How to Captivate and Motivate Adult Learners

A Guide for Instructors Providing In-Person Public Health Training

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Contents

Leading
Public Health Training Sessions
Is an Important Job.

The people who take your training have high expectations and specific needs to help prepare them for their work in public health. By including a variety of engaging teaching techniques, you will be more effective in promoting learning compared to lectures alone.

These techniques are based on adult learning principles that have proven to be effective in engaging learners and helping them retain new knowledge and skills long after class ends.[1–14]

You can use the techniques described in this guide to take what you know and deliver it in ways that will **engage and excite your learners**. This guide includes **Four Steps to Plan an Engaging Training Session** (pages 4–8), a **Course Outline Example Template** (page 9), and job aids (pages 11–16) to help you make your trainings more engaging and effective for adult learners. To get the most out of this guide, find an educator or instructional designer to help you plan your next training using these techniques.

Four Steps to Plan Engaging Training

1

Learn about the adults who will be taking your training. This will help you make your content relevant to them and help them understand how the training will benefit them.

How to Get to Know Your Learners

- **Talk with someone who knows about your learners'** interests, needs, and prior experiences.
- **Consider giving learners a short questionnaire** as a pre-assessment to find out what they know about the topic.
- At the start of your session, **ask your learners a few questions to get to know them** better. Find out what they hope to get out of your session.

- **Find out what your learners already know about the topic** and any prior experiences they may have in this area. Use this information to build on during the training.
- **Find out what they need to learn about the topic** and how they might apply their new knowledge.
- **Learn about the cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and values** of those who will be taking your training so you can ensure your learning activities are sensitive to cultural differences.

What do you know about your learners?

[Blank box]

If your learners are part of a specific group, consider how your session fits into that program's broader purpose. Find out what competencies exist for the group and which competencies your course aims to address. **List them here:**

[Blank box]

For additional information on getting to know your learners, see .

2 **Write objectives** that clearly state what learners will be able to *know* and *do* after your session. **Make sure your objectives are SMART.**

SPECIFIC. They clearly identify a specific knowledge or skill that learners can demonstrate after taking your training.

MEASURABLE. You want to be able to assess learners and measure the knowledge and skills they have gained after taking your training. To do that, you need to identify actions that you can objectively observe or test and then determine if the objectives have been met. A common pitfall is for instructors to use verbs such as "understand" or "know" (by the end of this training, you will understand how to… You will know what…). But how can you or anyone else objectively determine if a learner understands or knows what you have taught?

A better approach is to use verbs that describe an action you can observe and measure. These action verbs should also reflect the complexity of learning you expect to happen. Using the right action verbs will also guide you as you decide how to evaluate the training (for example, will you do knowledge checks to test learners' recall of certain facts or will you watch them apply a new skill?).

Here are some examples of recommended action verbs, based on *A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*:[15–16]

- When you want learners to remember, use verbs such as list, recognize, recall, identify, describe.
- When you want them to understand, use verbs such as summarize, classify, clarify, predict, select.
- When you want them to apply, use verbs such as respond, advise, conduct, use.
- When you want them to analyze, use verbs such as distinguish, integrate, deconstruct, sequence.
- When you want them to evaluate, use verbs such as check, determine, judge, reflect.
- When you want them to create, use verbs such as generate, assemble, design, create, develop.

ACHIEVABLE. Make sure the learning objectives you select can realistically be achieved during the time you have with learners. You may need to limit the number of objectives to ensure they are achievable.

RELEVANT. Make sure the learning objectives align with the needs of both the program and the learners. If your training aims to help learners meet competencies, align these objectives with those competencies.

TIME-BOUND. For many training sessions, the time-frame in which learners are expected to achieve objectives is "by the end of the training." Make sure the learning objectives state when they will be met.

Examples of Learning Objectives

By the end of the training, learners will be able to:

1. Sequence the 6 steps needed to complete a budget impact analysis.
2. Distinguish between static and dynamic budget impact models.
3. Develop an outline for a study to estimate the budget impact of a new public health intervention using the 6-step approach.

By the end of the training, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the 5 phases of project management.
2. Select the most appropriate development type (traditional or agile) for at least 3 projects.

