**Adult Learning Course**

**for**

**Adjustment To Blindness (ATB)**

**Instructor Applicants**

**State Services for the Blind**

**2200 University Avenue, Suite #240**

**St. Paul, MN 55114**

**651-539-2300 or 1-800-652-9000**

**Welcome**

Welcome to the SSB Adult Learning Course (ALC). This course is meant to provide an introduction and act as a resource for instructors contracted with SSB providing assistive technology and adjustment to blindness (ATB) skills training.

Training blind, visually impaired and DeafBlind individuals in the use of alternative techniques and accessible technology can be challenging. The students represent a wide range of skills, experiences, motivations, and goals. They come with a variety of types of vision loss and may have additional disabilities other than blindness or DeafBlindness. The material in this ALC offers practical teaching tools, strategies, and information to increase your effectiveness as a trainer.

When you complete reading this course material, contact Jennifer Beilke to schedule an appointment to discuss the material and any questions you might have. This meeting is required to complete the ALC.

Thank you,

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**Guidelines for Interacting with People who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Guide Dog Users:**

* Treat people who are blind or visually impaired as you would anyone else. They do the same things you do, but sometimes use different techniques.
* If you were blind, you would want someone to speak to you in a normal voice. Shouting won't improve a person's vision.
* Talk directly to a person who is blind, not through their companion. Loss of sight is not loss of intellect.
* When entering or leaving a room, identify yourself and be sure to mention when you are leaving. Address the person by name so they will know you are speaking to them.
* Don't worry about using common, everyday words and phrases like "look", "see", or "watching TV" around people who are blind.
* If someone looks like they may need assistance, ask. They will tell you if they do. If they are about to encounter a dangerous situation, voice your concerns in a calm and clear manner.
* Pulling or steering a person is awkward and confusing. Avoid grabbing their arm or their dog's harness.
* Ask "Would you like me to guide you?" Offering your elbow is an effective and dignified way to lead a person who is blind. Do not be afraid to identify yourself as an inexperienced sighted guide and ask the person for tips on how to improve.
* If you leave someone alone in an unfamiliar area, make sure it is near something they can touch - a wall, table, rail, etc. Being left out in empty space can be very uncomfortable.
* Be sure to give useful directions. Phrases, such as "across the street" and "left at the next corner" are more helpful than vague descriptions like "over there."
* Do not pet a guide dog without permission. A working dog should not be distracted from its duty. It is okay to ask the owner if you may pet their dog.
* In a restaurant, give clear directions to available seats. Your offer to read the menu aloud may be appreciated, but you shouldn't assume that they would not want to order their own food.
* When the food arrives, ask if they would like to know what is on their plate. You can describe the location of food items by using clock position: Your coffee is at 3 o'clock; the sugar is at 1 o'clock.
* Be considerate. If you notice a spot or stain on a person's clothing tell them privately (just as you would like to be told).
* Leave doors all the way open or all the way closed; half-open doors or cupboards are dangerous. Don't rearrange furniture or personal belongings without letting them know.
* Be sensitive when questioning people about their blindness. This is personal information and boundaries should be respected.

**DeafBlindness: A Unique Disability**

**Facts About DeafBlindness**

* DeafBlindness is a combination of vision and hearing loss that, together limits a person's awareness of the environment; and
* Limits a person's ability to acquire knowledge of the world at large.
* As result of this disability, a person must find other ways to interact with people and things.
* No two individuals with DeafBlindness have the same combination of vision and hearing loss. One may have been:
* born deaf and become blind;
* born blind and become deaf;
* lost both vision and hearing at an early age;
* born deaf and blind; or
* have partial vision and/or hearing that may decline over time.
* DeafBlindness creates unique problems with interaction in every facet of life including:
* access to information;
* difficulties with motor skills; and
* integration into the community.
* The key to independent living for people who are DeafBlind is communication. There are many methods and devices used by DeafBlind people to communicate including: braille; large print; print-on-palm; fingerspelling; American Sign Language (ASL); signed English; telephone devices such as the TTY, amplified receivers, using the Relay Service, etc.; adaptive technology; etc.

**Conclusion**

* DeafBlindness does not mean deafness plus blindness.
* It is not two disabilities put together.
* It is one unique disability that requires people to find other ways to interact with people and the environment.
* You can make this interaction easier and more effective by using some of the simple strategies discussed today to improve communication.
* Remember that communication is the key when interacting with a person who is DeafBlind.
* People who are DeafBlind are individuals - each one is different.
* The keys to dealing with a person who is DeafBlind, as in dealing with all people, are:

1. **COURTESY;**
2. **FLEXIBILITY**; and
3. **COMMON SENSE**

* The bottom line is respect - for each person who is DeafBlind as a unique individual and for yourself.

