

ADULT LEARNER PERSONA

A practical example for designing programs around real learner goals, behaviors and constraints

MARISOL RIVERA | AGE 38 | ADULT EDUCATION LEARNER

"I don't want to stop. I just need a way to keep going when life changes."

LIFE CONTEXT

- Parent of two children, ages 7 and 12
- Works 30–38 hours each week in food service
- Work schedule is posted one week in advance and sometimes changes
- Shares one car with her sister
- Comfortable with text and WhatsApp; less comfortable with email and online portals

WHAT MOTIVATES HER

- Helping her children with schoolwork
- Moving into a more stable career
- Seeing evidence that she is getting closer to her goal
- Encouragement from a teacher who knows her name and notices her progress

RELEVANT BEHAVIORS

- Reads program text messages quickly
- Rarely answers unfamiliar phone numbers
- Studies in 15–20 minute periods during work breaks
- Asks classmates for help before asking staff
- Stops attending rather than formally withdrawing

PRIMARY GOAL

Earn her high school equivalency credential so she can enter a medical assistant training program and qualify for a job with predictable hours.

WHAT MAKES PARTICIPATION DIFFICULT

- Evening childcare sometimes falls through
- Missing one class makes the next class feel harder
- She is embarrassed to explain repeated absences
- The make-up materials are stored in a portal she finds confusing
- She assumes several absences mean she is no longer welcome
- The next formal progress test is eight weeks away

WHAT SHE NEEDS FROM THE PROGRAM

- A clear way to return after an interruption
- Learning options that work in short periods
- Visible evidence of progress
- Direct, nonjudgmental communication
- Connections between today's learning and her longer-term career goal

EVIDENCE CONTEXT

Marisol is fictional, but a credible persona is synthesized from real evidence, not staff intuition alone. Each characteristic should be traceable to learner interviews, intake data, attendance and re-engagement patterns, staff observations, and adult learner persistence research.

Bias check: Do we know this from data? Have learners told us this? Are we inferring it? What do we still need to investigate?