



Creating a positive learning experience

Be Connected



**Good Things
Foundation**

1 | Introduction

This guide provides some 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's fine, there is no one approach that works for every venue and situation.



If you'd like to know more about learning theory, learning principles and case studies, you may like to visit the [Adult Learning Australia website](#).

2 | 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 venue more inviting.

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

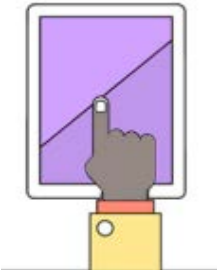

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is your venue accessible by public transport?• Is there affordable parking nearby?• Does the area feel safe after dark if events will take place in the evenings?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is your venue welcoming or potentially daunting to people going in for the first time?• Is it accessible to people with mobility problems?• Is it perceived as a building for everyone, or only for a specific community or group?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If marketing materials show pictures of people or places, do they use diverse images which suggest everyone is welcome?• 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?

2 | Getting people in

It's also important to consider what people might think about the session you run at your venue.

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

You should have greater control over most of these. You may want to tell people about these on your marketing material and when promoting your sessions.





	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are the activities accessible to everyone, and are they varied?• Is there a mix of group and individual activities?• Are refreshments available and if so are they free?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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)?

3 | Engaging learning sessions

Some adults have negative past experiences of learning, and worry that getting involved could be humiliating, 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.

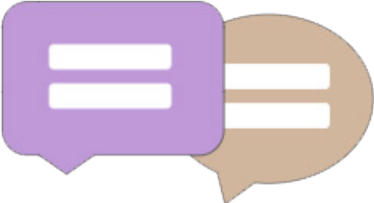



Here are a few suggestions when planning your sessions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adults may feel uncomfortable in a formal ‘classroom’ setting.• A welcoming, relaxed atmosphere can help make learning less intimidating.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have materials and activities 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.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.

3 | Engaging learning sessions

No matter how well you plan, it's likely that you'll 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.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allowing learners to help each other (peer to peer support) helps boost confidence for the 'supporter'.• It also reassures people that it's OK to ask each other for help, removing their reliance on you.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning new things can be challenging and take a lot of concentration.• Regular breaks are especially important if there's a lot of time in front of a computer screen.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Give people time to try things out, make their own mistakes and work out how to fix them.• Learning that it's OK to get it wrong, and reflecting it, is an important and valuable part of learning.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 been talked about.

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 leaning. These don't have to be serious or like exams; 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 assessment can include observation of learners as they practice, and listening to what they say about what they've 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 don't need to be detailed, and shouldn't contain anything you wouldn't feel happy to share with the learner. They can be just enough to remind you of each person's skill level, what they've done previously and any learning goals you've discussed. You could also include any quiz sheets they've 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. They may not have anything negative to say but at least they'll know that they have permission to do so.