**DeafBlind Training Resources**

The Minnesota Department of Human Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services offers the free online training *Deafblind 101: An Introduction to Combined Hearing Loss*. This training was created to help increase awareness and understanding of the general public about the unique challenges experienced by people who have both hearing and vision loss.

Deafblind 101 – An Introduction to Combined Hearing and Vision Loss

<http://pathlore.dhs.mn.gov/courseware/DisabilityServices/DeafBlind_101/index.html>

**Guidelines for Interacting with People who are DeafBlind**

* When approaching a person who is DeafBlind, let him/her know you are near. This can be done by a simple touch - usually on the hands.
* Identify yourself every time you meet. You can work out a simple but special signal for identifying yourself with the person who is DeafBlind.
* Be flexible about communication. Try a variety of communication methods such as print-on-palm; printing in large letters on white paper with a black marker or 20/20 pen; if you know even finger spelling in ASL, you can try that either visually or place your hands under the hands of the DeafBlind person and spell a word.
* If a person who is DeafBlind is alone in a room, let him or her know if you are leaving. Be sure the person is comfortable and has some contact with an object in the room. **DO NOT ABANDON A PERSON WHO IS DEAFBLIND IN UNFAMILIAR PLACES.**
* Remember to **COMMUNICATE!** If you must move a person who is DeafBlind suddenly for safety reasons, follow these simple steps:

1. Let the person know you are there by a simple touch;
2. Print a large "X" on the person's back - this is the universal sign for danger/emergency - and then move the person to safety;
3. Explain the reasons for the action when everyone is safe

* Offer help if it looks appropriate, but do not assume the person always wants or needs help.
* In walking, let the person who is DeafBlind take your arm. Never push the person ahead of you or pull the person behind you.
* Again, remember to **COMMUNICATE** when there is a need to move. Don't just grab and move.
* Lighting is critical when communicating with people who are DeafBlind. Here are some easy guidelines to keep in mind:

1. The lighting should be bright enough for you to read by without getting eye fatigue.
2. Be sure the person who is DeafBlind is not looking directly at the light or that light from a window is not shining directly in the person's eyes.
3. In general, overhead lighting is best, but when in doubt, **ASK THE PERSON.**

* Remember, it will always take longer to meet with a person who is DeafBlind than with most other people due to the communication style.
* If you are responsible for setting up a meeting that includes people who are DeafBlind, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Choose a site that is accessible and large enough to accommodate the person, interpreters, equipment, guide dogs, etc.;
2. Choose a site with "good" lighting;
3. Allow ample time for a meeting;
4. Try to choose interpreters who are specialists in working with people who are DeafBlind;
5. Provide written materials in appropriate formats;
6. Include brief (3-5 minute) breaks every hour for people who are DeafBlind and the interpreters to rest their eyes and arms.

**Working with Customers with Disabilities in Addition To Blindness**

Many of the customers you may work with have other disabilities in addition to blindness.

When working with individuals who have disabilities in addition to blindness, there may be many challenges students face such as:

* Fatigue
* Numbness or Tingling
* Weakness
* Dizziness and Vertigo
* Walking (Gait) Difficulties
* Spasticity
* Frequent restroom breaks
* Speech problems
* Tremor
* Seizures
* Headache/Migraine
* Difficulty breathing
* Hearing loss/deafness
* Chronic pain
* Neuropathy – loss of sensation in the fingers and toes
* Paralysis
* Use of wheelchair
* Need for frequent change in positions
* Fluctuating vision
* Depression
* Feelings of isolation or paranoia
* Difficulty concentrating and paying attention
* Easily irritated or angered
* Information processing challenges
* Learning and memory deficits
* Sluggish abstract reasoning
* Slowed executive functions (problem solving, planning, insight/awareness, sequencing)
* Difficulty expressing thoughts
* Chemical dependency

If you observe any cognitive or physical concerns that are adversely impacting training, contact the referring counselor.

While it is impossible to prepare for every challenge, here are some suggestions that can be helpful:

* Pay attention to the environment (temperature, lighting, noise, traffic, etc.)
* Check to make sure that necessary accommodations are available
* Meet in a location that is mutually convenient and accommodates the customer
* Reduce distractions in the work area
* Divide work into smaller sections
* Avoid long strings of verbal instructions
* Slow down the pace of instruction
* Have the student practice sequencing material
* Frequent repetition
* Allow additional time for review
* Check frequently for understanding
* Take small frequent breaks
* Have the student take notes and record assignments
* Assign lessons to practice outside of the training session
* Link new information to the student’s relevant prior knowledge

As an instructor you will need to be able to adapt your teaching style and technique to the needs of the customer. For example this could mean setting the volume, rate, or voice of synthesized speech for the customer’s choice or designing lessons to be have more hands on practice exercises.

**Adult Learning Concepts**

**Adult Learners**

Although the role, readiness, orientation, and motivation to learn are similar, adults learn differently than children. In general, there are two main models of instruction, instructor-centered and learner-centered.

