You've probably been in this situation a few times, a room full of youngsters as fidgety and jumpy as deer on opening day of gun season.

Here they are, full of energy, can't sit still, with an attention span so short you can't measure it. What are you going to do to get and keep their attention?

Let's try to understand a little about today's youth and what makes them act the way they do. Young people today grow up with television. Sometimes it is the baby sitter and sometimes the parent. But it is always there to be watched. What consequences has that had? One major effect TV has on young people is their inability to pay attention to traditional instructional methods.

Many years ago, the TV industry understood that if the image on the screen did not move, people would not watch. TV writers and producers made sure that either the characters move, the pictures zoom or the image pans within four seconds to keep the attention of the viewer. It's what I call the "Four Second Rule." The more movement, the stronger the capture.

Today a great number of youngsters are categorized with "attention deficit disorder." They just can't seem to focus their attention on any one thing for very long. Did you ever watch these youngsters play electronic games? Where's the attention deficit there? They can literally spend hours glued to that Nintendo or Play Station. Why? It moves!

Now enter into the classroom the students with all these years of television viewing experience. Are you going to hold their attention standing behind a podium or lectern for ten-plus hours of verbal instruction? No, that's not likely to happen. Studies indicate that young people generally have an average attention span of eleven seconds if you present material in lecture format.

There are also some other situations the instructor should try to avoid. If you have training aids to show the class, wait until break time or after class to display them. A younger looking at a cut away of a center fire cartridge case is going to shift his or her attention to that object instead of the instructor. More than likely, so will the surrounding students. These students will not know what you taught while they were looking at the visual aid.

Other things going on in the classroom will also distract students. People entering or leaving the room will distract the students' attention away from the lesson. Other instructors carrying on a conversation in the back of the room will certainly distract. Telephones ringing, and noises outside the classroom will also pull the attention of the student away from the instructor. Make every effort to eliminate these types of distractions.

How can the instructor succeed in keeping the students' attention?

First of all, an instructor cannot be very effective by standing behind the podium. Move out from behind it and move about the front of the classroom. If you can't get away from your teaching manual, carry it with you or make outline notes on 3x5 cards and carry them with you. People watch motion. Eyes will follow you. You have the students' attention! Teaching is not very effective if you move into the middle of the classroom and have your back to the students in the front rows. Stay in the front area or sides of the classroom. If you are using a public address system, use a wireless microphone.

Second, use hand gestures. It's this big ... It's this long ... Again, movement captures attention. A speaker

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Teaching Tips

**Ammo advice** To help teach the ammunition section, I use clear plastic 35mm film cannisters obtained from my local film processor into which I separately place the different components of a shot shell or cartridge.

Then I pass these cannisters around for the students to view, and I do not have to worry about any of these items spilling out.

Also, I use a photocopy machine to enlarge the illustrations found in the hunter education manual. I then convert these pictures to transparencies and have a homemade set of transparencies to go along with each chapter. You have the option to color in the transparencies with a permanent marker. — Susan M. Clark, Nebraska volunteer instructor

**Visual aid** I took this idea from the Kansas Hunter Education Neas a couple of years ago and have used it in my class since.

By cutting about one-third of the circumference (about 6.5 inches long) from the breech end of a non-functional shotgun, you can make an excellent visual aid to demonstrate how the 12/20-gauge burst occurs. Using dummy rounds, the students can actually see the position of shotshells when the trigger is pulled.

— Ken Almes, Kansas volunteer instructor

**Planning in advance** To help your classes come off "glitch-free," set your dates well in advance. Setting your class at least 30 days in advance allows time to prepare materials and head off any problems that might occur.

Confirm your location dates and times before you advertise your class. Even the best facilities can get mixed up, and a room booked in advance is the best way to go.

— continued on next page
standing behind a podium speaking in a monotone voice without hand gestures is guaranteed to put his or her students sound asleep. Use those hands to attract attention.

Third, try team teaching. I don’t mean you teach one chapter or unit and your teaching partner teaches the next. Try teaching alternating paragraphs or sections of your material. Both teachers need to be in different parts of the front of the classroom and alternate back and forth. Of course this takes practice with your partner but it is very effective for keeping the students’ attention. Male and female instructors are very effective team teachers.

Fourth, you might try to throw in some unexpected events. I’ve seen instructors begin a new section of material by grabbing some type of game call and letting loose with a series of goose honks, duck quacks, wild turkey yelps, or other noises. It’s not necessarily part of the lesson but it grabs the attention of the students. Now they anticipate what you might do next.

They are paying attention.

Fifth, change the tone of your voice. Most material can be presented in a normal speaking voice. But some material you teach may be worth shouting. Some material may be more effective with almost a whisper. People tend to listen closely when you suddenly change to a whisper voice.

All it takes to be a more effective instructor for today’s young people (and lots of adults, too) is to try some of these simple techniques.

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Teaching Tips, continued

vance may be occupied by someone else. Also, check for other conflicts with the classroom. If it’s just down the hall from a body shop using metal grinders, another location may be better.

Practice, practice, practice! Take the time to get well-acquainted with your material, demonstrations and activities. Nothing is more disconcerting or hurts your credibility more than having something fall flat.

Set up the room the day before, if possible. You’re ready, less stressed and know everything is in its proper place. Otherwise, allow plenty of extra time before class to set up. — Adapted from the Nevada Hunter Education Instructor Handbook.