

Tips for Educating Older Adults – A Guide for Presenters

The Message

What does the audience want to know?

What do you want them to learn? (The goals of the session.)

1. Use examples; things seniors would find familiar. (Remember the old wringer-washing machines? Remember how much work doing the laundry used to be? We don't get nearly as much exercise around the house as we used to. Can you think of other examples?)
2. Use familiar language. Avoid jargon.
3. Is your proposed message appropriate for the economic and cultural lifestyles of the audience?
4. Involve the audience. Ask them questions. Use a pre-test. Form them into small groups for hands-on learning. (For example, putting batteries in a smoke detector and testing it.)
5. Keep it short, 0 minutes or less is best, or break it up.
6. The message should tie-in to things older adults value such as independence, pride, or perseverance.
7. Make sure the message is not condescending. Make sure it doesn't assume all older adults are alike. Avoid the term "elderly". It implies frailness. Don't use baby talk. Address them as adults.
8. Use an unhurried, relaxed pace. Make them want to invite you back for more information.
9. Make sure your message is based on current information.
10. Speak with enthusiasm. Be open, honest and friendly.
11. Answer questions respectfully. If you don't know the answer, say so and get the answer to the person later.
12. Read body language. Are they interested? Having fun?
13. Use a catchy title to create interest.

14. If you are doing the speaking or before introducing the speaker introduce and welcome new participants.
15. Use an “ice-breaker” to warm-up the group and generate excitement.
16. Fluctuate your voice. Monotones are deadly!
17. Repeat key points.
18. Incorporate memory helpers. (i.e. RICE – Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation)

Print Materials

1. Avoid cartoons or graphics that caricature or stereotype older adults or depict older adults as all alike. Include positive images of people using canes; not images that infer frailty.
2. Photographs or illustrations need to be clean. Wavy lines or blurry images create movement (swimming) in print or design.
3. Use dark print on light backgrounds. Color contrast should be sharp. (Avoid blue on green or pink or yellow on white.) Use a plain, clear typeface at least 12 point in size. Avoid using all capitals even in titles. Use a lot of white space to break up sections of the message. Make sure important details are large, distinct, and uncluttered.
4. Use glare-free (non-glossy) paper.

The Environment

1. Is the background noise free?
2. Use a microphone. Speak clearly and project slowly in a moderate voice. Short sentences are best. Yelling distorts sound. Ask if everyone can hear and be alert to cues such as people leaning forward, turning their “good” ear toward them or cupping their ear. You may want to ask people to volunteer to be a “buddy” to people with hearing or visual impairments. (They probably would sit next to them and explain softly what is being said or shown on a video, for example.) Face the audience when speaking to permit lip reading. Don’t “speak” to your screen if you are showing overheads. Eye contact is very important to let the audience feel that you are involved with them instead of talking at them.
3. Exercise leaders need to make sure the music isn’t so loud that their instructions can’t be heard.

4. Important information should be reinforced on a flip chart or by handouts to aid those with hearing or visual impairment.
5. Don't stand in front of a window. It is hard to look into glare.
6. Ask that flickering fluorescent lights be fixed or turned off.
7. If using a blackboard, clean it ahead of time with a wet cloth to take away white glare or fuzziness from chalk dust.
8. Don't turn down lights unless you really must.
9. If overheads are used there should be no more than 2 – 3 lines on one. Otherwise print gets too small to read from the back of the room.
10. Room temperature should be a consistent and comfortable 70 - 72°F.

Adapted from material from Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging and Merck Frost.