With instructor-centered, the objective is to transfer the knowledge, skills, and information to the learner. The instructor controls the material, pace, and content. The focus is for the learner to acquire new knowledge or skills. The instructor plays a central role in the learning process.

On the other hand, a learner-centered style is described as the instructor providing knowledge but also interpreting it to a level to provide the opportunity for the learner to learn through discovery. The instructor designs experiences allowing the learner to gain new knowledge and develop new skills. The learner incorporates the new knowledge with previous knowledge. The learner controls the pace while the instructor coaches and mentors the learner to facilitate their learning.

Adults tend to be self-directed, bringing experience, and an established self-identity. Adults desire to learn stems from wanting to perform a task more effectively or learn a new skill. They tend to be aware of how they are performing and the motivation is internal.

Instructors are encouraged to view the learners as partners, working together to produce relevant and meaningful learning experiences. Structuring the lessons to facilitate a relevant learning environment for adults is vital. Instructors need to design lessons that are meaningful from the student’s standpoint.

**The Learner’s Need to Know**

Rather than be told what they need to know, adults need to know ***why*** they should learn something, why it would benefit them. This can be accomplished with reflection on what they expect to learn, how they might use it in the future, or how it will help them meet their goals. Lessons should incorporate those reflections.

**The Learner’s Self-concept**

Previous schooling experiences may have pushed the individual to be a dependent learner because the teacher was in charge of what is to be learned. The instructor of adult learners assists the adult learner to move toward a more self-directed role and to be responsible for what they learn.

**The Role of the Learner’s Experience**

The adult learner brings a lifetime of experiences. These experiences provide an additional base of knowledge that can be used to facilitate the learning experience. Adults want to use what they know and want to be acknowledged for having that knowledge.

**A Learner’s Readiness to Learn**

Readiness to learn is increased when an individual requires additional knowledge or skills to cope better with real-life tasks or problems. Lessons should be tailored to be concrete and relate to learners needs and future goals. An instructor can encourage learners readiness by incorporating experiences that simulate situations where the student will have a need for the knowledge or skill presented, such as on the job, filling out an application, developing a resume, etc.

**The Learner’s Orientation to Learning**

Rather than sequenced learning, adults are life, task, or problem-centered in their orientation to learning. The instructor is not necessarily viewed as an authority figure but rather as a resource for information. They want to understand what they are learning will apply to their life, a task they need to perform, or to solve a problem. Instruction becomes more effective if it uses real-life examples or situations that adult learners may encounter in their life or on the job.

**Learners’ Motivation to Learn**

While adult learners may respond to external motivators, internal priorities are more important. Incentives such as increased job opportunities, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life are important in giving adults a reason to learn. Activities that build learners self-esteem, or sense of accomplishment may help motivate the learner. In addition, learners input into the development of lessons or in the prioritization of topics covered can help students take ownership of the learning process.

# **Working with Adolescents**

There are countless joys in working with adolescents. They are discovering who they are, asking big questions about life, and learning to navigate the road in front of them. The adolescent brain is still developing and therefore working with adolescent learners can be very different than working with adult learners. Below are aspects of adolescence to consider in your work with them:

**Rapport**: Building rapport with teens is essential for success. A genuine interest in them and their lives will really improve your relationship. Teenagers have a talent for knowing if you are being genuine or faking this interest. Take time to get to know their interests and using them in your planning.

**Choice**: Build choice into your classroom activities. It should be clear that you cannot just let students choose what they want to do. Choice as a planned strategy within a lesson. In order to create meaningful choice, you first need to identify the main objective of your task. That is not up for choice. Once your main objective is clear you can come up with more than one way of achieving it. The choice can be in the type of task, the tool to be used, and the way to present it, among others.

**Variety**: Teens get bored easily. Use variety as your ally. You can vary topics, types of tasks, etc. Predictability can ruin your class. You can change the order in which you normally do things and come up with unexpected, original tasks to break down classroom routine. If you have the possibility of changing where you can have your class, do so! A classroom, a library, a playground, a garden…. Anywhere is good for a lesson. You can plan for specific tasks to be done in these alternative spaces.

**Challenge**: Add challenge. Challenge can come in different ways.

* Creating slightly more difficult tasks. More difficult tasks will require more concentration on the part of the learners and will stretch their minds thus increasing student engagement
* Introducing competitions in the classroom. Most teens are very competitive and will get involved in almost any task if there is a competition element involved.
* Going for open-ended tasks. You can provide multiple points of entry and allow for varied and multiple possible solutions. This is also related to choice and interests. It is also a way of personalizing tasks. It will increase motivation and promote creativity.

