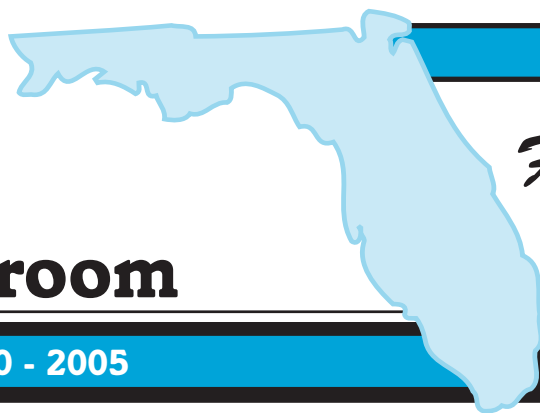


The

# Adult Basic Classroom



*For Florida Adult Basic  
Education Practitioners*

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[www.ABEFlorida.org](http://www.ABEFlorida.org)

**I understand the research that says adult learners want to have a say in their own education, need to learn in small groups, and have to develop as independent learners. But what does that mean for my classroom? How do I set up a classroom that meets the variety of needs of multiple students and still maintain my sanity?**

The joy and challenge of an Adult Education Classroom is that a variety of individual needs and goals must be met. Adult educators and researchers of successful adult education practices agree that adults learn what is meaningful to them. That means that teachers must somehow come to know what is meaningful to each student in her classroom and be aware of when needs change. But how does one accomplish that? A successful adult education classroom has three things: clear and manageable methods for record keeping; plentiful opportunities for individual, small group and whole class learning; and frequent, individual interaction between teacher and student.

## RECORD KEEPING

Record keeping is both necessary and intimidating in an adult education classroom. First, attendance must be documented. In many instances, attendance sheets become legal documents and they must, therefore, be accurate and complete. This means that adult learners must be faithful in signing them and that teachers must be faithful in providing updated sheets and storing old sheets. Attendance sheet must be accessible, yet in a place that will not disrupt work already begun. Getting students in the habit of

signing it means the sheet should be in the same spot in the room each class. Placing the attendance sheet by the door and offering both visual and oral reminders to sign the sheet should help make this a student task and not a teacher task.

The second kind of record keeping is more complicated. Both adult education students and their teachers need to be able to easily document progress through a learning plan. This means, first, that a learning plan must be developed. It is vital that adult learners be included in this process. Ask them what they are coming to class to learn. Ask them what their strengths and weaknesses are. Discuss their TABE scores and the state benchmarks with them. Then set goals and steps to achieve those goals. Write the goals and steps down. Make a copy for both teacher and student and set a time to meet weekly or bi-weekly about those goals. All of this involves face-to-face interaction between teacher and student. Though an initial interview must be done at the beginning of each session, it must also be done periodically during each session. But these one-on-one discussions are very profitable for the teacher. Not only do they allow teacher and student to set up record-keeping, they also allow the teacher to get to know the student's learning style, preferences, challenges, and risks. And,

these sessions help teacher and student plan when individual, group, or whole class learning should best be applied for each student, allowing the teacher to work on all three organizational goals at once.

Index cards are easy tools for keeping personal information on students. The checklists offered by the ABE Resource Guides are working tools for charting progress. This may entail teachers keeping lists or folders of projects and assessments that are identified with a certain benchmark. The ABE Resource Guides offer many lesson plans to get you started.

Remember that goal setting and record keeping are skills necessary throughout life, not just while one is in school, so all time spent with students to develop these skills is meaningful. Remember, too, that goal setting and record keeping skills can be combined with the practice of other basic skills. Periodically have students practice their charting skills by producing graphs of progress. Likewise, consider having students write a summary of work done and future goals at the end of each class session, week, or month.

Though setting up record keeping takes quite a bit of time initially, it is the heart of an organized classroom. It facilitates individual learning by allowing students to not only keep up with their own progress, but to have a say in their own goals which means

they will be learning more quickly and effectively. Knowing the teacher will be checking progress regularly makes students more accountable, and therefore more independent. Setting up effective record keeping allows a teacher to manage individual learning.

## INDIVIDUAL, SMALL GROUP, AND WHOLE CLASS LEARNING

Like effective record keeping, offering plentiful individual, small group, and whole class learning activities requires prep work up front from the teacher. Individual work requires accurate placement and must be supported with appropriate texts, interviews to set up learning plans and to check progress, and availability from the teacher and other students to answer questions.

Small group learning requires the teacher knows the interests and abilities of each group member so that the right combination of students may be placed together. Small group learning requires that the teacher provide clear instructions and goals for the group activity, and that the teacher monitor group interaction and progress. Once small groups are established, however, they can work more independently. Though a student may be in a different reading small group than math small group, there is good pedagogy in keeping groups working together for an extended period. First, small group members learn to trust each other's work quality and reliability. Second, trust within small groups allows for deeper questions and greater risks in the completion of the work. Third, small groups that have members who are responsible and trust each other can become self-directed. Here, once again, strong preparatory work on the part of the teacher makes the work load manageable later.

Whole class learning is a good place for the teacher to challenge students. Whole class learning can be on a subject that no one is working on independently or in small groups, or it

may be set up to use the expertise of a particular individual or small group. Whole class learning need not be a whole lesson plan. Puzzle of the Day from [www.educationworld.com](http://www.educationworld.com), math problem of the day, or news event of the day can be information written on the board and discussed at the end of class after individual work has already been done on it. Whole class learning could be a once-a-semester special project like throwing a party, campaigning for a piece of legislation, planning a field trip, or inviting a guest speaker. Adult education teachers need not prepare a whole class lesson plan for every class, and each whole class lesson should still involve participatory learning, like solving a puzzle or setting a budget for a party. Instead, what adult education teachers should plan to do every day is talk individually with each student at least for a few minutes.

## INDIVIDUAL INTERACTION

Though the three great responsibilities of the adult education teacher are to organize effective record-keeping, create individual, small group, and whole class learning situations, and individually monitor each student, the maintenance of these goals really lies in knowing your students. Make it a priority to know their goals, their educational history, where they work, who they call family, how difficult transportation is for them, who their friends are in the classroom, and what views or experiences they bring with them to the classroom that will impact their learning. While doing the initial interview in which learning goals are set and a plan is crafted, get an index card full of phone numbers, names of contacts, job addresses, birth dates, and hobbies so that you can not only have a conversation with your student, but so you can better direct his learning as well. A grandmother caring for her grandson on the weekends may want to work on reading skills by taping

herself reading children's books for her grandson to use when he is away from her; a male choir director may want to use hymns as one of his reading exercises. Likewise, that same choir director may be having difficulty comprehending the science reading for the GED not because it is beyond his reading skills but because it does not fit with his religious training. Knowing the difference is only possible for the teacher who has his classroom organized so that information about students is not only collected but is used and constantly updated through frequent contact.

## CLASSROOM SUCCESS

Although the challenges of creating and maintaining an adult education classroom are many, they are greatly outnumbered by the joys that will be experienced by teacher and students if the classroom environment encourages opportunities for individual, small group and whole class learning; and frequent, individual interaction between all members of the class.

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