Effective Instruction for Adults with LD

1. **Teach important skills.** Deciding what is important to teach is critical given the limited amount of time for instruction in most literacy programs. Adults with LD should be involved in deciding what is important, and skills should be as functional as possible.

2. **Teach less better.** Most adults with LD need explicit, intensive instruction combined with numerous practice sessions to truly master a skill or strategy. It is more effective and efficient to pick fewer, but important, skills and teach them to mastery, rather than to try to teach a wide range of skills in a cursory fashion.

3. **Teach explicitly.** Because of the learning characteristics of many adults with LD, a direct and explicit approach to teaching is more effective than more “discovery” types of approaches.

4. **Teach contextually.** Literacy skills and strategies should be taught and practiced in the context of “real-life” situations.

5. **Explain what is to be learned and why it is important.** Briefly explaining the purpose of the skill, strategy, or activity before teaching it clarifies expectations for the adult with LD. In addition, discussing the relevance of what is to be learned can increase learner motivation.

6. **Check the old before teaching the new.** Before beginning instruction on a new skill or strategy, verify whether the adult with LD has retained any prerequisite skills or knowledge needed to perform the new skills. This type of review is best conducted by requesting that the adult demonstrate performance of the perquisite skills rather than merely inquiring whether or not he/she can perform them.

7. **Model what is to be learned.** A clear demonstration of the skill or strategy is a must prior to practicing it. Effective modeling includes both a clear and exaggerated demonstration as well as a comprehensive description of any covert thinking or decision-making.

8. **Use supported practice.** After viewing a demonstration/model, adults with LD benefit from supported or guided practice in a new skill or strategy. Through a series of prompts or questions, they are guided through the skill as a way of providing a high level of initial support and success.

9. **Use controlled materials.** During initial stages of practice, it is sometimes effective to control the difficulty of the task in which the new skill or strategy is practiced. Initial practice in “easy” materials allows the adults with LD to focus on learning the new skill. Task difficulty can be added when success is achieved in controlled material.

10. **Provide practice, practice, practice, and then more practice.** Adults with LD need multiple opportunities for practice over time to retain new skills or information. Independent practice (with no guidance or prompting) should be provided only when a high level of success has been achieved during prompted practice.
11. **Require frequent responses.** Adults with LD learn better when they stray involved during instructional sessions. One effective way to do this is to ask frequent questions related to the information being taught. This facilitates involvement and provides important information about the adult learner’s level of understanding.

12. **Provide corrective feedback.** Adults with LD should receive corrective feedback as soon as possible in a matter-of-fact manner. Learning rate is enhanced when feedback about quality and correctness of performance is provided in this way.

13. **Promote Generalization.** Often adults with LD have difficulty transferring what they learn to different settings or to different, but related tasks. It is, therefore, imperative that activities and techniques designed to promote skill or strategy generalization be built into literacy instruction.

14. **Be prepared.** Implementing the above principles requires preparation. Good teaching may appear “spontaneous”; however, that impression is illusory. The amount of time put into planning is directly related to the quality (effectiveness and efficiency) of instruction.

15. **Use accommodations only when necessary.** While reasonable accommodations are required by law and are necessary for appropriate instruction and assessment under certain circumstances, two important warnings apply regarding their use: (1) creating a situation where adults with LD become dependent on others versus becoming independent learners, and (2) not providing the instruction needed to benefit fully from the accommodation.

16. **Use caution when selecting instructional techniques and programs.** Many products and approaches purport to be effective for adults with LD. Although some may have intuitive appeal and make grandiose claims, there may be no empirical support for their use. Become a cautious consumer. Adults with LD should not be the victims of poor instruction as a result of instructors’ jumping on educational bandwagons.