**Individualized Instruction**

http://d.adroll.com/cm/r/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/b/outhttp://d.adroll.com/cm/w/out

Individualized instruction is an important principle in teaching. When instructors design lessons based on individual needs, they are differentiating their teaching. The following excerpt from *Scholastic Professional* titled,[**Differentiating Reading Instruction**](http://shop.scholastic.com/shop/en/teacherstore/product/differentiating-reading-instruction-9780545022989)**,**by Laura Robb details why differentiation is important and factors to consider when working with a diverse group of people.

Differentiation is a way of teaching; it’s not a program or package of worksheets. It asks instructors to know their students well so they can provide each one with experiences and tasks that will improve learning. It means giving students multiple options for taking in information (1999). Differentiating instruction means that you observe and understand the differences and similarities among students and use this information to plan instruction. Here is a list of some key principles that form the foundation of differentiating instruction.

* **Ongoing, formative assessment:** Instructors continually assess to identify students’ strengths and areas of need so they can meet students where they are and help them move forward.
* **Recognition of diverse learners:** The students we teach have diverse levels of expertise and experience. Ongoing assessments enable teachers to develop differentiated lessons that meet every students’ needs.
* **Group Work:** Students collaborate in pairs and small groups whose membership changes as needed. Learning in groups enables students to engage in meaningful discussions and to observe and learn from one another.
* **Problem Solving:** The focus in classrooms that differentiate instruction is on issues and concepts rather than “the book” or the chapter. This encourages all students to explore big ideas and expand their understanding of key concepts.
* **Choice:** Instructors offer students choice in the tasks and projects they complete. By negotiating with students, teachers can create motivating assignments that meet students’ diverse needs and varied interests.

From this list you can see that differentiating instruction asks teachers to continually strive to know and to respond to each students’ needs to maximize learning.

The pages that follow offer a variety of differentiating factors to consider when planning your instruction. Information about learning styles, additional disabilities, and young adult learners present you with aspects to think about as you get to know our customers and design meaningful lessons for them.

**Learning Styles**

While people learn in a variety of ways, most have a preferred learning style. Some learn best by seeking the meaning, some need to think through ideas, others seek efficiency, while others prefer to learn though self-discovery.

Use the following information on learning styles to determine the learning style of the learner. If unsure, the learner can respond to the Learning Styles Profile (<http://www.nomolos.org/trdv500/frame_a.html>). This may be a good activity or at least discussion during the first meeting.

Knowing the learning style of the learner will assist the instructor in knowing how to design lesson plans and approach the learner.

CATEGORIES OF LEARNERS

**Imaginative Learners**

Imaginative learners seek meaning and have a need to be personally involved with the learning. They learn by listening, sharing, and seeking meaning.

Imaginative learners prefer:

* Being personally involved
* Cooperation
* Asking questions to understand the concept and task
* Learning by understanding the concept and task
* Perceiving information concretely
* Processing the information reflectively

Imaginative learners dislike:

* Debates
* Memorizing
* Being rushed
* Insensitivity

**Analytical Learners**

Analytical learners tend to be deliberate, unhurried, and learn by thinking through ideas. They seek facts. Their behavior tends to be compliant.

Analytical learners prefer:

* Organization
* Logical flow
* Specific directions
* Routines
* Exactness

Analytical learners dislike:

* Creative projects
* Small talk
* Discussion
* Impracticality
* Irrelevance

**Common Sense Learners**

Common sense learners are efficiency oriented. They have a need to know how things work. They test what they learn in sensible ways.

Common sense learners prefer:

* Getting to the point
* Developing strategies
* Practical uses
* Solving problems
* Being in control of the situation
* Perceiving information abstractly and actively processing
* Usefulness and practicality

Common sense learners dislike:

* Fuzzy ideas
* Lectures
* Unclear deadlines

**Dynamic Learners**

Dynamic learners are active, involved, and learn by trial-and-error. They prefer self-discovery and dislike routine.

Dynamic learners prefer:

* New things
* Asking questions
* Being active
* Accomplishment
* Jumping right into a new task
* Creativity

Dynamic learners dislike:

* Following specific directions
* Writing
* Formality
* Sterile environments

By knowing the learners learning style, the instructor can facilitate the learning process by using the instruction method best suited to the individual learner. This allows for a smoother and more effective learning experience.

Although a learner may have a preferred learning style, the instructor should utilize a variety of instruction methods and styles.

INSTRUCTION STYLES

In addition to knowing the learning style of the learner, it is important for the instructor to know his or her own learning style. This can be accomplished by responding to the same Learning Styles Profile found at <http://www.nomolos.org/trdv500/frame_a.html>. Learning style influences instruction style. Instructor self-awareness is central to productive training sessions.

Instructors who are Imaginative Learners, tend to be:

**Imaginative Trainers**

Imaginative trainers believe knowledge should increase the insights of the learner. They prefer cooperation and encourage authenticity. They strive for individual growth and are sensitive to learner’s backgrounds and experiences.

Instructors who are Analytical Learners, tend to be:

**Analytical Trainers**

Analytical trainers like direct instruction and are viewed as content experts. They manage by knowing facts. They encourage outstanding students.

