BEST PRACTICES FOR DEVELOPING IMPACTFUL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Executive Summary
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WESTERN
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Use Multiple Learning Strategies when Marketing, Creating and Implementing Your Programs

In general, adult learners need to:
- know why a training is important.
- have their self-concept acknowledged.
- have their previous experiences recognized.
- be ready to learn, oriented to the learning environment, and motivated.

Using the right teaching and learning strategies can help create an experience that addresses these needs and will make your program participants eager to implement change. Learning styles of participants varies but research has shown learning style preferences themselves are not as important as ensuring the content of your educational programs are of high quality, tailored to the needs of your audience, and developed with your specific audience in mind.

This executive summary will provide a high-level overview of the wide variety of learning styles and provide examples of educational strategies that can be used to appeal to a diverse set of learners.

Highlights

Types of Learning Styles

Motivating Participation

Promoting your Program

Know your Audience

Teach to Specific Audiences

Teaching Online

Specific Teaching Strategies

Teaching Farmers/Ranchers

Types of Learning Styles

Learning styles are our personal preference for how we like to receive and use information - just like food preferences inform what type of food we like to eat. Being aware of the wide variety of learning style preferences can help us develop and deliver educational programs which will motivate everyone to learn. People tend to prefer certain learning environments, ways to engage in the learning process and the way the information is presented. Example approaches are presented below. Try to use **one strategy from each column** when creating your program.

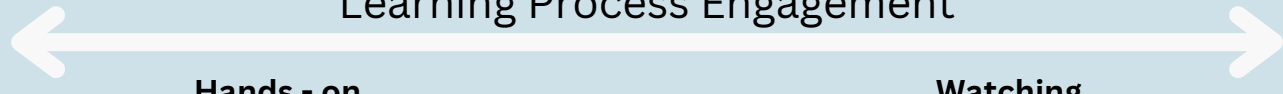## Learning Style Preferences

Learning Environment
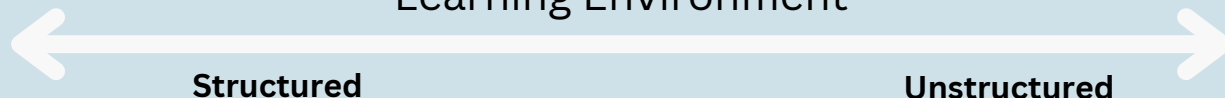
Structured	Unstructured
• Classic lectures	• Brainstorming
• Activities with specific instructions	• Self-expression
• Lab work with right/wrong answers	• Sharing of ideas
• Simulations	• Analyzing data
• Using graphs to describe data	• Journaling

Learning Process Engagement

Hands - on	Watching
• Action oriented group activities	• Pictures
• Workbooks and handouts	• Video
• Sticky notes	• Reading
• Interactive activities (field days)	• Demonstrations (field days)
• Case studies	• Webinars

Way Information is Presented
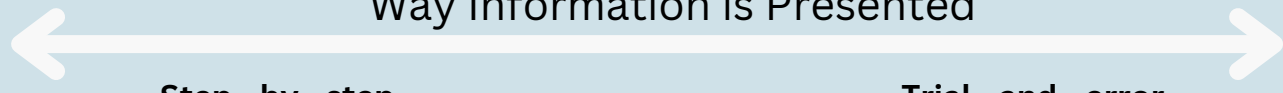
Step - by - step	Trial - and - error
• Specific directions provided for all activities	• Independent work
• Access to experts	• Safe experimentation with new ideas
• Ordered content with clear guidelines for progression	• Group activities
	• General guidelines
	• Personalized learning

Motivating Participation

We focus on **WHAT** we are teaching.
Learners want to know **WHY** the information they will learn will help them in their daily life.

Before developing and marketing your educational program ask yourself:

What is the sustainable agriculture PROBLEM potential learners are looking to SOLVE by attending my program?

USE THE ANSWER: Emphasizing WHY you are offering your program rather than WHAT information will be provided in all of your promotional materials and when you talk about your program will motivate people to attend.

Promoting Your Program

Engage potential participants quickly and effectively using specific design elements:
- Use a compelling headline or attention grabber (HINT: Your WHY is a great headline).
- Preview what will be covered with a brief overview.
- Brand it with your logo.
- Offer next steps showcasing how the information being shared can be used right away.

Basic graphic design tips:
- Use high quality images - avoid pixilated or blurry images.
- Use white space - sometimes less is more.
- Use colors and patterns based on printing versus online distribution - some colors look great online but not when printed.
- Use templates and tools - many online tools can help you design visually appealing flyers and materials with little to no training.

Know your Audience

Identify who might attend your program:
- Are they older/younger?
- Are they men/women?
- Are they from underrepresented groups?
- What is their level of education?
- Where are they are physically located?
- Are they mobile?

Teach to Specific Audiences

Things to consider to ensure your educational programs meet the needs of your identified audience:

- Motivate your audience based on why they are there to learn by making things relevant.
- Do not offer programs strictly online when targeting those with limited technology and internet access.
- Obtain permission and/or support from your targeted group's opinion leaders.
- Be inclusive and appropriate - especially when using languages you are not familiar with.

- Avoid activities which involve extensive reading when literacy levels are unknown.
- Reduce jargon - keep things simple and direct.
- Take the time to understand cultural norms, social customs, expectations, etc.
- Establish trust - share where you are from, how you obtained expertise, and why you believe your information will help at the beginning of every program.

Teaching Online

Interactivity
Mimic teaching strategies used in-person and limit written content by using:
- visuals
- videos
- discussion boards

Clarity
Learners may not be able to ask questions for clarification.

Spend extra time covering concepts which are **most important.**

Timing
Online environments have more technical challenges than in-person programs.

Plan extra time to address and resolve challenges when developing your program.

Specific Teaching Strategies

Reach all types of learners by using these four strategies:
- A **verbal** description of the idea/technology.
- A **written** description of the idea/technology.
- A **figure** representing the key benefits of the idea/technology in graphical format (e.g., increased efficiency or economic benefit).
- A **video** of the idea/technology in operation.

Problem based learning
Incorporate scenarios to develop:
- Critical thinking skills
- Problem solving skills

Case studies
Use for:
- Analysis
- Critique
- Making judgements
- Real world application

Lectures
Used for:
- Providing current information
- Summarizing concepts
- Adapting information to learner needs

Only speak for 15 - 20 minutes at a time.

Incorporate learning activities between speaking sections.

Role play
Help learners:
- Experience feelings
- Practice skills in real time

Educational games
Develop and use them to:
- Stimulate competition
- Achievement opportunity

Discussion
Promotes:
- Active engagement
- Critical thinking

Teaching Farmers/Ranchers

Experience - Many have prior knowledge and experiences that should be acknowledged and valued.

Off the farm/ranch jobs - Many have multiple professional roles both on and off their operation. New information introduced should focus on reducing mental stress and improving operation efficiency.

Diverse situations - All operations are different and some practices you want to teach may not seem practical to a producer. Offer options on how ideas/technologies can be adapted.

Long-term goals - Many are focused on maintaining their operations for future generations; therefore all changes introduced must be financially viable and ensure long-term sustainability.

External pressure - Producers work in an ever-changing environment where weather, regulations, and market conditions impact their livelihoods. Be adaptive and incorporate systems approaches to keep them interested and engaged.