# Supporting Learning Styles – Seniors & Technology

Overview: This article provides tactics in working with different learning styles and approaches among seniors. It is taken from Old Dogs, New Tricks: Why Seniors Have Trouble With Technology. By Melanie HaikenCaring.Com – as website about serving older adults. https://www.caring.com/articles/seniors-learning-technology

The Slow Starter: The number of seniors using the Internet has slower year by year than the rate of Internet use by adults in general. In 2012, the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project announced that more than half (53 percent) of American adults over age 65 are online and using e-mail. When asked their reasons for not going online, most said they either "didn't need it," didn't see the benefits of it, or didn't know how to access it. Interestingly, though, once older adults get online, they tend to be very active; Pew's data show that most Web users over 65 go online on a daily basis, and more than half use social media as well as e-mail and search engines. What does this suggest? **That seniors only discover the benefits of being online once they are.** In other words, showing a senior photos or postings online is a powerful motivator.
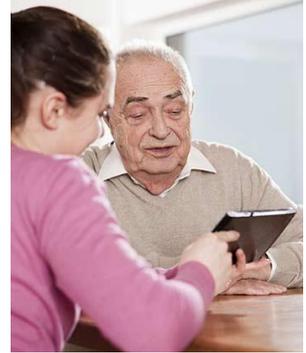
How to Help: The best way to help a slow starter is with the simplest possible technology and step-by-step demonstrations. Walk them slowly through the basic steps, starting wherever they are. If your loved one is resisting the introduction of technology at home, get her started at the library, or bring your own laptop or tablet over to show. Many seniors also benefit from the support of a group course. Many adult day programs and community centers offer courses. Keep in mind any physical limitations -- if your loved one has arthritis that interferes with typing, for example, a tablet or an oversized keyboard might be the solution. If eyesight is an issue, there are phones designed with larger interfaces, and you can increase type size on devices and computers.

The Nervous Nellie: *Oh, I don't know, I don't think I'll be able to learn to use it.* Older adults be intimidated or fearful. Nervousness may be accompanied by self-doubt. *I think it's a little late in life for me to learn all that.* According to a 2008 government report, Barriers and Drivers of Health Information Technology Use for t he Elderly, Chronically Ill, and Underserved, anxiety and intimidation are factors preventing seniors from trying out new technology.

How to Help: Like most of us, older adults learn best with one-on-one, hands-on show-and-tell. The more nervous one is about technology, the more important it is to transmit information in small bites. Show how to do one thing at a time, with practice doing it on her own multiple times before moving on to another challenge. Also, don't show a bunch of new tools at once. The survey found that seniors learn best when technology is delivered using equipment they're already familiar with. This suggests that if a senior has experience with one type of technology, increasing skills in that area before trying a new device may be the best approach.

Helping Seniors Help Themselves
Creating Learning Guides for Various IT learning Elements
For practice when the senior is alone or without coaching – try two tactics. First create a step by step listing of directions. Providing it in a numerical list rather than a narrative form. Second, consider creating pictograph directions where you create a screen shot or photo of what the person should be seeing with bold arrows and numbers to correspond to the directions.

The Cranky Curmudgeon: The operative issue here as it relates to technology is temper; the curmudgeon has a low frustration threshold.

How to Help: To reduce frustration, set low expectations from the start, explain that everyone gets stuck early on. Offer positive reinforcement after each task. Stop frequently and have the senior practice each skill. (Otherwise you'll trigger frustration when she can't remember.) If she gets impatient with herself, you can try humor to defuse the situation, offer reassurance,
take a break, or overlook the grumpiness and keep going.

The Budget-Conscious User: Many seniors live on tight budgets and have to pay close attention to expenses. Owning a computer or setting up cable access may feel like an expense they can't afford. That said, the government's study on barriers to Internet use found that **many seniors overestimate the cost of technology**, based on outdated information or a misunderstanding of what type of equipment they need.

How to Help: Take a senior to a store with a good technology department and introduce him to the variety of options available. Show that tablets, netbooks, and laptops are available at much lower cost than desktop computers. If a senior can't afford or balks at monthly payments for Internet access or a data plan, you can introduce her to the computers at the public library or see if he's interested in a Wi-Fi-only tablet that he can use in cafes and other public places. Studies show that once older adults discover the ways in which the Internet and social media enhance their lives, they become more open to paying for those services.

The Stay-at-Homer: *I'm always here, so why would I need a cell phone?* Many seniors are used to relying on a home phone and voice mail that they don't realize it's exerting a habit-forming pull. *I need to stay home in case Mary calls*. But isolation can become a bad habit. Studies have shown that for many older adults, isolation gradually breeds fear, social anxiety, and increases the likelihood of depression and health problems.

How to Help: According to a U.K. study by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Internet usage can be key to helping seniors stay connected and avoid loneliness. The Web also comes in handy for tasks that may be difficult for older adults who tend to stay home. Learning to do online banking, for example, could save her many a trip downtown. And when it comes to accessing government benefits, older adults may have no choice but to go online. In 2011, the U.S. Social Security Administration stopped mailing Social Security benefit statements, making them available online only. Even more drastic, in March 2013 the agency stopped mailing paper-based benefit checks, requiring direct deposit instead.