

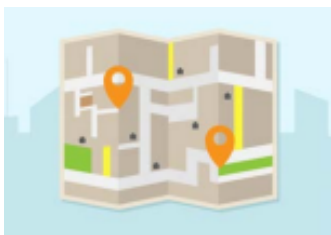
Creating a positive learning experience

This guide provides suggestions and ideas to help you break down some barriers to learning, deliver engaging learning sessions and ensure that learners are getting the support they need. You may find that some of these suggestions work for you, others may not. That is fine, there is no one approach that works for every session and situation.

Getting people in

Sometimes just getting people through the door can be a challenge. Identifying and removing potential barriers can go a long way to making your session more inviting.

Here are a few questions to consider about your session. You may not be able to resolve all of these, but an awareness of them can help you anticipate reasons people may give for not visiting.



- Is your venue accessible by public transport?
- Is there affordable parking nearby?
- Does the area feel safe after dark if events will take place in the evenings?



- Is your venue welcoming or potentially daunting to people going in for the first time?
- Is it accessible to people with accessibility challenges?
- Is it perceived as a building for everyone, or only for a specific community or group?



- If marketing materials show pictures of people or places, do they use diverse images which suggest everyone is welcome? Is it inclusive?
- Is the font size large enough for people to read?
- Are they easy to read and available in a language used by the local community?

The subject matter may be the first thing people think about, but if people are not sure if they want to learn, it is easy for them to look for other reasons not to.

You should have greater control over most of these barriers. You may want to think about these when promoting your session and on your marketing materials.



- Are the activities accessible to everyone?
- Are they varied?
- Is there a mix of group and individual activities?
- Are refreshments available and if so are they free?



- Are the session times appropriate for the target group?
- Do the sessions clash with other commitments (caring responsibilities, paid work, religious festivals, other key events in the local community)?

Engaging learning sessions

Some adults have negative past experiences of learning and worry that getting involved could be overwhelming, particularly if they have to learn or speak in a group. A general lack of confidence, and more specifically in relation to spoken English skills and/or literacy, can also affect people's willingness to participate.

Here are a few more suggestions when planning your sessions.



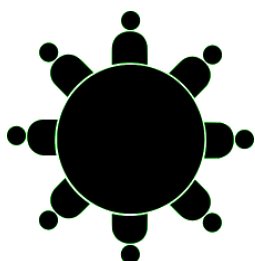
- Adults may feel uncomfortable in a formal 'classroom' setting.
- A welcoming, relaxed atmosphere can help make learning less intimidating.
- Consider using customs that will be experienced as positive such as sharing a plate.



- Providing tea and biscuits can give people a break from learning and a chance to socialise.
- Some venues make a nominal charge to cover the costs of refreshments, others provide them for free.



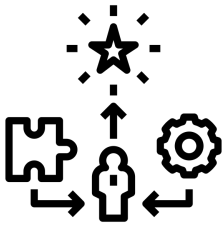
- Have materials and activities such as icebreakers that people can relate to and are interested in.
- For example, if you know that people in the group like sport, asking them to search for pictures of that, rather than cats, will engage them more.



- Having a combination of styles and techniques can help keep your sessions interesting.
- For example, a demonstration followed by small group activity and then full group discussion, ending with individual reflection on the learning gained in the session.

No matter how well you plan, it is likely that you will need to adapt your sessions based on your learners.

Unless you have a fixed schedule, being flexible and allowing people to learn at their own pace can be very beneficial.



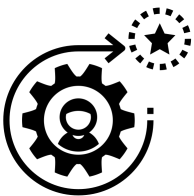
- Allowing learners to help each other (peer to peer support) helps boost confidence for the 'supporter'.
- It also reassures people that it is OK to ask each other for help, removing their reliance on you.



- Learning new things can be challenging and take a lot of concentration.
- Regular breaks are especially important if there is a lot of time in front of a computer screen.



- Give people time to try things out, make their own mistakes and work out how to fix them.
- Learning that it is OK to get it wrong, and pausing to reflect, is an important and valuable part of learning.



- Plan for people who learn at different rates and in different ways.
- Extension activities for quicker learners can keep them engaged whilst others catch up.
- Handouts can be useful to help people remember what you've talked about.

Keeping it going

Assessing learning

Assessing learning is important for evaluating how effective teaching is. For learners it can reinforce learning and build confidence. For

volunteers or Digital Mentors it can help identify people that may need additional support or areas of the session that could be improved.

Assessments can be obvious, such as quizzes or group questions and answer sessions. This type of assessment is great for identifying specific points of learning. These do not have to be serious or like an exam; making them light hearted or 'group vs group' can take the pressure off individuals and make them more of an activity and less like a test.

Less obvious assessments can include observation of learners as they practise, and listening to what they say about what they have learnt. Often this can be a more reliable method of identifying if someone is finding an activity difficult.

Learner records

However you assess your learners' progress as your sessions continue, you'll build up an awareness of the ability, confidence and needs of your individual learners. It can be useful to keep a few simple notes for future sessions; they can also be very valuable in case a different volunteer or Digital Mentor needs to support the group.

Your notes do not need to be detailed, and should not contain anything you would not feel happy to share with the learner. They can be just enough to remind you of each person's skill level, what they have done previously and any learning goals you discussed. You could also include any quiz sheets they have completed.

For example, "David: Confident with email and happy to support others. Diane: Likes cooking. Enjoys working in groups or pairs".

Feedback

Feedback is an important part of the learning process, both for you and your learners.

Be sure to offer praise where appropriate throughout the session. Even a simple, “That’s good, well done.” can go a long way to boosting a learner’s confidence, especially if they were worried about learning in the first place.

Encouraging learners to give you their feedback on the session, the activities, or any other part of their learning experience can reassure them that their opinion matters; which in turn can build confidence. They may like to give feedback one to one, or feel better doing it as part of a group.

You might even have time at the end of each session to ask them for one thing they liked and one thing they thought could be better about the session.