

## Laws of learning: 14 Important Principals Every Trainer Should Know

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### *Adults Only*

These laws are particularly relevant to adult learners.

**Law of previous experience:** *New learning should be linked to (and build upon) the experiences of the learner.*

Check the entry level of the participants. Remind yourself that adults bring a variety of rich experiences to the training session. Design activities to ensure easy adjustments to fit different entry levels and to incorporate relevant experiences.

**Law of relevance:** *Effective learning is relevant to the learner's life and work.*

Use simulations and role plays to increase the link between the learning situation and the real world. After a training activity, debrief the participants and discuss strategies for applying what they learned in the game to their real-world context.

**Law of self-direction.** *Most adults are self-directed learners.*

Don't force everyone to participate in every activity. Identify training objectives and let participants select among different resources and activities to learn at their own pace and according to their personal preferences. Involve participants in setting training goals and selecting appropriate types of learning activities.

**Law of expectations.** *Learners' reaction to a training session is shaped by their expectations related to the content area, training format, fellow participants, and the trainer.*

Some learners are anxious about mathematical concepts and skills. Encourage them with intriguing puzzles and short-cut techniques. Other learners feel uncomfortable about making fools of themselves in public while playing games. Establish ground rules that reward risk-taking among participants. Demonstrate non-judgmental behavior by applauding participants for their effort.

**Law of self image.** *Adult learners have definite notions about what type of learners they are. These notions interfere with or enhance their learning.*

Reassure participants about their ability to learn new concepts and skills. Motivate them to attempt challenging tasks. Ensure frequent and early successes by making initial tasks simple and by progressing in small steps. However, avoid patronizing participants with simple, trivial tasks. Incorporate learning tasks at different levels of difficulty in your activities.

**Law of multiple criteria.** *Adult learners use a variety of standards to judge their learning experiences and accomplishments.*

Encourage participants to choose personal standards and scoring systems. Provide different ways to "win" in your activities. In simulations and role-plays, keep scores related to different criteria. During debriefing, discuss alternative criteria for measuring participants' performance.

**Law of alignment.** *Adult learners require the training objectives, content, activities, and assessment techniques to be aligned to each other.*

Create a training situation that closely resembles the job situation. Teach and test for the same content, using similar strategies. Make sure that the scoring system used in your training activities rewards the mastery of the training objectives.

### **General Public**

These laws apply to all human beings, from infancy to old age.

**Law of active learning:** *Active responding produces more effective learning than passive listening or reading.*

Intersperse lectures and reading assignments with active-learning episodes such as quizzes and puzzles. Provide participants with ample opportunities to respond by asking questions, encouraging them to ask questions, answering their questions, and questioning their answers.

**Law of practice and feedback:** *Learners cannot master skills without repeated practice and relevant feedback.*

Don't confuse understanding a procedure with ability to perform it. Invest ample time in conducting activities that provide repeated practice and feedback. Make sure that the training activities incorporate immediate and useful feedback from peers and experts. Use rating scales, checklists, and other devices to ensure that the feedback is objective and useful.

**Law of individual differences:** *Different people learn in different ways.*

Use training activities that accommodate a variety of learning styles. Make sure that participants can respond by writing, speaking, drawing, or acting out. Encourage and permit participants to learn individually, in pairs, and in teams.

**Law of learning domains.** *Different types of learning require different types of strategies.*

Learn to recognize different types of training content and objectives. Don't use the same type of activity to teach different types of training. Use suitable designs to help participants achieve different training objectives related to concepts, procedures, and principles.

**Law of response level.** *Learners master skills and knowledge at the level at which they are required to respond during the learning process.*

If your training activity requires participants to merely talk about a procedure, don't assume that they will be able to apply it in their workplace. If you want participants to solve workplace problems, the learning activity should require them to solve problems. Avoid trivial, closed questions with rote-memory answers in your training games. Challenge participants with authentic that require innovative solutions.

### ***All Creatures Great and Small***

These laws apply to all animals, including white mice, pigeons, dolphins, and people.

**Law of reinforcement:** *Participants learn to repeat behaviors that are rewarded.*

Make sure that training activities provide several opportunities for earning rewards. Require participants to make frequent decisions and responses. During the initial stages of training, reward even partially-correct answers.

**Law of emotional learning:** *Events that are accompanied by intense emotions result in long-lasting learning.*

Use training games, simulations, and role plays that add emotional element to learning. Make sure that emotions don't become too intense and interfere with learning. Make sure that participants don't learn dysfunctional behaviors because of intense emotions. Debrief participants after emotional activities to reflect on their feelings and learn from their reactions.

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