

# Putting Adult Learning Principles to Practices

## What Is Adult Learning?

Developed by Malcolm Knowles in 1968, Adult Learning Theory or andragogy is the concept or study of how adults learn and how it differs from children. It aims to show how adult learning is distinct and identify the learning styles which suit them best.

## Key Assumptions About Adult Learners

A central part of Knowles' Adult Learning Theory refers to five assumptions. Each one outlines the general ways in which adults perceive learning and how they prefer to train.

<b>Self Concept</b>	As we grow older, we shift from being dependent to being more independent. Therefore, how we prefer to learn changes from being instructor-led to a more self-directed approach.
<b>Adult Learner Experience</b>	Adults have lots of experience from which they draw knowledge and references. We can take from these experiences and learn from them.
<b>Readiness to Learn</b>	Adults want or are ready to learn when there is a reason, such as when it's directed towards growth and development related to their work.
<b>Orientation to Learning</b>	As adults, we want what we are learning to be actually applicable to our everyday lives, instead of being general learning about a subject. We want to learn practical skills that help us solve problems and work better.
<b>Motivation to Learn</b>	As children, we learn because of external factors, like parents and teachers. However, as adults we want to learn for our own reasons, for example, to progress in work or to boost self-esteem.

## Principles of Adult Learning

Considering that adults have their own, unique way of learning, there are 4 central principles that explain how to best develop training for them.

<b>Involved Adult Learners</b>	When it comes to learning, adults want or need to be involved in how their training is planned, delivered, and executed. They want to control what, when, and how they learn.
<b>Adult Learner's Experience</b>	Adults gain more when they can pull past experiences into the learning process. They can draw on what they previously know to add greater context to their learning.
<b>Problem-centered</b>	Memorizing facts and information isn't the right way for adults to learn. They need to solve problems and use reasoning to best take in the information they are being presented with.
<b>Relevance and Impact to Learner's Lives</b>	Adults want to know "How can I use this information now?". What they are learning needs to be applicable to their lives and be implemented immediately.

## Practical Applications to Training

<b>Knowles' Assumptions About Adult Learners</b>	<b>What This Means</b>	<b>Training Techniques</b>
<p><b>Self-concept</b> As a person matures his/her self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a <b>self-directed</b> human being.</p>	<p>Adults believe that they are <b>directly responsible for their own decisions</b>.</p> <p>Adults take <b>ownership of learning</b> in terms of making decisions about what and how to learn.</p> <p>Adults <b>need to know why</b> they are learning something, what the benefits are of learning it, and what the risks are of not learning it.</p> <p>Adults prefer to learn at their <b>own pace</b>.</p>	<p><b>Include adults in deciding what it is they learn, and setting goals and plans for their learning.</b></p> <p>Establish <b>peer relationship</b> with learners.</p> <p>Give <b>room for self-assessment and reflection</b>.</p> <p>Encourage learners to think by either providing them with <b>brain teasers, or by asking thought-provoking questions</b>.</p> <p>Ask for <b>feedback</b>.</p> <p>Clearly present the <b>benefits of the course</b>.</p> <p><i>What other techniques can you think of?</i></p>

Knowles' Assumptions About Adult Learners	What This Means	Training Techniques
<p><b>Adult Learner Experience</b> As a person matures he/she accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.</p>	<p>Adults may have <b>ingrained ideas</b> from their experience, <b>leading to bias and single-mindedness</b>.</p> <p>Adults associate experience with identity, which means that the experiences they have had defines who they are.</p> <p>Adults <b>are less open-minded and therefore more resistant to change</b>.</p>	<p>Design activities that are <b>active, constructive, and collaborative</b>.</p> <p>Associate learning activities with existing knowledge and real experience.</p> <p>Provide <b>new concepts that can be linked to already established ones</b>, and promote the need to explore.</p> <p>Encourage <b>discussion, sharing, and interactivity</b>.</p> <p><i>What other techniques can you think of?</i></p>
<p><b>Readiness to Learn</b> As a person matures his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his/her social roles.</p>	<p>Adults become ready to learn when they experience a need to know something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives.</p> <p>Adult learners need learning to be timely, relevant, and focused on what is useful in their particular concept and situation.</p> <p>Adults have a lot to juggle: family, friends, work, and the need for personal quality time.</p>	<p><b>Create flexible programs</b> that accommodate busy schedules.</p> <p><b>Diversify learning materials and activities to accommodate individual interests and career goals</b>.</p> <p>Get learners <b>emotionally involved—come up with controversial statements, tap on memories and real-life stories</b>.</p> <p>Give examples that connect content to applications at the workplace.</p> <p><i>What other techniques can you think of?</i></p>
<p><b>Orientation to Learning</b> As a person matures his/her time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his/her orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness.</p>	<p>Adults learn in order to be able to better perform a task, solve a problem, or live in a more satisfying way.</p> <p>Adults usually resent theory and generally prefer practical knowledge that will improve their skills, facilitate their work, and boost their confidence.</p> <p>Adults learn less rapidly.</p>	<p>Ensure that activities are <b>task-oriented</b> instead of focusing only on memorization.</p> <p>Come up with different <b>problem-solving exercises and case studies</b> to make learners look for and find solutions.</p> <p>Chunk information to help people remember and assimilate information.</p> <p>Let learning occur through mistakes.</p> <p><i>What other techniques can you think of?</i></p>

Knowles' Assumptions About Adult Learners	What This Means	Training Techniques
<p><b>Motivation to Learn</b> As a person matures the motivation to learn is internal.</p>	<p><i>Adults will respond to some external motivators, but the more potent motivators are internal—self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, self-actualization, etc.</i></p>	<p><i>Tap into a learner's intrinsic impetus with the right thought-provoking material that will question conventional wisdom and stimulate his mind.</i></p> <p><i>Provide engaging materials that help learners focus.</i></p> <p><i>Acknowledge individual strengths and talents to make learners feel they have something to contribute.</i></p> <p><i>What other techniques can you think of?</i></p>

Sources

- [Adult Learning Theory Infographic](#)
- [The Adult Learning Theory](#)
- [What is Adult Learning](#)