Write 3 SMART learning objectives for your session.

By the end of the training, learners will be able to:

1.

2.

3.

Use these objectives to plan your course content and select the most appropriate teaching strategies to support learning. For ideas, see Job Aid 2: Quick Tips for Engaging Adult Learners on page 12.

3

Consider different techniques you can use to help your participants learn. Then have them practice applying their new knowledge and skills.

Think about how to capture your learners' curiosity and inspire them to discover, ask questions, and connect with you and the other learners.

Open with an attention getter:

- Tell them a surprising fact, statistic, or an interesting story.
- Ask a thought-provoking question.
- Ask them to share what they hope to get from the training.

Change activities at least every 20 minutes.

- Some of the best instructors use this tactic to engage learners and hold their attention.

Create effective slides that are easy to read and visually appealing:

- Make sure the text, pictures, and graphs are large enough to be seen even in the last row of the room. Use a 36-point font for titles and a body text font of at least 20 points.
- Limit the text on each slide: no more than 6 lines of text and no more than 6 words per line.
- Use colorful, interesting visuals that are relevant to your topic.
- Present only one message per slide. Presenting more than one key point is distracting.
- Do not present too many slides. A good rule is one slide for every 1-2 minutes of presentation time.

What are some techniques you can use to engage learners? List your ideas:

For more ideas, see the Course Outline Example Template on page 10 and Job Aid 2: Quick Tips for Engaging Adult Learners on page 12.

4

Decide what supplemental resources you can share to engage learners and reinforce key content.

Before the training: By assigning pre-work, you can begin engaging learners before the training even begins. Some instructors provide reading assignments. Others require learners to take a test or come up with a topic idea for an activity before the training. List an idea for homework that you might assign learners before the training:

During the training: Consider what handouts you might want to use during your session. If you are conveying complex information in your slides — such as a table, flow chart, or diagram — consider using handouts to make it easy for learners to read the information and follow along. Make sure that your handouts are an extension of the learning and reinforce your learning objectives. List any handouts you might use for this training:

At the end of the training: By providing adult learners with resources and materials they can review after the course has ended, you can help reinforce what they have learned in your session. List resources you can provide:

Now you are ready to outline your course.

These four steps will go a long way toward ensuring that learners in your class are excited about what you are teaching and that they retain the valuable knowledge and skills you have taught them—long after your class ends. Work with an educator or instructional designer and use the **Course Outline Template** on the next page to get started.

Course Outline **Example Template**

Title: [sample training session title]

Activity	Content	Time
Introduction	**What is your attention-getter?**	3 minutes
Training session overview	**State the purpose of the session and the learning objectives.** Adult learners like to know up front what you will be covering during the class and what they are expected to get out of it. This is also an opportunity to tell them how this training is relevant and beneficial to them.	2 minutes
Learner expectations	**Describe how you will find out more about your learners' expectations.** Ideas: Conduct an online survey or poll using an audience response system to find out more about your learners and what they want to get out of your session. You can do this before or during class. If you ask them during class, note their responses on a flip chart or white board and refer to these during the session.	10 minutes
Main Point	**Describe how you will present your content.** **Ideas:** Show a video or use a story to convey the point. A short lecture is okay, but what other techniques can you use? (5 minutes) **Describe an activity that you could use to encourage learners to apply the new content.** **Ideas:** Use role play, small group discussion, or questions that provoke critical thinking or research to find the answers. (15 minutes)	15 minutes
Debrief	**Describe how you will debrief learners to reinforce the main point.** **Ideas:** Ask them to share what they have learned, summarize the main point, and discuss how they can apply it in their work. Ask for and answer any questions they have.	5 minutes
Conclusion and Wrap-Up	**Describe how you will wrap up and help learners remember all of the main points. Ideas:** ■ Ask them to complete sentences beginning with "I learned…" or "I was surprised by…"or "Here's what I took away from this training that I will share with colleagues back at work…" ■ Ask them to write a promise to themselves about 2 things they will apply when they get back to work. Email them 3-6 months later to check in with them about how things are going with their promise. ■ Be sure to answer any remaining questions. ■ Give them follow-up materials so they can build on what they learned. ■ Show the learning objectives to review and reinforce learning. ■ Show a summary slide as the last slide they see.	15 minutes

