

## PROFILE OF AN ADULT LEARNER

Your future adult learner will be either male or female, age 18 and older, and may come from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. Your learner may have gone through several years of schooling without success, they may be currently struggling through some form of schooling, or they may have been well educated in a foreign country and struggling to learn verbal and written English. Adult learners are very different, and their goals can be just as diverse. The following descriptions and characteristics of adult learners may help you prepare yourself for what it will be like working with your future learner.

**Punctuality:** There are cases where adult learners are not as reliable as others when it comes to showing up to tutor sessions on time or at all. It may be that the learner decided at the last minute not to go through with tutoring, or it may be that there was an unexpected problem such as the sickness of a child or not understanding the time or place of the meeting. As a rule of thumb, wait at least 15 minutes for your adult learner to show up to a session before deciding to cancel and go home. If your learner has a habit of showing up late or missing sessions altogether, then either sit down and talk with them about the necessity of punctuality for their tutoring progress, or contact an MNTR staff member and they will consult with the your learner about the program requirements of punctuality.

**Creative and Adaptive:** If an adult has not yet learned to read or write, it in no way indicates a lack of intelligence. Many non-readers are intelligent and creative in finding ways to compensate for their lack of literacy in everyday life. Imagine having to go about your daily routine without being able to read street signs, medicine bottle labels, job applications, or work memos.

**Goals:** Adult Learners make up a group of very different individuals, from different backgrounds, who have any number of personal goals. It is important for volunteer tutors to record any and all personal goals/accomplishments that adult learners meet and report them to Hailey Law, Program Director of Office & Volunteer Management, along with tutor hours accumulated for each month. Recorded goals and accomplishments help us track learner success and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of our program. The following are examples of goals that adult learners may have, and should be recorded by volunteer tutors when met:

### Employment Goals

1. Obtain G.E.D.
2. Obtain a new job or better job
3. Enroll in class for certification
4. Obtain a degree, certificate, or license to achieve career goal(s)
5. Use computers, internet, and other electronic tools
6. Generate job resume and understand job postings
7. Fill out job application
8. Learn new work skills
9. Pass work-related and educational tests
10. Communicate at work
11. Achieve employer recognition for job well done
12. Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Family Goals

1. Read to children
2. Help children with homework
3. Attend school meetings (teacher, PTA, programs)
4. Attend school board meetings
5. Volunteer for schools
6. Support children's education
7. Provide for family's safety and physical needs
8. Purchase a home
9. Move to better housing
10. Mentor other family members
11. Communicate with teacher or principal
12. Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Societal and Community Goals**

1. Pass citizenship test
2. Register to vote
3. Vote
4. Obtain a driver's license
5. Obtain a library card
6. Use relevant services and agencies
7. Monitor media resources (newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and the internet)
8. Use community resources
9. Participate in the community
10. Volunteer for community organizations
11. Express opinions to community leaders through letters, e-mail, or phone calls
12. Orient newcomers to the community
13. Attend community meetings (informational, city council, committee)
14. Join the military
15. Other \_\_\_\_\_

### **Personal and Survival Skills/Goals**

1. Improve reading
2. Improve English
3. Improve writing
4. Improve Math
5. Read agreements, contracts, and consumer information
6. Learn protocols for hospital/job/school
7. Read instructional manuals
8. Read street signs, road signs, and instructional signs
9. Read maps, charts, and graphs
10. Utilize and understand public transportation
11. Manage finances
12. Read medicine labels, care instructions, and first aid manuals
13. Read cookbooks
14. Read food labels and product information
15. Read phone books, newspapers, and magazines
16. Read and use U.S. currency
17. Write name and address
18. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Insecure/Fearing Failure:** Some adults may go into their first tutor session with hesitancy and apprehension. They may be questioning whether they are capable of learning after years of being outside of an educational program, or they may feel that they have failed too many times in the past to succeed now. Your learner may have their insecurities, but how you relate to them during tutor sessions is an important part of developing your learner's sense of self-worth and positive attitude toward learning.

**Uneven Learner:** There will be days where your learner will make great progress and you will feel confident in their achievements. At other times, your learner may struggle with remembering the material during lessons. You might be tempted to think that your learner is not trying, especially if a day of struggling follows a day of good retention. However, we know very little about the physiology of memory, and the cause of a bad tutor session may be due to several factors beside a lack of willingness to learn. For learners with a learning disability, one or more of the usual paths through which learning flows may be blocked or ineffective. Some learners may need to *hear* material to learn it while others may learn more easily if they can *see* or *feel* the material. There is no easy way to predict what will work for your learner and what will not, so you will need to experiment, observe, and then use what works.