Instructors who are Common Sense Learners, tend to be:

**Common Sense Trainers**

Common sense trainers seek productivity and competence and want to give students specific skills. Their desire is to see learners use skills. They engage the learning process through coaching and facilitating learners.

Instructors who are Dynamic Learners, tend to be:

**Dynamic Trainers**

Dynamic trainers like experiential learning that includes variety. They tend to incorporate the learner’s expertise by linking their experience to the lesson. They enjoy the learner’s discovery.

Instructors need to use different instruction styles based on the needs and preferences of the learner. Different learning styles are used with the same learner.

**Lesson Planning**

Simply stated, a lesson plan is a detailed description of the instruction to be provided to a learner. It provides the map and steps to take the learner from their current skill level to their desired skill level.

To understand the direction of the instruction, a goal must be developed. This begins with the goal of the learner. With the assistance of the rehabilitation counselor, the learner has developed vocational goals. In this case, the individual would like to increase his or her assistive technology skills or adjustment to blindness (ATB) skills. Those goals will be provided to the instructor as part of the referral information. This serves as the goal of instruction.

For the learner to achieve their technology and assistive technology or ATB goals, the instructor must assess the learner’s current skill level and devise the intermediate steps to reach the goals. Each lesson plan identifies the steps involved with reaching the learner’s goals. It provides the framework of instruction.

Lesson plans are designed with the individual learner’s needs and goals in mind. It is vital to let the learner know exactly what will be taught and what is planned for them to learn.

Lesson plans also serve as a record for the instructor to use for documenting the process and progress to the learner and rehabilitation counselor.

DAILY LESSON PLAN

A daily lesson plan lists the strategy and goals of each training session. It helps the instructor and learner to know the lesson focus and the goals of the training session.

The framework of each lesson plan should include:

**Date** This allows for record tracking.

**Lesson Number** This allows for tracking the sequence of the lessons.

**Learner’s Name** This allows for tracking each learner.

**Overall Goal** The goal presents the desired outcome that was developed by the learner and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. This is used to gauge progress and to know when instruction is complete. Additionally, it details why the training is occurring.

**Lesson Objectives** This lists what the learner will be able to do after the lesson or training session is completed. The goal of the individual training session is listed in this area. It describes how the learner will benefit from the lesson objectives.

**Instruction Procedures/Activities** This describes the sequence of events of the lesson, including instructional input, practice, discussion, and independent practice. The section explains how session time will be utilized, how will the lesson be taught.

**Checking for Understanding** This describes how the instructor will know if the learner understands the new material or skill set. What questions or feedback will the instructor need to determine that the learner understands the concepts explored in the training session.

**Summary/Outcome** This provides a review of the session, discussion topics, overview of new skill sets, and the assignment of homework, if needed. This section provides a framework of what was accomplished during the training session. This is to be completed after each session.

LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE

|  |
| --- |
| **Date** |
| **Lesson Number** |
| **Learner’s Name** |
| **Overall Goal** (desired outcome) |
| **Lesson Objective(s)** (what will the learner be able to do/know by the end of the lesson) |
| **Instructional Procedures/Activities** (how will the objectives be taught) |
| **Check for Understanding** (what questions will be asked and how to determine the learner understands) |
| **Summary/Outcome** (session review, what was accomplished by the lesson, homework assigned) |

**Feedback**

Feedback that is succinct and meaningful is necessary for a person to learn; it is the most powerful teaching tool. Simply put, feedback is sharing information about the learner’s performance. Providing the right kind of feedback can make a difference in learning achievement.

Feedback that is specific and provides related suggestions improves learning. When feedback is instructive, it extends the opportunity to teach by alleviating misunderstanding and provides a platform to reinforce learning.

Provide feedback that links current performance in relation to the desired outcome or training goal. Reinforcement of the desired goal will allow the learner to monitor progress, understand what has been achieved, and what is yet to come. In addition, feedback includes how to close the gap from their current performance to achieving their goal. Feedback provides guidance, strategies, or tips. This, followed by the opportunity to apply the feedback, is part of the cycle of feedback. The cycle of feedback is simply a cycle of model, practice, perform, feedback, perform.

Feedback is information about the learning objectives, while assessment is a quantification or judgment about a performance.

Positive feedback aims to sustain appropriate and effective behavior. Negative or corrective feedback serves to change behavior that is ineffective. Learners receive a mixture of positive and negative feedback. When the feedback is specific, the learner is better equipped to understand which behaviors are effective and which ones need to be changed.

General comments such as “good job” are pleasant to give and receive but do little for teaching. Meaningful feedback is based on observing and interacting with the learner.

**Effective Feedback**

Effective feedback should be:

***Timely:*** The sooner the feedback can be delivered, the better. Feedback is part of the regular teaching process.

***Personalized:***Feedback needs to fit each learner. If it is generic, it can reduce the learner’s ownership. Feedback is based on trust, honesty, and concern.

