context for them in learning. Most adults tend to prefer learning through tasks, in the context of common tasks adults need to perform at work or elsewhere.

Another characteristic of adult learners is that they need to be ready to learn. Many adults become ready to learn as they become aware of a knowledge or skills gap at a particular moment in their personal or professional lives.

Although some adults are forced into learning or training, many choose to learn to meet personal and/or career goals. For

both groups, though, understanding why something is important to know or do tends to be a core need for many adult learners. After all, they are there to learn something new or to become certified in a particular field.

For most adults, being able to apply new principles, skills, or knowledge immediately makes their learning/training more effective. Thus, learning that has immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life tends to be most appealing for adults. So, how does this translate into learning plans?

Learning for individuals

It's seldom effective, or reasonable, to have a one-size-fits-all approach to training for all employees in an organisation. Personalised learning and development plans based on what is most relevant to the individual – or a group in a similar role – tend to be more successful than a singular plan designed for all staff.

Learning needs to be customised to each person's needs. Doing so involves careful consideration and discussion with the individuals to ensure that training addresses their actual needs and not their perceived needs. Thus, doing an effective needs analysis before starting training can save organisations money in the long run. For adults who enrol privately in learning opportunities, sitting down with a knowledgeable and experienced advisor to develop a suitable learning path can be just as beneficial as the needs analysis that an organisation would do.

So, whether you're looking at learning programmes or further training for yourself or for a group of your employees, consider the approach to training: does it cater to how adults learn? Choose an interactive, experiential approach that meets your needs rather than just another chalkboard with a teacher at the front of the room.

Study options for adult learners

Wits Plus is the [Centre for Part-time Studies](#) at Wits University and offers selected part-time Wits undergraduate degrees, postgraduate programmes as well as business and language short courses.

Our portfolio of business-focused short courses and language courses can also be [customised to be delivered in-company](#), for groups of employees.

- **Choosing a quality TEFL course** 25 Mar 2024
- **Upgrade your copy-editing and proofreading skills!** 11 Mar 2024
- **Your challenge: Learn a new language** 19 Feb 2024
- **Enhanced learning and training in 2024** 22 Jan 2024
- **The reasons why you should study corporate governance** 8 Jan 2024

Wits Plus



If life and your career is a full-time job and you can't study full-time but you need to learn more to earn more or advance yourself then Wits Plus is definitely for you.

[Profile](#) | [News](#) | [Contact](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [RSS Feed](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>