**Learning Disabilities:** Adults with learning disabilities usually have average to above average intelligence and possess the potential for being successful in a variety of areas. Generally, "learning disability" refers to a broad spectrum of processing disorders that arise from inaccurate information received through the senses; an inability to remember or integrate information; or difficulty with oral, written, or nonverbal expression. Individuals with learning disabilities may at first appear to be lazy or unmotivated learners, when in reality they are trying hard to learn/retain the material presented to them, but are unable to do so.

Learning disabilities can be mild, moderate, or severe. An adult with a mild disability may not even know he/she has a problem and has learned to compensate for their differences. Adults with a moderate disability often cope by avoiding situations that require using the skills they struggle with. Below is a checklist for volunteer tutors who suspect their learner may have a learning disability:

\*The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD - [www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org))

- Confuses left and right
- Has a poor sense of direction; is slow to learn the way around a new place; is easily lost or confused in unfamiliar surroundings
- Finds it hard to judge speed and distance (e.g., hard to play certain games, drive a car)
- Has trouble reading charts and maps
- Is disorganized and poor at planning
- Often loses things
- Is slow to learn new games and master puzzles
- Has difficulty listening and taking notes at the same time
- Performs inconsistently on tasks from one day to the next
- Has difficulty generalizing (applying) skills from one situation to another

**Working with Learning Disabilities:** When working with an adult learner who has a learning disability, tutors should remain patient, use all resources available to them at the Literacy House (including staff support, guidance, and advice), and be creative in developing new tutoring approaches for working through the disability. For example, adults who have difficulty learning may find it easier to process information when it is made concrete through the use of practical examples that apply to their everyday life.

Adult learners with learning disabilities often need to engage multiple senses while learning new information including hearing, seeing, speaking, and writing the material. They will also need more repetition, practice, and fewer outside distractions than most other learners. Using patterns and rules of thumb are also helpful tools for learning and retention in disabled learners. Stress, anxiety, or simple tiredness may worsen learning disabilities during lessons, so taking several small breaks during tutor sessions can be helpful. In sum, adults with learning disabilities learn best when associating new information with their own life experiences, and when using practical and meaningful methods.

### **TIPS FOR WORKING WITH ANY ADULT LEARNER**

1. Get to know your learner and discover their interests. This will set a foundation for teaching lessons which engage your learner.
2. When forming lesson plans, begin with what your learner already knows and move from there using lessons built around your learners' personal goals.
3. Make sure that your learner has reading material available at home. You can meet them at the local library to help them obtain a library card (if they do not have one), or books are available at the Literacy House for your learner to take home.
4. If possible, prepare audiotapes or CDs of articles, stories, or poems for your learner to practice

reading along with.

5. Place the responsibility of learning on your Adult Learner by stressing the importance of regularly practicing lessons and doing homework.
6. Have your learner practice reading practical and everyday materials such as newspapers, magazines, menus, television guides, application forms, etc.
7. Help your learner set realistic short-term and long-term goals, and then work toward them during lessons and with homework.
8. Present all information in small manageable steps, and provide frequent feedback.
9. Teach organizational skills such as filing, color coding, and outlining; and teach learners to proofread and edit their own work.
10. Always encourage learners' questions, and eliminate possible distractions, with the exception of optional background music (depending on learner preference).

### **THINGS TO REMEMBER**

1. Adults who are confident in life tasks may be insecure or easily discouraged when learning academic skills, so please be patient and kind.
2. Adults with disrupted schooling may have gaps in their basic literacy skills. Do not assume that skills and abilities were acquired in sequence up to the time they left school.
3. Adults who are speakers of another language and not literate in English vary in skills and educational levels. Some may be illiterate in their own language, while others may be highly educated in their language but are not literate in English.

### **BASIC TUTOR PHILOSOPHY**

The most important part of being a volunteer tutor is having a genuine devotion to, and concern for adult learners. The basic goal of all volunteer tutors is to help their learners improve their literacy skills, so that the lives of our adult learners will be transformed through literacy. An important part of accomplishing this goal is to build a ladder of successful learning experiences, which will give learners a positive self-image based on greater academic confidence. Tutoring should be a relaxed and friendly experience in order to generate a positive climate for learning.

Your Adult Learner's feelings of success are another very important aspect of the tutoring process. Feeling successful raises one's level of aspiration and confidence. Allow your learners to progress at their own pace, look for your learner's gains in skill, recognize their achievements and encourage their growth.

### **CREATING A POSITIVE LEARNING CLIMATE**

1. Encourage your adult learner, especially during more challenging lessons.
2. Remind your learner that mistakes are part of the learning process, and that they are to be expected but not dwelt upon.