***Empowering:*** Feedback should strengthen and consolidate learning. Care should be used when providing critical feedback to ensure empowerment. Feedback provides for two-way communication, to share information. Based on openness and trust, the learner will use feedback to increase confidence in their abilities.

***Designed to open doors, not close them:***Provide suggestions on how to improve as part of feedback. Feedback is anchored to common goals. It provides communication about learning gains. Even if the gains are small, improved performance and training that is more efficient can be realized.

***Analytical:*** Praise exactly what was good in detail. Balance is found between giving enough feedback so the learner can understand what to do but not too much information that the learner is told what to do.

***Constructive:*** Learners tend to value feedback that provides guidance to the learner. Additionally, feedback that is effective uses the specific issues and links them to the overall learning objectives. Feedback can feel like criticism without offering insights into how to improve.

***Manageable:***Feedback needs to be manageable for the instructor and the learner. Since the instructor’s job is to provide feedback, it can be an endless task. The instructor may want to comment on everything, especially where the target is perfect achievement in all areas. However, from the learner’s perspective, receiving too much feedback can be overwhelming, making it difficult to sort the important feedback from the general, routine feedback. Real learning is accentuated by having a usable amount of information that is connected to knowledge the learner has and provides a map to take them to the next level.

**Quality of Feedback**

Feedback focuses on the learners work, not their personalities. Feedback is based on observations. Avoid value judgments. Constructive feedback focuses on what the learner can change and is in their control.

Provide feedback that allows the learner to find the positive, even with critical feedback. However, feedback should balance negative and positive comments. Feedback should be truthful, fair, and respectful. Provide positive comments first to inspire confidence.

When appropriate feedback is given, the learner is better able to make decisions and problem solve on their own, learn from mistakes, see learning as positive, and it reinforces their involvement.

The learners must know the instructor wants them to succeed. When the instructor is willing to explain, the learning improves. This gives the learner opportunity to improve, try again, and get it right.

In summary, feedback should begin with the positive, complimenting what has been done well, then describing areas for improvement, followed by explaining what the learner needs to do to achieve the goal. Reinforce the positive and redirect the negative. Learning is an act of changing; feedback provides the learner with information on how they are doing.

**Assessment and Evaluation**

The goal of assessment is to improve learning and is ongoing, while the goal of evaluation is to summarize what has been learned and to determine what has been achieved. Typically, learners are more accustomed to being evaluated (grades), rather than being assessed (feedback on strengths, areas of improvement).

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is a process. The process involves gathering information from a variety of sources and activities to cultivate an understanding of what was learned. The aim of assessment is to provide information on progress made and how to improve, in order to reach the goals of the learner. Assessment also includes appraisal of the effectiveness of instructional strategies and lesson plans.

In order for assessment to be productive, the instructor and learner need to have the same understanding regarding the outcome goal. This establishes the foundation for instruction, feedback, and assessment to improve learning. Without this, the feedback can be perceived as critical and judgmental.

Assessment is future-focused, providing information to improve performance.

EVALUATION

The purpose of evaluation is to determine if the learner developed the knowledge and skills because of the instruction. Evaluation provides feedback on whether the instruction and the learning objectives were met at a satisfactory level.

Evaluation, or determining level of achievement compared to the overall goal, will be part of the monthly report to the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the focus of the final report.

**Rubrics**

Since adult learners want to be competent in what they are learning, they are not keen on tests and grades. Grades tend to be meaningless and the threat of a bad grade can demotivate future learning. If grading is imposed, some learners may be more focused on the grade than what they can learn. The instructor must deal with learners who like the idea of having their competence assessed but without testing. Rubrics can be key to providing the information needed for the learner to successfully progress.

To assist with assessment and evaluation, a learning rubric can be a helpful tool. The rubric offers students a vision of what the instructor is seeking to accomplish during the training and why it is important to learn.

Rubrics are methods for classifying skills into categories or steps that vary along a continuum. Rubrics work better with cooperative and collaborative learning environments because the instructor and learner have a better understanding of what is to be learned and how well the student is meeting the standards and goals.

Rubrics give learners information regarding the criteria for achieving learning goals. It provides a framework to determine what they have already learned, where they are currently, and what they need to learn.

Learners need to know what is expected of them and what is considered good performance, which the rubric can provide. Instructors can use a rubric to demonstrate how a particular set of skills and knowledge will compare with the learner’s goals.

A rubric, to be effective, should include several elements.

1. Levels of Mastery – levels of achievement such as beginner, intermediate, competent, advanced
2. Dimensions of Skills – specifics of skills at each level

Instructors are highly encouraged to create their own rubric that fits the needs of the individual learner. Although rubrics are not required, it is a preferred tool. The rubric shows the pathway from beginning to end of the skill or training. The rubric should be shared with the learner to ensure they are aware of their progress and path to reach their assistive technology goals, and ultimately their vocational goals. In addition, the Assistive Technology or ATB Instructor can share the rubric with the referring Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor as part of the report. Here are a few examples.

