

## Responding to individual needs

### *Introduction*

Once you have considered the information you have about individual learners, you will need to think about how you might adapt your teaching to take into account this information, and so enrich the learning experiences of your learners. This is one aspect of differentiation.

Another aspect to take into consideration is whether your learners have a preference for one learning style and need support in others. We can't assume that they like to learn in the same way, nor that they necessarily have the same preferences as we ourselves do.

If you look up 'learning styles' on the internet, you will discover dozens of different questionnaires for assessing learning preferences. **But beware! A study by the Learning and Skills Research Centre<sup>1</sup> said that some of the most widely used instruments had low reliability and poor validity. The report recommended that 'teachers and trainers should look instead at broader notions of how learners approach learning'.**

So where does this leave you? There is a basic principle to bear in mind that will enrich the learning experiences of your learners:

### *Plan your session so your learners use their eyes AND ears AND hands.*

This way, you will involve their visual, auditory and kinaesthetic senses, so that you will be creating a varied learning experience for them.

### *When you have completed this task, you will have:*

- **reflected on the extent to which your sessions accommodate the preferences of different learners;**
- **shared your reflections with colleagues;**
- **made plans for making more use of all three senses in your sessions.**

### *Suggestions for using different senses*

#### *Help learners learn visually by:*

- **giving demonstrations or getting learners to demonstrate to each other;**
- **using different coloured paper for different tasks;**
- **using different colours to highlight main points;**
- **using pictures and cartoons on handouts and worksheets;**
- **providing instructions in diagrammatic form.**

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<sup>1</sup> Coffield F et al, *Learning styles and pedagogy in post-16 learning. A systematic and critical review*, 2004, Learning and Skills Research Centre/Learning and Skills Development Agency.

***Help learners learn through listening by:***

- extracting and noting main points in all activities;
- giving clear feedback/summary to all activities;
- repeating main points to be remembered more than once;
- including activities that invite learners to talk to each other.

***Help learners practically by:***

- using role-play and simulation to give a practical experience;
- letting learners help someone else by demonstrating or coaching;
- breaking activities into small, step-by-step, real tasks to give positive and quick results;
- letting learners handle equipment and tools (with appropriate safeguards).

***Activity: Accommodating different learning preferences***

***1. Reflecting on past sessions***

Think back to the last session you ran. If you still have the session plan, consult it as a reminder.

List each strategy you used for incorporating visual, auditory and practical/kinaesthetic aspects into the session.

***2. How I used visual, auditory and practical approaches in my last theory session:***

Visual:

Notes

Auditory:

Notes

Practical/Kinaesthetic:

Notes

### 3. *Sharing the information with your colleagues*

If you have the opportunity to share your session plan with a colleague:

- describe the purpose of your session;
- describe how you involved learners in using the different senses;
- invite comments and suggestions about how it might have been done differently.

Make notes here about the outcomes of your discussion

We will be referring to learners' preferences again in the next section when we invite you to begin preparing session plans

