



EXPERT PERSPECTIVES ON **E-LEARNING**



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INTRODUCTION

The Role of E-Learning in the Digital Economy

Since the first personal computer entered the workplace, HR and L&D leaders have included it in training programs. E-learning is broadly defined as the use of technology to deliver or access training courses or content. It has evolved over the decades as technology has evolved. Today, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and [machine learning](#) and virtual and augmented reality are changing how we develop and deliver online training – and how learners access and consume it.

[Adaptive learning](#), for example, enables personalized learning at scale, using machine learning to customize content based on learners' ability and learning needs. [Virtual and augmented reality](#) allow learners to immerse themselves in training like never before, and [AI-enabled chatbots](#) provide answers to common work questions at employees' point of need.

This e-book explores the perspectives of leading e-learning experts: their insights into the benefits of online learning; best practices for developing, delivering, and managing online content and programs; and how to develop your skills as an e-learning professional. Using these tips and strategies in your organization will enable you to provide an online learning experience that engages learners and gives them the content they need, where and when they need it.

As always, I would love to hear your perspectives on this collection from TrainingIndustry.com's e-learning community.



Ken Taylor
President, Training Industry, Inc.

It's a Great Time to Work in E-Learning



Mark Hunter is CEO of [CD2 Learning](#).

Over the past 20 years, innovation in the e-learning industry has been staggering. Rapidly innovating technology has eliminated the majority of frustrations associated with [legacy learning management systems \(LMSs\)](#) by focusing on the evolving needs of the consumer. That consumer is also evolving – both HR/L&D professionals and the modern workforce. What an exciting time to be in this industry!

Hats off to those early adopters of e-learning. They understood that the use of technology for training could be cost-effective, offer flexibility and appeal to their learners. What they found in actuality was that the systems couldn't handle audio/video content, and the user interface was quickly outdated. Systems struggled to integrate with others, the platforms weren't mobile, and tracking and reporting weren't what they needed. Early adopters morphed into fair-weathered fans and began to doubt their investment. The word spread, and e-learning was no longer the solution "de jour." It became widely accepted that older LMS platforms were succeeding at managing compliance but nothing else.

"Today's platforms are precisely the learning management systems that those early adopters first dreamed of."

Today's learning platforms creatively look for ways to brand themselves as anything but an LMS to distance themselves from the negative connotation of the term. In reality, these platforms are precisely the learning management systems that those early adopters first dreamed of. They offer microlearning, just-in-time learning, powerful [analytics](#), advanced built-in content creation and the ability to convert old content into engaging courses for the modern learner.

Today's cloud-based learning platforms provide a way for L&D professionals to quickly create learning for a variety of learning preferences. Courses go beyond delivering knowledge and allow learners to apply what they've learned and then to prove [mastery](#). Organizations can create simulations to reduce expensive or dangerous errors and empower confidence in team members. [Gamification](#) can increase engagement and healthy, productive competition (and provide valuable recognition and rewards). [Collaborative learning](#) also has a positive impact on user satisfaction; interactions among learners, trainers and peers are essential.

Most importantly, personalization and personalized learning are now possible. This individualized learning, designed to meet individual needs and interests, is highly valued by modern learners. It's all about choice – where, what, when and even how. Even better, it can provide a path to career advancement, which is motivating for employees and leads to cost-saving retention for organizations.

What was once impossible is not only possible but now successfully in use, with the most significant opportunities in specialty industries. Companies are now [training pilots](#) without risk to their lives or expensive machines. [NFL players can practice](#) plays before hitting the field. Chemists can combine elements in a safe environment. Competitors in the show horse industry can practice “in the arena” in front of judges. First-time employees can confidently master the point of sale system before facing a customer. Medical professionals hone their skills online instead of “on mom.” Students challenged with visual learning will discover alternatives, and thousands can pursue degrees or certifications they never thought possible. Why not prove competence on a new machine before buying it, or [role-play](#) an important sales call and problem-solve the potential results?

Now is an exciting time to work in e-learning. Authoring is built-in, reporting is sophisticated and highly valued, [assessments](#) are varied and provide immediate feedback, mobile apps are included, and so are gamified elements and some form of virtual experience. The time is right for users, too! Dissatisfaction with early LMSs was based, in part, on feedback from users. The workforce of 20 years ago had a higher percentage of people who were uncomfortable with online learning and computers in general. The modern workforce (digital natives) are not only comfortable, but they also have high expectations regarding [user experience](#). They will set the bar that current LMS and LMS hybrids will innovate to reach.