Course Outline Template

Fill in each section of this outline to plan the components of your training. For trainings longer than 1 hour, be sure to include at least one 10-minute break each hour

Title: _____

Activity	Content	Time
Introduction		___ minutes
Training session overview		___ minutes
Learner expectations		___ minutes
Main Point		___ minutes
Debrief		___ minutes
Conclusion and Wrap-Up		___ minutes

Once you are ready to deliver your course, consider asking an educator or instructional designer to observe and assess your course using Job Aid 3: Observe and Assess Learner Engagement. You can then use the feedback to strengthen learner engagement during future training sessions.

JOB AID

1

What Every Instructor Needs to Know
About Adult Learners

As you plan your training, keep in mind these important facts about adult learners:

They need to know why this training matters to them.

At the beginning of your class, adult learners need to know how the training is relevant to them and how it will benefit them. If they know what's in it for them right away, they are far more likely to pay attention and participate.

They need to be able to see how they can use what they are learning now.

They want to be able to use their new knowledge right away. By including real-life examples such as case studies and stories, you can help learners see how they can apply what they are learning in real public health situations they might encounter on the job.

They need the chance to practice their skills in class.

Adult learners thrive when they can practice what they're learning right away. This can boost their confidence and their ability to retain new knowledge and skills. You can also help them see how what you're teaching is relevant to them.

They will learn better when you use a variety of techniques to present your training.

Adults learn better when they are engaged, and you have so many different techniques to choose from, beyond just lecturing. See Job Aid 2: Quick Tips for Engaging Adult Learners for ideas.

They want to share their experiences—with you and with each other.

Whether you ask them to share their perspectives with the entire group or give them opportunities to break into smaller groups, you are engaging them and getting them excited about what they are learning.

They need to feel respected.

Respect and embrace the cultural backgrounds, beliefs, and values of adult learners. Take cultural diversity into account when you deliver your training—for example, make sure your learning activities are sensitive to cultural differences among adult learners in your class. By doing so, you can create a learning environment that fosters cultural sensitivity and produces engaged learners.

They need to hear key concepts repeated.

Adult learners need to hear things more than once to remember them. When you introduce new activities, be sure to incorporate information you presented earlier to add context to the new content. Then review key concepts again to help them retain them.

2

Quick Tips for Engaging
Adult Learners

Learners are more engaged and learn more when they help direct their learning. These quick tips can help increase the learners' involvement:

- Give your learners opportunities to practice as they learn throughout the training.
- Repeat and review key concepts and processes; practice strategies often because adult learners need to hear things more than once to remember them.
- Incorporate information presented earlier into new activities.
- Throughout the training, encourage learners to ask questions and actively participate in group discussions, listen to others' contributions, and reflect on new information and how it relates to their practice in the workplace.

Get Them Interested Before Class

- Send agendas or course outlines before the training so adult learners can review and reflect on their knowledge of and experience with the content.
- Ask them to think about what their learning needs are with respect to the content to be presented.

Additional Ideas

Deliver content in exciting ways:

- Tell interesting stories.
- Ask thought-provoking questions.
- Show video clips, and engage learners by discussing what they watched.
- Use pictures to explain a process or unfamiliar concept.
- Use scenarios to help learners imagine how they might apply what they are learning.
- Give them hands-on exercises so they can practice what they are learning.
- Have non-competitive quizzes.
- Make technology, such as mobile devices, part of the learning experience (e.g., use an audience responses system or ask learners to look up an answer online or research information).

Use group activities:

- Use role play, where learners take on different roles and act out a situation to solve problems or learn different perspectives.
- Facilitate small group discussions.
- Involve learners in a case study.
- Use demonstrations or simulations.
- Ask them to pair up and share information.
- Have them identify steps for a procedure and then put them in the correct order.