RUBRIC EXAMPLES

Rubric Example 1.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **Excel and E-Mail Rubric Example** | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Level | | **Microsoft Excel Spreadsheets** | 1. columns and rows, 2. move around spreadsheet | c. name rows and columns;  d. cut, copy, and paste | e. insert and delete rows and columns;  f. select ranges | g. create mathematical formulas;  h. edit formulas,  i. format for printing | \_\_\_\_ | | **E-Mail** | 1. internet safety, 2. read, reply, send, forward, save, delete, | c. adding, editing address book,  d. creating a distribution list, | e. open, send, and save attachments,  f. open, save, and forward files, | g. search messages  h. create, organize, edit folders | \_\_\_\_ | | |

Rubric Example 2.

Presentation Rubric

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ATTRIBUTE** | **EMERGING** | **COMPETENT** | **EXEMPLARY** |
| **VOICE**  Personal, expressive, revealing; compels involvement from audience. | Presenter seems uninvolved. Indifferent. Work is flat, stiff. All tell, no show. Anyone could have done it. | Personality, flavor, style of presenter shows sometimes. Pleasant, acceptable, earnest, cautious, routine. | Confident, vital, honest style gives viewer a powerful sense of presenter’s convictions. Natural language amuses, provokes, delights. |
| **THINKING**  In-depth, divergent. | Takes an unreflective and routine approach to the subject. Little evidence of gaining new understandings. | Takes a successful but ordinary approach to the subject. Remains at knowledge level thinking. | Unique, insightful, or fresh approach. Analyzes, synthesizes, evaluates and applies new knowledge. |
| **IDEA & CONTENT** Clearly developed. | Central idea is undeveloped. Strays from topic. Hard to follow. Lacks details and examples. | Central idea with support is obvious. Stays on topic. Predictable. | Central idea is focused, clear, and specific. Fresh and original insights. Details keep viewers attention. |
| **ORGANIZATION** Work is easy to understand | Order is confusing. Ideas, details, and events not shaped yet. The beginning and end are vague and undefined. | Order of presentation makes sense. Beginning, middle, and end are obvious. Most details are in the right place. | Clear direction moves audience through the presentation. Beginning gains attention. Details fit and build to main point. End provokes thought. |

<http://www.mashell.com/~parr5/techno/present.html>

Rubrics assist the learner in understanding the link between learning objectives and desired outcome by articulating the elements of success. Additionally, rubrics aid the problem solving process because it provides information about what the instructor considers important. By providing a more objective format, rubrics improve performance of the learner while reducing ambiguity and uncertainty.

**Report Writing**

A main method of communication between the Assistive Technology or ATB Instructor and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is letters and reports. The process begins with a referral letter from the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

Referral information from the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will include signed written consents to release private information (Release of Information, ROI), an outline of expected training outcomes, the job goal or a copy of the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), and the most current eye report and other pertinent medical information, if applicable. The referral letter will provide direction for the training based on the expected outcome.

Per the Master Contract, the instructor is required to supply the rehabilitation counselor or referral agent a monthly progress report. The report documents progress and learning activities. The report must be provided within 10 business days following the month that instruction occurred.

Consistent with the Master Contract, each report must include the number of sessions, punctuality, progress that occurred, any additional pertinent information related to the instruction of assistive technology, and the plan for the next month of training. As a preferred tool, the rubric could provide much of this information. The information provided to SSB should include the number of hours spent training and documenting progress.

The report details progress and learning activities that occurred during the month. Documenting the progress of the learner in relation to their beginning skill set and their desired outcome is essential in the report to the rehabilitation counselor. The report documents where they started, progress that occurred, and the next steps in reaching their learning goals.

In addition to the areas of achievement, areas of concern, if any, are included the report.

A tool to objectively document and report progress is the rubric. The rubric may be included in the report as a way to inform the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor of progress made toward the goal. As an example of objective and measurable reporting, referring back to Rubric Example 1. Microsoft Excel, a report could include the following:

*During four, one-hour sessions this month, Joe Doe completed the first three steps of learning Microsoft Excel, which were A. columns and rows, B. moving around the spreadsheet, and C. naming rows and columns. He has progressed to level two. We will continue to review level one skills and progress to level three skills by the end of next month.*

In addition to objective and measurable information, the report should contain subjective information that is pertinent. An example is:

*For each session, Mr. Doe arrived on time and was willing to get started. He completed the homework assigned and explained in detail the basic concept of spreadsheets and he was able to demonstrate cutting and copying, which is the fourth step in learning Microsoft Excel. However, he appears to have difficulty with pasting. Next month will focus on explaining and demonstrating how to paste in a variety of ways. In addition, discussion will occur on how the concept relates to his intended work goal.*

When the assistive technology or ATB goals of the learner have been reached, the instructor is to provide the rehabilitation counselor a final report that concludes the instruction along with any recommendations.

