

Adult Learning Principles Reference Guide

A Companion to:

Delivering High-Impact IPC Training Through Better Design and Facilitation

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Principles of Adult Learning (PAL)

PAL 1: Autonomous and Self-directed

What: Adults thrive when given autonomy to direct their own learning journey.

Why: Autonomy and self-direction allow adult learners to select learning paths that align with their goals and needs. It respects their professional demands and individual learning preferences. Adults bring a wealth of experience and self-concept to the learning environment and prefer to be seen as capable of self-direction.

Example Strategies:

1. **Give Ownership of Learning Choices:** Provide options for how and when to participate in learning.
2. **Create an Independent Modular Structure:** Divide the course into modules that can be completed in any order.
3. **Provide On-Demand Resources:** Offer access to webinars, readings, videos, and microlearning.
4. **Encourage Personalized Learning Goals:** Have learners set personal goals that align with the training objectives.
5. **Incorporate Reflection Activities:** Include regular reflection to assess progress.
6. **Offer Variety:** Provide several case studies/scenarios for learners to select from.
7. **Allow for Open Forum Discussions:** Create opportunities for participants to share their experiences and perspectives.
8. **Integrate Group Work with Choice:** Form groups based on interests or professional backgrounds.
9. **Implement Self-Assessment Tools:** Provide tools that allow learners to evaluate their own knowledge and progress.
10. **Create Learning Contracts:** Develop agreements where learners identify their learning objectives and evaluation methods.
11. **Encourage Independent Problem-solving:** Present challenges that require learners to apply knowledge independently.
12. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 2: Goal or Results Oriented

What: Goal orientation is a significant motivator for adults.

Why: Adults engage in learning with specific career advancement, personal development, or skill acquisition goals. They want to understand how the content will help them achieve their professional and personal objectives. Visible progress toward clear goals increases engagement and motivation.

Example Strategies:

1. **Present Tangible Goals and Objectives:** Limit to 2-3 learning objectives per content area.
2. **Establish Relevance:** Review learning outcomes at the beginning of each training.
3. **Showcase Measurable Outcomes:** Provide numerical examples of results (e.g., infection rates before/after).
4. **Emphasize Impact:** Demonstrate how efforts substantially improve safety and health outcomes.
5. **Provide Roadmaps to Success:** Structure learning pathways with clear steps that lead to completion.
6. **Use Progress Indicators:** Implement visual cues that show advancement toward learning goals.
7. **Incorporate Competency Assessments:** Develop assessments that demonstrate mastery of specific skills.
8. **Set Achievable Milestones:** Break down larger objectives into manageable achievements.
9. **Align with Professional Standards:** Connect learning objectives to industry certifications or standards.
10. **Implement Recognition Systems:** Acknowledge accomplishments through badges, certificates, or other forms of recognition.
11. **Share Success Stories:** Present case studies of how the knowledge led to positive outcomes.
12. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 3: Connected to Lived Experiences

What: Contextualize learning to real-world settings, making it more relevant and immediately applicable.

Why: Adults build upon a foundation of existing knowledge and experiences. Adult learners' life experiences allow them to connect new knowledge to existing understanding. This connection enhances comprehension, retention, and application of new concepts. Adults learn best when relating new information to their existing mental frameworks.

Example Strategies:

1. **Promote Openness:** Foster an atmosphere where learners share experiences without judgment.
2. **Facilitate Open Discussions:** Use group discussions with diverse participants.
3. **Ask Guided Questions:** Use open-ended questions about lived experiences.
4. **Encourage Storytelling:** Invite learners to tell stories related to the topic.
5. **Conduct Debriefing Sessions:** After activities, discuss how experiences connect to new knowledge.
6. **Incorporate Problem-Solving:** Draw on past experiences to approach problems practically.
7. **Use Interactive Technologies:** Utilize surveys or polls to gather and incorporate experiences.
8. **Create Experiential Learning Activities:** Design exercises that mimic real-world scenarios.
9. **Employ Metaphors and Analogies:** Use familiar concepts to explain new information.
10. **Develop Reflective Journaling:** Encourage participants to document how content relates to their experiences.
11. **Share Instructor Experiences:** Model connection-making by sharing relevant personal experiences.
12. **Build on Prior Knowledge:** Begin sessions by exploring what participants already know about the topic.
13. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 4: Relevance and Practicality

What: Provide opportunities to practice or envision how learning can be immediately applied.

Why: Adults prefer learning that can be immediately applied in real-world scenarios. Connecting learning to real situations helps learners retain new information and skills. Practical application increases motivation and engagement as adults see the direct value of their learning investment. Professionals need to understand how new knowledge translates to improved performance in their specific roles.