Try individual activities:

- Journaling, silent reading, reflection, or writing

JOB AID 3

Observe and Assess
Learner Engagement

Instructions for Observers

Please observe this training session from an adult learning perspective. Answer questions 1–6, and use those observations to help you answer question 7 on the overall rating. You can then use this feedback to identify what worked well and what strategies the instructor can use to improve learner engagement in future trainings.

Topic & Instructor: _____

Date: _____ Observer's Name: _____

1. Answer yes or no to the following questions:

Questions	Yes	No
a. Did the instructor introduce learning objectives for the learners to achieve?	❏	❏
b. If yes, were the objectives SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound)?	❏	❏
c. Did the instructor encourage learners to ask questions?	❏	❏
d. Did the instructor effectively answer questions from learners?	❏	❏
e. Did the instructor encourage learners to share their experiences or expertise?	❏	❏
f. Did the instructor adapt delivery of course based on audience feedback or nonverbal cues?	❏	❏
g. Did the instructor give any pre-work (i.e., pre-test, quiz, reading)?	❏	❏
h. Did the instructor use real-life examples to support the content of the presentation?	❏	❏
i. Did the instructor cover all content in the slides during the allotted time?	❏	❏
j. Did the instructor provide take-home materials to reinforce learning objectives?	❏	❏
k. Did the instructor provide follow-up resources to support learners after the course?	❏	❏

Continued

2. What techniques did the instructor use to engage learners and how effective was the technique?
(select all that apply)

Techniques	Not at all effective	Somewhat effective	Very effective	Why?
a. Instructor shared a story	❏	❏	❏	
b. Instructor demonstrated a process	❏	❏	❏	
c. Instructor gave learners opportunity to reflect	❏	❏	❏	
d. Instructor asked thought-provoking questions	❏	❏	❏	
e. Instructor gave learners a quiz	❏	❏	❏	
f. Learners took polls (e.g., mobile app, clickers)	❏	❏	❏	
g. Learners did a problem-solving activity	❏	❏	❏	
h. Learners participated in a group activity	❏	❏	❏	
i. Learners engaged in a group discussion	❏	❏	❏	
j. Learners participated in role play	❏	❏	❏	
k. Learners paired up to share information	❏	❏	❏	
l. Learners participated in a game	❏	❏	❏	
m. Other (please specify):	❏	❏	❏	

Continued

3. What other techniques could the instructor use to engage learners?

Provide specific suggestions for certain slides or sections of the training, if you have them.

4. Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the quality of the slides:

Quality of the Slides	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A (no slides)
a. Content was relevant to course topic.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
b. Slides were organized in a logical order.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
c. Slides had the right amount of text (not too much).	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
d. Tables and figures were easy to follow.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
e. Photos and illustrations were related to topic.	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
f. Other (please specify):	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

5. Identify any slides that would be better if reformatted or made into handouts.

6. Use the following verbal and non-verbal learner cues* to indicate learner engagement:

Cues indicating learners ARE engaged	Yes	No
Nods head in agreement	❏	❏
Smiles or makes eye contact with instructor	❏	❏
Looks interested	❏	❏
Asks relevant questions	❏	❏
Leans forward	❏	❏
Tries activities or assignments on their own	❏	❏
Adds relevant information to the topic	❏	❏

Cues indicating learners ARE NOT engaged	Yes	No
Drums fingers	❏	❏
Yawns	❏	❏
Falls asleep	❏	❏
Talks to neighbor, easily distracted	❏	❏
Looks away or stares	❏	❏
Rests head in palm of hand	❏	❏
Checks email or Facebook	❏	❏

*Adapted from Effective Adult Learning: A Toolkit for Teaching Adults, developed by the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice.

7. Overall, how would you rate this session in terms of how well it engaged learners?

Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
It did **not** keep their interest at all.	It kept their interest **some** of the time.	It kept their interest **most** of the time.	It kept their interest the **entire** time.
❏	❏	❏	❏

Please explain your answer:

Thank you for your observation and feedback!
Return your completed form to:

_____.

References

The techniques in this guide are based on adult learning principles that have been proven effective in not only engaging learners, but also helping them retain the knowledge and skills they learn during an in-class presentation.

The following references provide background about the research behind adult learning principles and additional tools you can use to strengthen your skills in engaging adult learners.

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