



Volunteer Administration in the 21st Century:

Teaching Volunteers to Teach: Learning Styles

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Everyone has his or her own approach to learning. Learning styles can be best described as different ways of learning. There are three primary ways people learn.

1. *Visual learners.* These learners need to see the educator and his or her facial expressions to fully understand the educational content. Visual learners tend to sit at the front of the class to avoid visual obstructions. They typically think best by seeing pictures and learn best from visuals. Some of the visuals that are most helpful for visual learners are diagrams, illustrated text books, videos, flip charts and hand-outs. During a lesson, visual learners often take detailed notes and may even draw illustrations in the margins.
2. *Auditory learners.* They learn best by listening to lectures, participating in discussion groups, and talking things through. Auditory learners listen for tone of voice, pitch and speed of delivery. For an auditory learner, written information means nothing if it is not reinforced orally. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud or recording lectures. They may not read

the newspaper often and tend to get their news by listening to television and radio. Some of the delivery methods that are most helpful to auditory learners are lectures, class discussions, small group discussions and case studies.

3. *Tactile/kinesthetic learners.* They learn best through a hands-on approach that lets them explore the things around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity. They look forward to laboratory work and field trips where they get to learn by doing. Some of the activities tactile/kinesthetic learners enjoy are role playing, labs, worksheets, brainstorming and field trips.

It is important for educators to develop educational plans that accommodate all the different learning styles. We should select delivery methods suited to all types of learners. This is the way to make our programs effective for all participants.

As we come to understand the importance of learning styles in educational design, we should also understand the importance of educational comprehension. Educational comprehension is sequential learning, which is often used in program development. The idea that one lesson builds on previous lessons is one of the foundations of educational design and theory. Krathwohl, Bloom and Masia (1964) noted five categories involved in helping learners reach educational objectives. These five are attending, responding, valuing, organization and characterization.

1. *Attending.* Attending is the most introductory level of change. It makes individuals aware of the subject matter and causes them to begin to pay attention to it.
2. *Responding.* The responding level signifies that the learner has an appreciation of the subject matter. This is measurable because the educator begins to see a reaction in the learner. This is sometimes measured by using satisfaction levels and reaction scales.
3. *Valuing.* After responding, the learner should move to valuing the subject matter. This is usually when a learner takes a genuine interest in the subject matter and starts searching for additional information.
4. *Organization.* This level takes the learner past the typical classroom setting. The learner commits to the subject matter, organizes it into his or her belief system, and begins to connect with experts in the field.

5. *Characterization.* This is the last and most difficult step. Characterization implies that the learner becomes the teacher and a model for others. This is most notable in our Master Gardener program and other volunteer programs where, after mastering a curriculum, the learner responds by teaching others. This is the result of a learner moving through the five categories of comprehension.

Educational comprehension can be an excellent goal for Extension agents in training volunteers. Agents who help learners move through the five levels of educational comprehension will ultimately be able to use those learners as a teaching resource.

References

Krathwohl, D.R., B.S. Bloom and B.B. Masia. 1964. *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook II: Affective Domain.* New York: Longman.

Other publications in this series on volunteer administration:

- D-1452, Leadership Advisory Boards
- D-1453, Program Area Committees and Youth Boards
- D-1454, Volunteer Associations and Groups
- D-1455, Understanding and Managing Direct and Episodic Volunteers
- D-1456, Managing the Risk Associated with Volunteer Service
- D-1458, Teaching Volunteers to Teach: Delivery Methods

This material was developed by the Texas Cooperative Extension Volunteer Steering Committee, chaired by Chris Boleman and Angela Burkham. Extension faculty who serve on the committee are Dirk Aaron, Michelle Allen, Joyce Cavanagh, Nelson Daniels, Darrell Dromgoole, Linda Lynch Evans, Alma Fonseca, Pam Foster, Elaine Fries, Richie Griffin, Rick Hirsch, Kit Horne, Shirley Long, Rick Machen, Linda Mock, Carolyn Nobles, Susan Richey, Bob Robinson, Renee Sanders, Robert Scott, Doug Welsh, Neal Wilkins and Ron Woolley. Administrative advisors are Kyle Smith, Associate Director for County Programs, and Martha Couch, Associate Director for 4-H and Youth Development.

The authors acknowledge the assistance of Elizabeth Gregory, Extension Communication Specialist, District Extension Administrators, County Extension Administrators, and Regional Program Directors.

Produced by Agricultural Communications, The Texas A&M University System
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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. Edward G. Smith, Director, Texas Cooperative Extension, The Texas A&M University System.
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