

Engaging Learners in Learning:

We know that engaging learners in as many ways as possible will help them give to *and* take from any learning experience, as much as possible.

As you prepare to teach, plan for ways to involve learners mentally, emotionally and physically. There are many ways to do that, and you undoubtedly have your favorites. Some suggestions are offered below. Though you'll be drawn more to some than others, they're all important. Apply as many as are workable.

1. Ignite curiosity and learning: Let the learning begin – days or weeks *before* learners arrive at your program! Clearly communicate learning outcomes so they can anticipate what learning to expect. Invite them to think about what they already know about the content, and what they hope to learn. Ask them to reflect on what relevance the content has in their lives. Direct them to readings, web-based resources, mental or written exercises or hands-on activities that can heighten their interest in and knowledge about the content. Your goal: to have learners arrive at your program with mental wheels already turning.

On arrival -- they're ready to learn with *you*! Prepare brief statements that trigger learners' interest in your topic, while teaching them at the same time! Formats like "*Did you know ...?*" work well. Use these statements on table tents, wall posters, entrance signs, overheads, etc. Make them colorful with interesting lettering and graphics. These are powerful learning tools, often overlooked.

2. Create environment: Provide for a physical and psychological learning environment that promotes openness, thought and discussion. Appropriate light, sound, temperature, ventilation, comfortable chairs, room arrangements that invite interaction and space to move around, varied learning resources, time for stretch and mental breaks, use of color, music, -- these are but a few elements that heighten alertness and stimulate learning, and they tell learners that you care and that something extra-ordinary is about to happen here. You may not have control over all of these, but strive for those within reach!

3. Develop relationship: Take time to get acquainted! *Really!* Share something interesting about yourself and your passion for this topic. Then -- be *genuinely* interested in your learners! Who are they? Why are they here? What do they already know about this topic? What problems have they encountered with it and what use do they have for it?

4. Discover what's known: Learners have many life and work experiences. They know *more* than they *think* they know about your topic. Help them discover what that is. When *you* know more about what *they* know you can build upon it, and help them find relevance.

5. Invite dialogue: Encourage discussion, opinions and cordial disagreement. And don't just *invite* questions...*ask* them! *Lots* of them! Like "*What have your experiences with (this topic) taught you?*" or "*What concerns you most about (this topic)?*" We're all in this together. We have much to learn from each other.

6. Note relevance: Learners don't have much time, but they *make* time for practical, problem-centered, relevant learning. Help them discover why this content matters to them, their clientele and their communities. What desired changes can be anticipated?

7. Broaden perspective: Fit participants with panoramic lenses. Help them see the larger implications of what you're teaching. What broader purpose does this content serve?

8. Vary presentation modes: Variety is not only the spice of life, it's an *essential* ingredient for learning! Balance your presentation with an engaging mix that stimulates all of your learners' senses -- the visual, auditory, reading-writing and kinesthetic dimensions of learning. Passive listening and viewing *do not* generate learning. Keep lectures to a minimum. Stimulate critical thinking.

As you plan your teaching mix, consider:

Visual resources such as video, slides, real objects, photographs, graphs and charts, graphic images, etc.

Auditory resources such as brief lecture, large and small group discussion, problem solving with a partner, brainstorming, recorded or live music and sound, etc.

Reading-writing resources such as print-based materials, quiet reflection, journaling, note taking, mind mapping, etc.

Kinesthetic resources such as hands-on experiences, working with equipment, manipulating objects, physically moving about, role-playing, etc.

9. Engage emotions: We best remember those things that engage us emotionally. Help learners find and experience an emotional connection to your topic. Seek moments of laughter! Humor is a powerful learning tonic!

10. Transfer learning: Suggest strategies and opportunities that will help learners “try on” their new learning once they’re back at work. Where can they turn for help, resources, reinforcements and counsel?

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