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Teaching Tips

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Extension program participants may possess different learning styles, or ways they process information and prefer to learn. As an Extension agent, you may tend to teach the way you were taught in school. Just remember that teaching your audiences in one specific teaching technique, or method, is not effective for reaching and engaging all program participants. Researchers suggest there are various models of learning styles, but four general types of learning styles have been identified, according to Fleming and Mills (1992), and include Visual, Auditory, Reading and Kinesthetic, which make up the VARK Model (see Table 1). Individuals develop learning styles as a result of their previous learning experiences, genetic makeup, culture and the society. Oftentimes, children in 4-H are strong kinesthetic learners, and thus 4-H promotes the Experiential Learning Model. Don't overlook that some adults, including many agents I've met, are also strong kinesthetic learners.

Be sure to approach your program design and lessons with the different learning styles in mind and utilize multiple teaching techniques (see Table 2 for some examples) to engage and reach all types of learners who attend your Extension programs. As a result of utilizing multiple techniques of teaching, participants will increase their learning and usefulness of the information.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me and I'll be happy to help! For more information on teaching adults, and a more extensive list of teaching techniques see the Extension fact sheet titled [Adults as Learners: Teaching Adults in Extension](#).

Table 1. VARK Model Learning Styles (Fleming & Mills, 1992).

| Learning Style | Characteristics |
|---------------------|--|
| Visual | Graphics, pictures, flow charts and other visuals are helpful in learning. |
| Auditory | Hearing information is a prominent part of learning. Listening to lectures or recorded information to play again is useful. |
| Reading/ writing | Reading written text or writing notes is important in comprehending and retaining information. |
| Kinesthetic | Motion and space, or hands-on experiential learning is helpful. Being able to practice something learned to make it real is appreciated. |

Table 2. Teaching Techniques.

| Teaching Technique | Characteristics |
|---|--|
| Demonstrations | Demonstrations allow for learning by observation of how to do something. May be used with both large and small groups. |
| Discussions | Learning takes place in a social context and adult learners become resources of new knowledge for one another as well as the adult educator. Discussions allow for information sharing and comprehension. |
| Storytelling | Adult educators can provide knowledge through real-life experiences – telling stories – during educational programs. Adult learners in attendance may also teach something by storytelling, which can enhance understanding. |
| Games | Teaching through the use of games is a fun way for adult learners to model actual situations or problems they face. |
| Project activities | These include simulations and problem solving activities where learners may experience how to do something being taught during the educational program. Experiential and active learning helps learners apply the learning to their personal situations. |
| Videos | Videos may provide a memorable learning experience that enhances knowledge but should be used intermittently and no more than 20 minutes at a time without engaging the learners. |
| Case studies | Case studies allow adults to better understand and analyze learning. They also allow for discussion and the transfer of knowledge/skills learned to other situations. |
| Educational tours | Educational tours, or field days, have been used since the beginning of the Cooperative Extension Service. Educational tours are a way for adults to learn visually and to learn to adopt new practices by seeing how they work/have worked. Tours also enhance understanding of information. |
| Guest speaker/ panel discussion | Guest speakers and panels are a way to enhance an educational program by bringing in experts in fields relative to the topic being taught. The guests may provide knowledge and answer questions adult learners have. Panel discussions are a great way to develop discussion when there is a large group of program participants. |
| Handouts/fact sheets/other written materials or websites | Adult learners sometimes like having resources for additional information once an educational program is completed. Provide handouts, fact sheets, web links and/or other written material to adult learners to reinforce learning. |