Tips to Help Organize Workbooks and Written Documents for People Living with Dementia

by Elaine Wiersma, Kathy Hickman and Jeanette Romkema

In an education event juggling work books, lots of paper, and other written documents is a challenge for any learner (and teacher!). When the learners are people living with dementia trying to find the right piece of paper or spot on a page can interfere with learning, cause undue stress and impact safety. Here are a few tips to keep things organized and help people living with dementia (and other learners) in finding what they need in their workbooks and written documents.

1. **Colour code sections of the workbook.** Each week should be printed on a different colour of paper.

2. **Use colour** within the workbook to help direct people. For example, “follow along with the paragraph in the green box.”

3. Ensure that **dividers are used** in-between weeks or sessions.

4. **Use symbols or pictures** for specific places on a page so people can easily be directed there (e.g., a mouth for discussion questions, a book for reading, a question mark for brainstorming, etc.). Include a legend in the beginning of the workbook to explain all symbols used.

5. **Number the pages** for easy reference in large font size.

6. **Number specific activities or tasks.** For example, “Follow along with the paragraph at 2.1”.

7. **Print on one side of the page only** to minimize confusion. Put holes on both sides of the paper if people want to put pages facing each other in their binders.

8. **Make sure everyone is on the correct page** at the beginning of the session. This will assist people to move forward together.

9. **Offer to assist** people if they require it.

10. **Minimize the amount of “extra” papers and handouts.** Try to keep everything within the workbook where it’s being worked on.
11. **Ensure the printing is large enough** for people to read. Font size 11 is usually too small – font size 14 is often a better choice.

12. If people are uncomfortable with writing down ideas for brainstorming, ensure that the facilitators **take the flip charts away, type it up for people**, and give it back to them the following week (with a 3-hole punch). When it is given back to participants, facilitators can assist people to put these notes into their binders or folders in the proper place.

13. **Minimize how much information and how many words** you have on any given page. Keep it simple, clear and easy to follow.

14. **Use a binder** so pages are easy to turn and stay organized. If you only have a few pages, ensure all pages are stapled together – one staple in the top left-hand corner is fine.

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Elaine Wiersma is an Associate Professor, Centre for Education and Research on Aging & Health at Lakehead University ewiersma@lakeheadu.ca;

Kathy Hickman is Knowledge Mobilization Lead at Alzheimer Knowledge Exchange and Education Manager at Alzheimer Society of Ontario khickman@alzheimeront.org;

Jeanette Romkema is Senior Consultant, Partner and President of Global Learning Partners jeanette@globallearningpartners.com.