

Helpful Tips for Presenting

Be prepared!

Yes! Have your ducks all in a row. You will perform so much better, and your learners will love it if you are well prepared and demonstrate it. What are these ducks? Here is a list of ways to be prepared:

Make a list of things you need to do and things you need to take with you to your session. I like to prepare a checklist with little boxes to check off. When you are scurrying around at the last minute, a checklist helps you think clearly. Some preparations you will need to consider are:

- Clear directions to the training site
- Equipment you need and what will be supplied (projector, flipchart holder, screen, etc.)
- Proper number of handouts (usually more than needed)
- Items for displays or demonstrations (books, music, props, etc.)
- Learner needs (pencils, paper, note cards, etc.)
- Items for presentation (flip chart, pens, masking tape, etc/)
- Electrical cords and attachments that may not be supplied
- Your notes, list of objectives & agenda, overhead slides, computer disk, etc.
- Refreshments such as water, coffee, sweets (chocolate may be a must)

Always be early! Allow enough time to find the room (Oh, how I have wandered lost), get set up (I have rarely found the room ready to use in the way I want.), leisurely greet early arrivers, and deal with a myriad of little emergencies. Prepare more material than you'll think you'll need – it is embarrassing to face an eager crowd and be all out of ideas. If you train on a regular basis (or even not), have a trainer's kit with all the stuff you usually use for your classes. Keep it stocked; ready to grab and run.

Organize with flexibility

You need to be flexible with your agenda. You need to be responsive to your audience. But there is a tendency for trainers to become inflexible with the content they present and the methods they use. Both new and experienced trainers may tend to become rigid for different reasons. New trainers become rigid out of anxiety and they hold on to “by the book” to avoid leaving their comfort zones. Experienced trainers become rigid because they have vested interest in doing what they have always done. Well, LOOSEN UP. It is all right to have important truths to impart and proven methods to use, but you should strive for responsiveness to your learners as the highest goal. Your training exists for your audience, not the other way around. Many trainers experience resistance from reluctant learners, but it is often because the trainer is reluctant to shift and move.

Now, just how can you become more flexible and responsive to your audience?

1. Prepare with a Plan B. A Plan B is to arrange for contingencies. An experienced trainer will know what audiences in the past wanted and can prepare for this. The new trainer will be wise to leave spaces in the agenda where there can be changes. Be prepared to shorten or lengthen sessions, be ready to shift topics, be willing to listen a little more and talk a little less.
2. Have choices available. For example: “Here is my agenda, but these are related areas of interest that you can choose from.”
3. Learn to “read” your audience’s nonverbal responses to you. Be sensitive to when you lose eye contact with your group or when they become restless. When people begin to stare off into space or start annoying side conversations, it is time to pay attention.
4. Don’t be so anxious to avoid anxiety – good trainers, more often than not, experience anxiety as they prepare and conduct sessions. Like actors, it is what keeps you sharp.

Create a nice learning space.

Nothing disrupts good learning for adults like feeling uncomfortable in the room used for training. Adults like to feel like they are entering a friendly, warm, welcoming atmosphere. Often it is the little things like clear directions to the bathrooms or having the smell of coffee wafting through the room. These little things touch that primitive inner core of our human needs, and educators often overlook such things because they think what matters is the mind alone and not the body. Rest assured those little comforts DO MATTER to adults. Some things to consider:

1. Arrange chairs and tables so adults make contact with each other. Avoid rows of chairs like church pews where people see backs of heads and the trainer becomes the star. I heard a saying, “don’t strive to be the sage on the stage; instead strive to be the guide on the side.” Depending on the situation, my favorite arrangement is small groups of 3 or 4 (not more than five) people sitting around small tables.
2. Have refreshments. They can be simple: water (cut up lemon wedges), cookies or crackers, coffee and tea. They can be more elaborate: Bagels and cream cheese, cakes and cookies, Starbucks catered coffee, etc. But the essential thing is food and drink are inviting and welcoming for adults. Little candy varieties can also add to the welcoming atmosphere.
3. Visual displays of books, posters, thematic props that are related to the topic add much to the learning place.
4. Play music as people arrive, during breaks, and as they exit. I have used meditative music when I ask people to quietly reflect on some aspect of their new learning.
5. Do what you can to regulate the temperature, block drafts, keep down interruptions, and avoid distracting noises.

6. Imagine you are building a small learning community – plan out ways to help people get connected, smile, and be glad they came.

Present your spoken message effectively

A good trainer needs to be a good presenter. Yes, I know that adult learning involves active learning, where much of the responsibility for learning rests with the student, but whether we like or not the key to transmission of understanding, knowledge, and skills depends on the trainer's presentation. One key element in this transmission is how well you are able to communicate to a group verbally. You need to be a good speaker/presenter to get your important message across. Here are some guidelines for being a good speaker called My Seven Best Speaking Tips:

1. Focus on your audience - Remind yourself constantly that your audience, not you, matters most.
2. Conserve your words - Stay on task and don't ramble. For training, use "lecturettes" – 5-7 minute verbal jolts of important information, tell illustrative stories, and use lively visuals. No long PowerPoint slides please!
3. Use nonverbal cues - Use good posture, eye contact, and gesture as you focus on your audience.
4. Slow down - Speak more slowly than seems natural and project your voice.
5. Control your voice - Use appropriate voice inflections and well-planned pauses.
6. Hide your nervousness - Use deep breathing or other techniques to overcome nervousness; wear comfortable clothing that will not show perspiration; simplify hand movements if you are shaky; remind yourself that you have an important message for your audience that they will appreciate.
7. Organize and practice - Use a clear outline and practice in order to perfect your timing, sequence, stories, and illustrations. Rehearse in front of an imaginary audience, a mirror, or some good friends.