Example Strategies:

1. **Provide Hands-On Training:** Give participants opportunities to practice.
2. **Integrate Case Studies:** Use scenarios relevant to professional backgrounds.
3. **Simulate Realistic Environments:** Create "labs" based on real-world situations.
4. **Use Practical Materials:** Provide checklists, quick reference guides, and toolkits.
5. **Develop Role-Playing Scenarios:** Create situations where participants can apply skills in simulated contexts.
6. **Design Action Planning:** Help participants create plans to implement learning in their workplace.
7. **Incorporate Job Aids:** Develop tools that support on-the-job application.
8. **Use Problem-Based Learning:** Present real workplace challenges for collaborative solving.
9. **Create Transfer Activities:** Design exercises that bridge classroom learning to workplace application.
10. **Implement Spaced Practice:** Schedule follow-up sessions where learners share application experiences.
11. **Showcase Real-World Examples:** Highlight successful applications in similar work environments.
12. **Conduct Application Workshops:** Hold sessions focused exclusively on implementing learning.
13. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 5: Collaboration and Support (Shared Learning)

What: Provide diverse opportunities for adults to share knowledge and experiences with peers.

Why: Group learning environments can provide a sense of community and support, making adults feel more comfortable taking risks and engaging in the learning process. It also creates a dynamic and meaningful learning environment that leverages the experiences and perspectives of all participants.

Example Strategies:

1. **Form Interdisciplinary Groups:** Include diverse roles (nurses, doctors, lab techs, support staff)
2. **Create Opportunities for Participant Sharing:** Ensure enough space in the agenda for participants to share their own experiences and lessons learned. Offer formal assessments and informal check-ins.
3. **Ensure Availability:** Provide office hours, email support, or Q&A sessions.
4. **Share Resources:** Develop portals where users can access additional materials.
5. **Implement Peer Teaching:** Have participants teach concepts to each other.
6. **Design Collaborative Projects:** Create group assignments that require shared contributions.
7. **Facilitate Knowledge Sharing:** Structure time for learners to share expertise.
8. **Use Collaborative Technologies:** Implement digital group work and communication tools.
9. **Create Mentoring Opportunities:** Connect experienced practitioners with newer professionals.
10. **Incorporate Team-Based Challenges:** Design competitive activities that require collaboration.
11. **Encourage Peer Feedback:** Include processes for constructive peer evaluation.
12. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 6: Modern Learning

What: Provide a variety of modalities to keep engagement high and make learning adaptable to busy lives.

Why: Online courses and digital resources cater to adult learners' need for flexibility. Modern professionals face time constraints and prefer learning that fits their schedules. Multi-format content addresses diverse learning preferences and allows for personalized pacing. Digital resources support just-in-time learning when knowledge is immediately needed.

Example Strategies:

1. **Create Engaging Content:** Develop interactive modules with quizzes and simulations.
2. **Use Rich Multimedia:** Incorporate videos, animations, and infographics.
3. **Implement Microlearning:** Offer short, focused learning segments.
4. **Showcase New Tools or Technologies:** Highlight new tools or allow learners to share about the tools they use.
5. **Provide Flexible Access:** Make resources available on demand
6. **Incorporate Technology Tools:** Use polling technology (e.g., Slido, StrawPoll, Mentimeter)
7. **Use Mobile-Friendly Content:** Ensure resources are accessible on various devices.
8. **Use Blended Learning Experiences:** Combine in-person and online learning.
9. **Implement Flipped Classroom Approaches:** Provide content before sessions and use in-person time for application.
10. **Use Social Platforms:** Implement discussion forums or collaborative spaces.
11. **Incorporate Gamification Elements:** Increase engagement by adding points, badges, or leaderboards.
12. **Provide Just-in-Time Resources:** Create searchable libraries for immediate knowledge needs.
13. **Develop Adaptive Learning Paths:** Create content that adjusts based on learner performance and preferences.
14. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 7: Respect and Inclusivity

What: Create learning environments that respect diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds.

Why: Adults bring varied cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds to learning situations. Inclusive environments promote psychological safety, encouraging full participation and risk-taking. Diverse perspectives enrich discussions and deepen collective understanding.

