

Handout - tips for new teachers and trainers

Some tips might not apply to you depending upon where the training takes place, e.g. in the workplace, in a classroom or in another environment; the age range of your learners; whether you teach groups or individuals, or the subject you are teaching.

- Keep things simple: don't try to achieve too much too soon, or expect your learners to either. They don't know what you know. They need time to assimilate new skills and knowledge and to understand the *how* and *why* of this new learning. You will find you may need to keep repeating and recapping things, which might be frustrating at first, but will help learning to take place.
- Be organised: always have a contingency plan in case anything goes wrong, for example if a piece of equipment stops working you could hold a discussion instead.
- Get to know the people who can help you when necessary, e.g. the support staff and technicians.
- Give a professional impression to your learners whenever you are in contact with them. They will learn important aspects of how to behave and act from watching and listening to you. This is often referred to as the *hidden curriculum*, so lead by example. For instance, by arriving early, dressing appropriately and leaving the area tidy.
- Check spelling, grammar and punctuation of any visual presentations, worksheets or handouts you issue. If your learners spot an error, they might think it's correct just because you are their teacher.
- If you feel nervous, your learners probably won't even notice. Try and act confidently, use eye contact and speak a little louder than normal to command attention.
- Use an appropriate icebreaker to help your learners get to know each other at the start of a course.
- Agree ground rules or learning contracts from the first meeting with your learners. For example, arriving on time and respecting others' opinions. Try not to impose them, but discuss them in a way that lets your learners agree them. This should help them to take ownership, help with any potential behaviour problems and lead to a respectful working environment. If a ground rule is broken, remind everyone of their existence and why they are important.
- Start your session by recapping the previous session (if applicable) and asking if any questions have arisen in the meantime. You can then state your aim and link to the objectives (or tasks) of the current session.

- You could use a starter activity at the beginning of each session. This could be a quiz which your learners can carry out in small groups. It could be based on the topics covered in the last session or any homework or research you asked your learners to carry out. If a learner is late to the session for any reason, they only miss the starter activity, not any important aspects.
- Treat your learners as individuals and use their names whenever possible.
- Involve all your learners during discussions and activities, find out what they know already by discussing their experiences and how they relate to the subject. Learners can learn from each other as well as from you, particularly if you have learners of different age ranges and levels of experience within the same group.
- Ask your learners to take a learning preference questionnaire, the results can help you plan your sessions to ensure you are being inclusive, yet differentiating for their needs. A short free online questionnaire is available at www.vark-learn.com. You might like to try it yourself beforehand.
- Use a variety of different teaching, learning and assessment approaches and activities. These should engage, inspire, motivate and enthuse your learners. Don't just stick to one style because you find it easy. Vary the pace of your session and watch the body language of your learners to notice if boredom is setting in.
- Try and make your sessions fun and interactive when you can. Add value to your subject by drawing on your own experiences and using anecdotes to bring the subject to life.
- Have an extra activity ready in case you have spare time during a session, or if a learner finishes a task before others. Equally, have something you can remove from your session if you over run time. You can always give it as self-study material or carry it over to the next session.
- Try and incorporate technology into your sessions and in-between your sessions. You could consider letting your learners use their own devices. Ground rules might need to be agreed for their proper use i.e. not accessing personal social networking sites.
- Your learners are not your friends so you should not become involved with their personal lives. It's best to avoid joining their social networking sites.
- You should assess continually throughout your session not just at the end. Always make a judgement based only upon what needs to be assessed.
- Ask open questions such as *.. 'How do you....?'* This will achieve a knowledgeable response rather than asking a question beginning with *'Do you....?'* which will

usually only elicit a *yes* or a *no* answer. A learner may say 'yes' just because this is what they think you want to hear, but it won't tell you what has actually been learnt.

- If ever a learner asks you a question and you don't know the answer, say you will find out. Then make sure you tell them the answer next time you see them, or e-mail them in the meantime. It's fine not to know everything and you don't need to bluff your way out of answering difficult questions.
- When providing feedback, try and start with something positive so that you don't demoralise your learner. Even if they haven't achieved something, you can still be constructive. For example, '*Well done for trying, however, you might like to think about doing it a different way next time.*' You can then discuss different ways of achieving the task.
- End your session by asking questions to check your learners' understanding, and allow time for them to ask you questions.
- Link to the objectives (or tasks) which have been achieved, and state what will be covered in the next session.
- Consider using a closing activity such as asking your learners in turn to state one thing from the session that has had the most impact upon them.
- Keep on top of your administration duties and keep your records up to date. If your learner loses their work you will need your records to prove what they have achieved. Your organisation should inform you what records you need to keep and how, i.e. in hard copy format or electronically. Awarding organisations expect records to be kept safe and secure.
- Never be afraid to ask for advice from experienced colleagues. You could ask to sit in during one of their sessions to see how they manage the learning process.
- Don't be too hard on yourself, even if you make a mistake. Your learners might not notice, but if they do, you will need to be honest to help retain their respect.
- Keep your own subject knowledge up to date as well as that relating to developments in technology.
- Reflect after each session to think about what went well, what didn't and why. This will help you improve for the future.
- Above all, be prepared, patient, positive and passionate about teaching your subject to others.
- Stay happy and healthy, remain focused and enjoy the experience.