

Working with Different Ages & Learning Styles

The audience for MYAN's events is diverse in many ways. This tipsheet is intended to give you **a little background about learning styles and mixed age audiences** to help you as you're planning your workshop content and presentation. Thinking about these issues ahead of time is a great way to strengthen your workshop!

Learning Styles

There are many theories of learning styles out there, and the information below is certainly not the only way to categories learners, and learners can definitely fit in more than one category. These are the three most common styles, and while you may not be able to address each learning style with every workshop or activity, thinking through how your plans will suit different learning styles is important.

	Visual (Seeing)	Auditory (Hearing)	Kinesthetic (Touching, hands-on)
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn best by seeing. Easily recall printed information or info in pictures, charts or diagrams. May pay close attention to body language to increase understanding. Strong sense of form and color. Usually more comfortable in classes that emphasize reading and visual presentations. Distracted by movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn best by hearing. Remember information or details from conversations or lectures. Remember what is said rather than who said it or where. Strong language skills, (verbal and written.) May find noise distracting. Have no problem listening to directions or following lectures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn best by doing. Like to talk things out and interact with others. Learn best by using their hands and manipulating objects. Usually like to work with their hands. Do well in activities that involve movement or hands-on participation. May use movement/fidgeting as a way to help them focus.
Examples of Strategies to Support Learners with this Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide time for people to read through something you're going to discuss. Include handouts or slides. Include charts or graphs in addition to text. Include a written version of directions or rules (on a handout or flipchart). Incorporate visual examples such as advertisements or art. Take notes on a flipchart to record discussion. Ask participants to express a concept creatively, such as drawing a picture or diagram of it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for people to take notes. Ask participants to share ideas or experiences that illustrate a point you're making. Provide opportunities for sharing out after small group work. Include some time for individual work that's done quietly. Include music in your presentation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask people to get up and move around when creating small groups. Mix up brainstorming techniques by having people get up and write on flipcharts rather than sharing from their seats. Include a demonstration and ask for assistants. Incorporate activities to illustrate your points/ideas. Ask the fidgeters to assist you in some way, such as by helping distribute materials or write on flipcharts.

Feel free to do your own research about other learning styles, too!

Working With a Mixed Age Audience

Unless you restrict your workshop to a certain age range (adult only, youth only, HS & up, etc.) you will potentially have participants ranging from 7th grade up through adults, so it's good to think ahead of time about some strategies. **Many of these are just good facilitation techniques in general**, but they're especially important when you're balancing the needs of a diverse age range.

- **Get to know your audience.** Do a brief introductory activity at the beginning that helps you know who is in the room and their level of experience with your topic. You may want to give participants an opportunity to say what they're hoping to get out of the workshop.
- **Make people of all ages feel welcome.** Even if you're busy setting up, try to smile and say hello to participants as they come into your workshop room. Workshop participants can often feel nervous and not know what to expect. Think of yourself as a host, not just a presenter.
- **Use humor.** Making jokes or including silly examples is a great way to put people at ease and help people identify with you as a person. You can also be creative about how you ask for volunteers or comments (raise your leg instead of your hand) or throw in some random silly questions to see if people are listening (how many glasses of vinegar do you usually drink in a day?)
- **Pay attention to body language.** Stand with an open posture. If people are sitting on the floor in small groups, think about crouching down when asking questions or providing guidance rather than speaking from above them.
- **Be aware of your language.** Try to explain concepts simply and clearly and be sure to avoid jargon or acronyms that your audience won't know.
- **Plan discussion prompts carefully.** Younger learners will have an easier time sharing concrete experiences or answering targeted questions rather than broad or abstract reflection questions. You can include broader reflection questions, too, but think about including different types of questions.
- **Make space for different voices.** Be aware of making space for younger participants by asking to hear from people you haven't heard from yet (during group discussions), or by asking a question that specifically gets at the experiences of a certain age group, such as "what have you noticed in your school about such & such". Or you may want to specifically say who your question is for, such as "This is a question for the youth in the room".
- **Ask for some responses nonverbally.** You don't need people to use their voices to answer a question. Ask for a show of hands in response to a question, which can help everyone feel included even if they don't feel comfortable speaking up.
- **Take breaks.** Taking a quick stretch break is a great way to give people a chance to stretch & re-energize, which can be especially helpful if students are used to classes that are shorter than workshops, or if you have adults in the room who are not used to sitting for longer periods of time.
- **Engage adults.** MYAN's intention is for adults to be participants in our events, not chaperones. Encourage adults to participate, share experiences, answer questions, etc. Ask adults to reflect on their own experiences, too, not just those of the youth they work with.
- **Mix it up.** Try to use a mix of large group, small group and individual work during your presentation.
- **Pace yourself.** Pay attention to your audience's reaction to your pace so you can gauge if you're moving too fast or too slow.
- **Be prepared so you can be flexible.** You may want to have some plans in mind about how you can adjust your presentation or activities depending on the mix of people in the room. You won't know ahead of time what percentage of the group will be middle school versus high school versus adults, so think through how you can adjust ahead of time, so that in the moment you can be flexible to meet the needs of your audience.