3. Be pleased with any good attempt.
4. Give sincere praise and positive reinforcement as your learner makes improvements in order to build their confidence.
5. Beware of being overly critical. For adult learners with a weak self-concept, even constructive criticism can be damaging to their self-esteem. The key is to not criticize *them*, but to correct the *mistake*. Try using the following techniques:

Try not to say:

*You* must

*You* should

*You* always

*You* never

Instead Say:

This word needs the “sh” sound.

Question marks go after questions.

Days of the week need capitals.

This “e” is silent.

### TIPS FOR IMPROVING LEARNER RETENTION

Everything we do or think is recorded by our brain. However, most of us forget about 90 percent of what we have learned over the course of about four weeks. To retain information and transfer it from short-term to long-term memory requires skill and effort. Here are some suggestions to help your adult learner with information retention:

**Attention:** Learners must be motivated and interested if they are to retain the information they learn. Try to relate lessons and materials to daily life. Focusing on your learners' goals and interests is a good way to keep their attention and increase their likelihood of retention.

**Do Not Overload:** Some research estimates that we can remember about seven "chunks" of new material, so be selective of the material you teach, and do not try to teach too many new ideas at one time.

**Make Associations:** Try to build new materials and ideas upon what your learner already knows—connect new lesson material with something from your learner’s background or experience.

**Use the Senses:** All learners have a preferred style of learning. Some may prefer visual, auditory, or tactile. Teach to your learner's strengths, and try to incorporate something visual, auditory, or tactile into lessons and activities.

**Preview:** Before having your learner read a new text, introduce any new words and concepts within the reading selection.

**Summarize:** Ask your learner to summarize (verbally or in writing) what they learned from the reading selection. This is a good indicator of your learner’s reading comprehension, or lack thereof.

**Organize:** Do your best to organize information in a way that is easily remembered. Use outlines, lists, color coding, or charts.

**Review:** Reviewing learned information is one of the most efficient methods for improving information retention. Take a few minutes at the beginning of each lesson to review previously-learned material, make practice and review exercises for homework, and incorporate practice games and activities into your lessons.

**Retrieve:** Some learners need a little help retrieving information they have learned. A hint or an association may help your learner remember what they have learned.

## ALTERNATIVE READING MATERIALS

- Advertisements from newspapers & magazines
- Airline schedules
- Bulletin boards
- Board game boxes, directions, and rules
- Calendars
- Comic strips
- Directions from models, & science experiments
- Directories
- Driver's manuals
- Excerpts from articles, stories, & essays
- Greeting cards
- Grocery lists
- Headlines
- Invitations to parties & events
- Jackets from books
- Jokes or riddles
- Labels from clothing, food, appliances, or furniture
- Letters
- Lyrics of familiar songs
- Manuals
- Maps
- Menus
- Movie reviews
- Museum brochures
- Notices
- Office materials
- Pamphlets
- Periodicals
- Plays
- Posters
- Questionnaires
- Recipes and cookbooks
- Road signs
- Schedules of school events or community happenings
- Speeches
- Sports materials
- TV guides
- Travel brochures
- Warranties
- Weather reports
- Wedding announcements

## IMPORTANT TERMS

**Cloze Technique:** The Cloze technique consists of deleting every fifth or seventh word from a passage and asking learners to fill in the blanks with words that make sense. Learners' answers do not have to be the same as the original reading passage, but they must fit the context.

**Context Clues:** Context clues allow a learner to make guesses about unknown or missing words in a passage.

**Duet Reading:** Is an excellent exercise to help adult learners practice fluent reading. The tutor and the learner read aloud simultaneously. The tutor is the "lead" voice, setting the pace and modeling expressive reading while the learner does their best to keep up.

**Language Experience:** Is a technique which uses the learner's own words. The tutor transcribes the learner's spoken words and uses them as the basis of a reading lesson. A learner reads his/her own transcribed words rather than material from a workbook to become more familiar with reading/writing.

**Metacognition:** The awareness of, and conscious control over, one's own understanding or lack of understanding while reading a text.

**Multisensory Learning:** Multisensory learning uses as many of the senses (auditory, visual, and touch) as possible to present new information.

**Phonics:** The study and application of letter sounds. Phonics instruction includes the study of consonant sounds, short and long vowel sounds; spelling patterns affecting vowel sounds; words with a silent "e"; and special letter combinations such as consonant blends, digraphs, diphthongs, and syllables.

**Sight Words:** Are learned as whole words through sight recognition. Word banks, flashcards, and matching games can be useful when building sight word vocabulary. Do not teach more than 10-15 sight words at a time, and be sure to teach the meanings of each word if they are not already known.

**Resource:** <http://sk.sagepub.com/video/anatomy-of-a-stickie>