

Tips for Teaching Technology to Seniors

A Pedagogical Guide



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**Be Smart
Seniors**

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Introduction

An ageing society, technology and digitalisation

The world's population is ageing. In the European Union, projections are that the total population of older people is to increase from 19% at the start of 2016 to 29% by 2080.

At the same time, technology and digitalisation has infused every aspect of the modern society and use of digital technology is becoming an integrated part of people's everyday lives. The result of constant technological development is that many services and resources are now accessible only through digital means. Along with this trend, virtually every country in the world is experiencing growth in the number and proportion of the older population.

These changes introduce many new challenges to society. Although older people represent an increasing group of technology users, however, many find themselves without appropriate competence and skills. Without appropriate skills and support, they may face a risk of being excluded from the society. This guide offers pedagogical guidance for younger relatives teaching technology to older persons.



See also a short animated video on the topic.

Be Smart Seniors project (BESS) project (2018–2020, Erasmus + funded)

The Be Smart Seniors (BESS) project aims at contributing to the establishment of the “European i2010 initiative on “e-Inclusion” by developing innovative intergeneration learning opportunity for older people – for one of the most vulnerable groups of society – to engage with technology and to make more effective use of it.

One of the objectives of the BESS project is to prepare a pedagogical guide for younger relatives on how to teach technology to an older person. An additional objective of the project is to share free and easily accessible online material to support the technological needs of older people.

The outcomes of the project aim at enabling older people to use technology in their everyday life, helping them to support their health and personal autonomy while living at their own home. Furthermore, this project will enhance and provide support for lifelong and intergenerational learning.

Link to the project homepage: <http://smartseniors.eu>

Seniors using technology

According to the Eurostat's data on Internet usage, in 2016, close to half of all people between 55 and 74 years of age used the Internet on average at least once a week, in the 27 countries of the European Union. Internet and social media enable older people to stay connected with family and friends and provide new possibilities to be active and engaged through hobbies and other leisure activities. In addition, older people use ICT for buying and selling purposes, sending free messages, participating in online forums, listening to radio online and reading newspapers.

Older people as learners, younger people as teachers

Age is not a barrier – learning ability is preserved throughout life. However, older people are concerned about learning possibilities, such as lack of support during the learning process, ambiguous teaching instructions during computer training courses, unfamiliarity of ICT concepts, and too fast-paced instructions.

In the learning process of older people, age-related issues need to be considered to ensure an effective way of learning how to use technology. Learning may be more difficult if the memory has weakened. Working memory, for the short-term maintenance and manipulation of information, and episodic memory, for remembering personally experienced events, are the types of memory mostly affected by ageing. In addition, age-related changes in sensory capacity, such as hearing and vision, may impact learning, and require additional aids to enable and facilitate learning.

Despite the cognitive and sensory changes, older people can learn new things. However, there are things worth considering when teaching an older person. Younger people, who are used to different digital devices and solutions, benefit from acknowledging the age-related aspects of older people as learners and users of technology. This guide, along with the Pedagogical Tips for Teaching Technology to Seniors Animation, aims at narrowing the gap between seniors and younger people and providing guidance on how to teach technology to seniors.

Tips for teaching technology to seniors

The most important thing is that the person you are teaching wants to learn. Internet offers many benefits for seniors, such as staying in contact with family and friends by email and on social media, taking care of everyday matters through online services and searching for information.



Consider the following when teaching a senior

1. Be calm

It is important to stay calm. Young persons, who have grown up with technology, are more used to different devices, programmes and quick access to information. Take your time and find a calm place. Keep sessions short, since learning can be slow and challenging.

2. Be Clear

Speak clearly and loud enough. Use concrete and familiar examples. Seniors may not speak such fluent English and foreign words may be hard for them. Try to explain things with your native language using everyday words. It is important that you know yourself what you are teaching. Go through and learn things before teaching them.



3. Repeat if Needed

Learning by doing is more effective and gives you an opportunity to check for understanding. It is easier to remember things when you do them yourself.

4. Enjoy

Respect the person whom you are teaching. What is easy for you may be difficult for others. Encourage and celebrate all achievements. Stay positive and enjoy the time you spend together.

Have a nice time together!

Golden rules for teaching smart seniors

1. Be patient: learning takes more time and effort when you are older, don't lose your temper.
2. Be calm: use a calm voice to explain, don't create unnecessary panic, speak slowly enough.
3. Be supportive: it may take more than one or two trials before learning how to use something new.
4. Choose a quiet space without disturbances.
5. Take time: ensure that you have enough time to teach things properly.
6. Keep it simple: use common words, not slang nor too complicated terms.
7. Focus on one thing at a time: don't complicate learning by concentrating on many things at the same time.
8. Use an audible voice; speak clearly and make sure you are understood.
9. Do your homework first: ask what the concrete goals for learning are, and make sure that you have the needed skills and knowledge yourself.
10. Repeat: repeat as many times as possible.
11. Check what has been learnt: make questions, practice and ask to see what has been learnt.
12. Respect: don't be arrogant and condescending.
13. Keep an open mind: don't be judgmental and underestimate anyone's abilities.
14. Be flexible: it may take some time and effort to learn new things.

15. Keep the learning sessions short enough: learning takes time.
16. Be kind!
17. Be polite!
18. Have fun: enjoy the time you spend together!

Further reading

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