Anchor new learning

How many times have you attended a workshop or taken a class, got excited about the new learning, then a few days or weeks later you forgot what you learned? OK, I confess that this has happened a lot to me. To make learning stick you, the trainer, have got to anchor learning in the minds and behavior of your learners. Well, just how does one do that? I have struggled with that as I know all trainers do. There are no easy answers, so don't believe it when you training promotions that promise "high impact training" or training that guarantees results. Believe me; no one has the corner on permanent change when it comes to adult learning. However, I can offer four distinct methods for anchoring new learning that have benefited me (and those I have taught) over the years.

1. Association – make connections to old behavior and learning. For example if you are teaching a parenting class on how to find peaceful napping for the toddler, you may want to help the parent remember their own napping patterns. What positive experiences do they remember when they were young. I remember my mother telling me stories to settle me down. The story brought me peace and closeness to my mother. I remember being sung to – the same melody, same rhythm, and comforting closeness of my mother. Anchoring to memories can be very powerful. Another powerful association is a story or illustration. Before you lecture – anchor each point to a humorous or poignant story.
2. Action – get people moving when you teach. I remember an Old Testament class I took where the instructor mapped out the ancient geography on the floor of an auditorium. We literally walk along with the Hebrew nation as we learned the sequence of events. I have taught the principles of human behavior change by have people try changing the way they cross their arms – try it cross your arms and then cross them the opposite way. It feels strange doesn't it? Now ask yourself what it would take for you to start doing it the opposite way. How would you get others to do it? Then we list the ways we create change. After the class, the students remember the odd feeling of crossing arms the opposite way and are more likely to remember the principles of human change we discovered.
3. Application – when adult students learn a new knowledge or skill, they are more likely to remember if they apply it to real or simulated situations. Try to build practice of new learning into every session you teach. When I teach trainers, I have them spend some time designing lessons and/or teaching them with a class critique. When I teach coaching for job effectiveness, I have managers coach each other. When you teach parents how to settle toddlers down for their naps, have them practice storytelling and singing to a fellow learner. Of course, the best job training is on the job training (OJT).
4. Alliteration – look at the list of four anchors I've just listed. What do you notice? Right, each technique starts with the letter "A" as does 'Anchor.' Use alliteration to teach complex concepts. The "Teach with Style" uses four key styles for effective adult teaching: make it safe, make it stimulating, make it systematic, and make it spontaneous. Just remember the four S's!

Use your learner's wisdom

When you teach adults, you are teaching people who have much experience in life and work. Even if the learners don't know the specific knowledge or skill you are teaching, they have opinions, points of view, and insights into most topics. I used to illustrate this by naming off topics and having a roomful of learners raise their hands if they thought they knew enough about it to teach a class. Every topic I mentioned (gardening, poetry, photography, parenting, etc.) would receive at least one or more raised hands. Adults are eager to share what they know about most anything and this interest and energy can be turned to good use as you teach them. Of course you don't want people to just share their ignorance; however, you can guide their enthusiasm into greater learning.

More experienced learners can mentor and model behavior for the less experienced. Build in lots of discussion and mix up the experienced with the inexperienced. Use the experienced ones to demonstrate your teaching.

When you acknowledge the wisdom and abilities of you adult groups, you not only increase the pool of learning, you will find it brings you more respect and credibility with the learners. This all translates into greater influence and more effective transmission of your important message.

Have some fun!

Yes, fun! I believe that learning should be enjoyable. When learners leave smiling and happy it means they have enjoyed themselves and will not only remember more, but they will remember the event as a pleasant one, and therefore, will be more motivated to put their new learning into practice. Ways to have fun in learning:

1. Music – sing, play music, have small groups compose songs to share
2. Games and activities – use the many different training resource books to select appropriate but amusing activities
3. Story telling – tell stories or have learners tell their own stories that reinforce teaching points
4. Humor – ad lib, tell jokes, tell funny stories, encourage people to laugh and lighten up whenever possible
5. Small group discussion – let adults learn from each other, break into small groups of 2-4 to give each person a chance to share opinions and information
6. Drama – role play, use skits, bring in volunteer actors to teach and entertain
7. Creative work – provide materials for collages, sculptures, or drawings
8. Movement – get people moving, dancing, or miming
9. Warm-ups and get acquainted activities – devise or borrow fun activities to break the ice and set the tone
10. Challenges and contests – let people compete or challenge each other in races against time, biggest or best of something

Most adults are willing to try anything if you will assure two conditions: First, show them how the activity relates to their learning success and second, give them the freedom to choose to opt out of any activity that they find uncomfortable.