Example Strategies:

1. **Establish Clear Guidelines:** Set expectations for respectful interaction at the start of training.
2. **Model Respectful Communication:** Demonstrate inclusive language and active listening.
3. **Recognize and Celebrate Diversity:** Design activities that highlight diverse experiences and viewpoints.
4. **Ensure Representation in Materials:** Include diverse imagery, examples, and case studies.
5. **Provide Multiple Participation Methods:** Offer various ways to contribute (speaking, writing, digital tools).
6. **Implement Universal Design Principles:** Create accessible materials for varied learning needs.
7. **Use Inclusive Language:** Avoid jargon, acronyms, and terminology that may exclude participants.
8. **Create Safe Spaces for Questions:** Encourage questions without judgment or criticism.
9. **Adapt to Different Learning Styles:** Provide varied learning modalities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).
10. **Gather Input on Content Relevance:** Check that examples resonate across diverse professional contexts.
11. **Address Power Dynamics:** Create structures that equalize participation regardless of position.
12. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 8: Active Learning

What: Engage learners through interactive, participatory learning experiences rather than passive information reception.

Why: Active participation increases engagement, retention, and application of new knowledge. Hands-on learning helps develop practical skills that transfer to real-world settings. Interaction with content promotes deeper cognitive processing and critical thinking. Active learning accommodates different learning styles and preferences.

Example Strategies:

1. **Implement Hands-on Activities:** Design practical exercises that apply theoretical concepts.
2. **Facilitate Discussion-Based Learning:** Create structured discussions around key topics.
3. **Use Problem-Based Learning:** Present real challenges for collaborative solving.
4. **Design Simulations and Role-Playing:** Create realistic scenarios for skill practice.
5. **Use Think-Pair-Share Activities:** Allow individual reflection followed by partner discussion.
6. **Integrate Technology-Enhanced Learning:** Use interactive polls, quizzes, and digital activities.
7. **Create Learning Stations:** Set up different activity areas that participants rotate through.
8. **Implement Jigsaw Learning:** Assign different content to groups, teaching others.
9. **Use Concept Mapping:** Have participants visually organize relationships between concepts.
10. **Incorporate Games and Gamification:** Design competitive or collaborative learning games.
11. **Develop Reflective Practice Activities:** Structure reflection on learning and application.
12. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 9: Feedback and Reflection

What: Provide opportunities for learners to receive input on their progress and reflect on their learning journey.

Why: Feedback helps adults gauge their progress and identify areas for improvement. Reflection deepens learning by promoting metacognition and connecting new information to existing knowledge. Regular assessment supports the goal-oriented nature of adult learning. Self-evaluation builds autonomy and encourages ongoing development.

Example Strategies:

1. **Provide Timely, Specific Feedback:** Offer input focusing on concrete behaviors.
2. **Create Self-Assessment Opportunities:** Develop tools for learners to evaluate their own progress.
3. **Use Formative Assessments:** Incorporate low-stakes checks throughout the learning process.
4. **Design Reflection Prompts:** Create guided questions that encourage thoughtful consideration.
5. **Document Learning:** Encourage ongoing documentation of insights and questions.
6. **Debrief:** Lead group reflections after significant learning activities.
7. **Create Application Plans:** Help learners develop strategies to implement new knowledge.
8. **Implement Follow-Up Assessments:** Check in after training to evaluate application and retention.
9. **Use Technology for Immediate Feedback:** Implement digital tools that provide instant assessment.
10. **Facilitate Reflective Discussions:** Create spaces for shared reflection on learning experiences.
11. **What other strategies can you think of?**

PAL 10: Environmental Comfort

What: Create physical and virtual learning environments that support focus, engagement, and participation.

Why: Comfortable, well-designed environments minimize distractions and maximize learning potential. Physical comfort allows learners to focus on content rather than environmental stressors.

Example Strategies:

1. **Ensure Appropriate Physical Settings:** Consider temperature, lighting, acoustics, and seating.
2. **Technical Readiness:** Test all equipment beforehand and have backup options available.
3. **Create Distraction-Free Zones:** Minimize noise and visual distractions.
4. **Design Flexible Spaces:** Arrange rooms to accommodate various learning activities.
5. **Optimize Virtual Environments:** Ensure clear audio, visible materials, and user-friendly interfaces.
6. **Provide Technical Support:** Offer assistance for technology-related challenges.
7. **Establish Psychological Safety:** Foster environments where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities.
8. **Consider Timing and Pacing:** Schedule sessions with attention to energy levels and attention spans.
9. **Incorporate Movement Opportunities:** Plan for physical activity to maintain engagement.
10. **Manage Group Dynamics:** Address disruptive behaviors that impact the learning environment.
11. **Create Accessible Spaces:** Ensure environments accommodate diverse physical and cognitive needs.
12. **Provide Resource Access:** Ensure materials are readily available and organized.
13. **What other strategies can you think of?**
