



Accommodating the Older Learner

Visual Issues

Avoid sudden changes in lighting; or, allow extra time for eyes to adjust.

When using audiovisuals, keep some lighting on, rather than allowing the room to go completely dark. Control sources of glare on screen, if possible.

PowerPoint presentations

- Use ***at least*** a 24-point font for text; larger for headings.
- Abide by the “6 by 6” rule—no more than 6 words per line; no more than 6 lines per page/sheet.
- Use highly contrasting colors—best is black and white. White letters on a black background also seems to work for older eyes.
- If using colors, the best contrast is between complimentary colors (opposites on a color wheel). Fluorescent colors can be exhausting for the eye and are not a good choice for text or background.
- Avoid patterned backgrounds and wallpapers – they provide an additional distraction that can be difficult to ignore. Text placed over even a light or subtly patterned background may prove troublesome, especially for someone with reduced visual acuity.
- Use a **sans serif font** for best readability on a screen.

Printed materials

- **Fonts:** Too small or too large can create problems in readability. Most older adults prefer a font size between 12 and 14 points in reading material. Don’t use anything smaller than a 12 point text.
- Headings should be sufficiently larger so as to distinguish them from the text; i.e., 18 pt headers to 14 pt text.
- **Typeface: serif vs sans serif.** Recent research suggests sans serif fonts (for example, Arial, Calibri, Verdana) are more readable for older adults when reading on a screen. The NIA (National Institute on Aging) recommends a serif font for printed materials. Avoid stylized, novelty or fancy type faces, except as accents.
- Type weight should not be too bold. Italics and underlining can appear wobbly or blurred to older eyes.
- ALL CAPS ARE HARD TO READ AND SHOULD ONLY BE USED FOR HEADLINES
- **Justification:** left-justified is easiest to read.
Full justification can create extra spacing that is hard to read and should be avoided.
Centered is fine for headings, but not for paragraphs of text.

A Course is Born: From Concept to Classroom

- Incorporate plenty of white space on your documents to reduce eye fatigue.
- Avoid long blocks of text: break copy into chunks whenever possible.
- Use bullets, subheads or boxes to organize your content.

Auditory Issues

- Slow down your speech; enunciate clearly.
- Substitute words adults have trouble understanding.
- Face the person.
- Try lowering the pitch of your voice (if speaking to a man) or raising it (woman) rather than just speaking louder.

Cognitive Issues

- Encourage older adults to take their time and read slowly.
- When asking questions, allow sufficient time for people to collect their thoughts and reply. Don't be afraid of moments of silence.
- Provide written materials that will help the learner remember steps in a process.
- Encourage those who experience a momentary mental lapse to relax and allow the brain to continue working on recapturing the information that was temporarily misplaced. Move on, encouraging them to get back with the group once they remember!

Other Issues

- Socialization is a valid need for older adults; find opportunities to incorporate it into your course.
- Don't go longer than 2 hours without a break.
- Make sure you approach your subject in ways that are relevant to adult needs and interests. Tailor your examples to those of interest to your audience. Better yet, ask your audience what their specific interests are.
- Don't allow ageist and/or self-defeating comments and ideas into your classroom.