

## Essential Ways to Enhance Learning for Older Students in the Adult Citizenship Education Classroom

There is a persistent myth among both students and teachers that older English as a second language (ESL) students cannot learn a language. Contemporary research on brain functioning in older adults dispels that myth. Older adults can learn languages, albeit not in the same way as children and younger adults.

The educational needs of older students are diverse and vary from person to person, as do the accommodations necessary to support their learning. Teachers should view this document as a menu of possible accommodations from which to choose once their students' needs have been determined.

### Sensory and Mobility Accommodations

- Determine special needs (e.g., visual, hearing, and physical impairments) through classroom observations and/or interviews
- Provide referral information in students' native languages, if possible
- Schedule classes to meet regularly, for short periods, and with frequent breaks
- Limit classroom and outside noise to accommodate students with hearing impairments
- Ensure that the classroom has adequate lighting, especially natural light
- Provide ample space and seating for wheelchairs, walkers, and canes
- Encourage students with impairments to sit near the front of the class
- Use a large font for all printed materials (i.e., 14 point or higher)
- Use materials with color and high contrast

### Self-Perception as a Student

- Provide frequent positive feedback
- Elicit students' knowledge and experience and relate it to new content
- Assign tasks that foster success from the start
- Help students see their progress

### Anxiety in Unfamiliar Situations

- Create classroom routines
- Familiarize students with the different aspects of the naturalization process through role play, videos, field trips, and demonstrations
- Expose students to a variety of speakers with different accents
- Teach strategies for dealing with challenging situations (i.e., asking for clarification and repetition or asking for more time)
- Provide practice in making online appointments, accessing information on various web sites, and using online study materials
- Familiarize students with USCIS security processes such as fingerprinting, getting photographed, and walking through metal detectors

## Ability to Process Language and New Information

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- Teach content thematically
- Explain key concepts using students' native languages, if possible
- Present information in multiple ways (e.g., print, role play, and visual); use multimedia, including music
- Reinforce printed materials with oral language
- Divide instructional content into small segments
- Teach information step-by-step; stay on topic
- Speak slowly, repeat, and paraphrase
- Check for understanding *before* asking students to produce information

## Memorization and Retention

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- Connect new learning to students' knowledge and experiences (e.g., birthdays, holidays, and events)
- Teach new concepts and new words using concrete examples from students' experience (e.g., compare the three (3) branches of government to tree branches)
- Use graphics, real objects, and photos as much as possible
- Use small group activities that encourage learning through social interaction
- Review material frequently, spaced over time, and in a variety of ways

## Navigating New Technology

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- Assist students with finding and using online resources
- Introduce technology slowly
- Provide multiple opportunities for practice
- Help students use computer accessibility features (e.g., print size, text to voice, and mouse speed)

## Other Administration Considerations

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- Create a list of emergency contacts and students' special needs
- Provide accessibility to public transportation, if possible
- Designate parking spaces for the disabled
- Ensure compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations and standards

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To find additional citizenship education materials and instructional resources, visit the USCIS Citizenship Resource Center at [www.uscis.gov/citizenship](http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship).



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