**Professionalism**

Mutual respect, trust, comfort, collaboration, privacy, and freedom to participate characterize adult learning environments. Training sessions are viewed as a worthwhile investment. Interaction with the learner is based on professionalism, trust, and respect.

PROFESSIONALISM

Although it may be difficult to define professionalism, it has been summed up to mean taking pride in one’s work, not compromising standards and values, and caring about the individuals served and one’s own career. Professionalism involves being sensitive to other people’s needs and being ethical and responsible. Assistive Technology and ATB Instructors need to demonstrate professionalism in the work they do. Professionalism is often judged by the attitude, communication, image, competence and demeanor an individual displays.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

* Respect others and their rights
* Know your boundaries/limits
* Stay out of others affairs
* Do not gossip
* Do not handle personal interests at work
* Keep inappropriate language out of the workplace
* Regulate personal cell phone usage
* Understand cultural values

SOFT SKILLS

Social graces, communication, language, friendliness, and optimism that characterize relationships describe soft skills or interpersonal skills. These skills also include personal effectiveness, creative problem solving, influencing, and strategic thinking.

Communication is probably the most important soft skill. Communication is used daily in almost every task. It involves listening to people, evaluate and interpreting what is said, then responding in a professional and respectful manner.

Creative problem solving and strategic thinking are used to solve conflicts, develop a strategy to achieve goals, and make decisions.

In order to instruct in a productive manner, soft skills are necessary to interact effectively with the learner, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, and other SSB personnel.

Hard skills are different from soft skills. Hard skills, which are an individual’s skill set and ability to perform a task or activity, are also important. Hard skills, in this case, refer to assistive technology technical knowledge. Having technical skills in assistive technology or ATB techniques does not necessarily make an individual an Instructor.

In addition to having the technical skills of assistive technology or ATB techniques, soft skills are necessary to instruct a learner. An instructor must know how people learn and instruct in a manner that is natural and accommodating to the learner. The instructor uses soft skills to present the technical skills to the learner and to understand what they learned from the interaction.

**DATA PRIVACY**

DATA PRIVACY

Since an Assistive Technology or ATB Instructor is under contract with SSB, there is a requirement to comply with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/dataprac.pdf>) and all applicable state and federal laws. The Data Practices Act states that all information about the learner is considered private.

Data privacy pertains to keeping interactions and documents in strict privacy. Data privacy and respect for the privacy of the learner are mandatory. This includes not sharing private information such as name, identifying information, contact information, progress, and opinions of the individual with anyone except related SSB staff, the learner, and those with a signed release of information (ROI). Legal guardians of the learner do not need a ROI.

The ROI will specify who may have access to specific information. Without a signed release, it is unlawful to provide data that are collected, created, received, and maintained about the learner. To exchange information between the Assistive Technology or ATB Instructor and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, signed ROIs will be included with the referral.

Conversations, documents, reports, identifying information, and training information are private data and cannot be released to anyone without the consent of the learner.

The Assistive Technology Instructor needs to be aware of the privacy rights of the learner. Verbal and in-person interactions need to occur with respect to privacy, especially public interactions. Private information should not be discussed in public settings.

When interacting with learners electronically, including the use of computers, email, fax, telephones, voicemail, and other technology, precautions need to occur to ensure privacy of all interactions.

Protecting the privacy of the learner includes not discussing learners with other learners. When going to a learner’s home or business, refrain from commenting to anyone about what is said, seen, heard, or observed.

Data privacy also extends to records of the learner including referral, notes, contact information, progress, billing, and reports. The information can be in print, braille, or electronic means. These data need to be kept in a secure location to prevent disclosure. All documentation about the learner is required to be stored under lock with a reasonable protection against fire, water damage, and other hazards. All electronic data should be password protected.

**Resources**

Teaching Tips Index

<http://www2.honolulu.hawaii.edu/facdev/guidebk/teachtip/teachtip.htm#top>

What To Do When You Meet A Blind Person Like Me

<http://www.blindinc.org/about-blindness/what-to-do-when-you-meet-a-blind-person-like-me/>

Minnesota Government Data Practices Act

<http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/dataprac.pdf>

Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, Minnesota Statutes, chapter 13

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=13>

A Crash Course in Communication

<http://www.inc.com/articles/2000/08/20000.html>

Professionalism in the Workplace. Shelvy L. Campbell, MS, EdS, ABD, Dedriell D. Taylor, MS, Eds.

<http://www.umkc.edu/starr/Workplace_Professionalism.pdf>

**Differentiating Reading Instruction**, *Scholastic Professional,* Laura Robb

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/what-differentiated-instruction>