

# *10 Ways to Minimize Resistance in a Learning Event*

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Every trainer, teacher, professor, facilitator, keynote speaker and curriculum designer encounters resistance. Learners will sometimes resist content being taught, the way something is presented, the task being asked of them or any number of aspects of a course. Regardless of the type of resistance, one thing is important for us all to know: resistance is normal and should be expected. Once we accept this, we will stop trying to avoid or ignore it. We need to plan for resistance and meet it head-on when it comes. If we think we can escape it, we are mistaken. Unresolved resistance will affect the learning of the individual involved and, because of its potentially explosive nature it can pull down an entire group or course.



Below are 10 ways to reduce destructive resistance. These are ways to plan for this inevitable force and create the space for it to help the learning rather than hinder it.

1. **TRANSPARENCY.** Learners want and need to know why teachers, trainers, and facilitators do what they do. By explaining why a type of task is being used and what the plan is for a learning event, learners will feel more relaxed, respected, and "in the know". Transparency builds trust that will lessen resistance.
2. **SAFETY.** All adult learners need to feel safe to take risks, ask difficult questions, try out new learning and participate fully in a learning event. When safety is high, resistance to participation will be low. When learners trust that the trainer will not lead them astray or take them into "unsafe" physical, emotional or psychological territory, they will question and challenge the process less aggressively.
3. **LEARNING NEEDS AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT.** Conducting a Learning Needs and Resource Assessment (LNRA) can greatly reduce resistance to the content being taught or the way it is being taught. By giving learners the opportunity ahead of time to ask questions, share needs and wants for the workshop, and learn how it will be conducted, the facilitator can make important changes to the workshop plan. Giving the learners the opportunity to have input in the learning design will help make the workshop relevant, meaningful and engaging for them. This will lessen resistance and increase respect experienced by learners.
4. **SEQUENCE.** When new content is presented in a logical sequenced way, learning is more likely to occur. If sequence is not smooth and if the learning event does not move from simple to complex tasks, learners may be confused and frustrated. This confusion can lead to undesired resistance from the learner, which will interfere with learning.
5. **AFFIRMATION.** It is amazing how far a "thank you" can go... but it can take you miles on the road to respect, trust, and safety for the learner. When we affirm difficult questions and



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personal experiences, we are saying, "It's alright to share these things. Let's take some time to look at this together." Affirmation helps minimize resistance.

6. **CHOICE.** An easy and effective way to lessen resistance is to give choices to learners. Since all learners have different learning styles, interests, intelligences, personalities, and experiences, giving choices in learning is critical and logical. When we offer choices about how to learn, what to learn and how to apply the learning, adult learners will usually make good decisions for themselves. These decisions will work to heighten their engagement, maximize their learning, increase relevance, and minimize their resistance. Why choose for learners, what they can more effectively choose for themselves? When learning styles match teaching styles, resistance will be minimal.
7. **CHECK-IN.** Watch for signs of resistance. Whether these signs show up in the Learning Needs and Resources Assessment, during the course, or during breaks, knowing who is questioning the content or the method of teaching is important. Check-in with people who hint of resistance as soon as possible. Often a simple private one-on-one conversation to get a better understanding of where resistance is coming from or to clarify goals or expectations can lessen resistance. Adjustments to a learning design based on what is discovered in private one-on-one conversations will demonstrate respect for learners and will increase engagement.
8. **DEBRIEF.** Taking time to debrief new content that was just presented, is critical. If learners are moved too quickly into applying new learning without having time to ask questions of clarity or share how it is meaningful for them, can invite confusion, uncertainty, and fear. These elements cause resistance. Having a group discussion to share what is new, surprising, or helpful, as well as addressing pressing questions, can lessen resistance.
9. **RELEVANCE.** A common reason for resistance is a lack of understanding of how a workshop is relevant for learners. Adult learners need to know how something can be used in their life and why it is important for them. By using relevant examples, referring to real events and issues, and personalizing the learning, learners will resist less. When learners understand how important something is for their life, they will be more engaged and learn more.
10. **WELCOME IT.** When resistance comes, greet it! When someone emphatically blurts out, "But I don't agree with that at all!" invite that person to explain what they are struggling with. When someone refuses to participate in a learning task, assure him, "It's fine to sit out of this activity, if you prefer to watch." Not every task will feel equally comfortable to every learner and not every idea will be understood or accepted in the same way by the entire group. The critical thing is to welcome resistance when it comes and recognize that it is coming from a real place of fear, confusion, frustration, uncertainty, or past experience. The biggest mistake we make is to try to avoid resistance when it comes... because it will only grow and interfere with learning.

These ten ways to reduce resistance work for me and have proven themselves over time. What have you found helpful in dealing with this issue? What lessons have you learned in your teaching and facilitating? Write me at [jeanette@globalearning.com](mailto:jeanette@globalearning.com). I would love to receive your thoughts, stories, and questions.



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