“The responsibility for delivering learning is great. Through technology, the opportunities are limitless.”

In this continually changing e-learning environment, the responsibility for delivering an organization's most valuable asset – its combined knowledge – is great. Through technology, however, the opportunities are limitless.

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Stuck in the Muck? Actions to Stay Meaningful, Current and Relevant as an E-Learning Professional



Robert Watters is the vice president of e-learning at [OnCourse Learning](#).

As learning and development professionals, we tend to primarily focus on other learners and lose focus on ourselves. Whether it's creating sound instructional design, writing effective content or delivering an impactful learner experience, the tendency is to use your time and energy to the betterment of other adult learners. But forgetting about your own lifelong education can be problematic. Are you stuck in the muck? Do you feel stagnated? Is your professional growth moving toward something or going nowhere?

Lifelong learning is a journey you should focus on for your own benefit. It's a commitment to continuous improvement. In today's workplace, knowledge is global, and making sure you are relevant and current as an e-learning professional makes continuous learning a necessity. Here are three actions you can take to stay at the top of your game.

1. Become Involved in a Professional Community of Practice.

Communities of practice can be accessed online 24/7. Join an L&D community, and gain access to tips, techniques and advancements from others as well as the opportunity to share your successes. Collaborative learning among group members allows you to share common interests. Exchanges of thoughts, emerging strategies or concepts, and best practices allow you to develop your skills and give back to others.

“Lifelong learning is a journey you should focus on for your own benefit.”

[Professional communities](#) sometimes have a fee, but many are free. You may prefer a community of L&D professionals, a specific professional guild, or even a technology community focused on your preferred authoring tool or tools. If you're already a member of a community, reacquaint yourself with what it has to offer, and get more involved. Your active membership will spark motivation and creativity and keep you relevant on the latest trends in L&D. Building a professional social network and actively participating in webinars and conferences or writing an article for an association newsletter or website will build toward your professional development.

2. Access Articles, Webinars and Industry Reports.

Knowledge and information are at your fingertips, and much of what is offered is free. There are many learning associations and professional communities that offer online development, from webinars and webcasts to special industry reports. For example, Training Industry's [free webinars](#) are hosted by international thought leaders and qualify for three different continuing education credits.

Using online speaking or video-sharing platforms will allow you to learn from visionary leaders, thinkers and innovators from a variety of learning and development disciplines. TED Talks, educational YouTube videos and [MOOCs](#) all provide information relevant to e-learning professionals.

Don't be the obstacle to your own improvement by thinking you already know all about the topic or are too busy to attend an event. Even if you are well versed in the information, there is always opportunity to learn something new – a nugget of information that can transform your thinking. Stay current on information, and pick up what you can when you can.

3. Use Formal Training, Certificate Courses or Certifications.

The benefit of being a lifelong learner is you'll be leading the pack instead of being stuck in the muck. Formal training opportunities, [certificates](#) and [certifications](#) are a differentiator that can help you stand out from the crowd. Regular training, whether through an hour-long webinar, a day-long training or sessions at a weekend conference, better aligns you and your skills to the needs of the industry.

Educational opportunities help you stay fresh and increase your value and pay scale. Advancing your education and skills opens new doors, keeps you motivated and connects you to new professional communities. Staying on the forefront of emerging trends, understanding advancements in learning technology, and applying new skills and techniques will help keep you motivated and may open new career opportunities, too.

Lifelong learning does not have to be formal or expensive. Even in today's busy world, you can always find the time to learn something new. In the end, it benefits you and the learners you serve.

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Using E-Learning to Engage Introverts



Taryn Oesch is the award-winning managing editor for digital content at [Training Industry, Inc.](#)

Introversion/extroversion is an often misunderstood dimension of personality. According to [Psychology Today](#), “introverts are drained by social encounters and energized by solitary, often creative pursuits.” They aren’t necessarily shy; shy people can be extroverts or introverts. Most people fall somewhere on a continuum from introversion to extroversion but often with definite preferences when it comes to communicating—and learning.

[According to Chris von Baeyer](#), client director and facilitator at The Ariel Group, common characteristics of introverts include “thinking carefully before speaking, a preference for 1-1 interactions rather than presenting in front of large groups, the ability to ask thoughtful questions and to listen carefully in response, and, most importantly, a frustration with settings that demand an extroverted approach to communication.”

Considering these attributes, it’s natural for instructional designers to wonder: Is e-learning a better option for introverts than for extroverts, and do introverts learn better online than they do in-person?

The Benefits of E-Learning for Diverse Personalities

Dr. Kate Earle, CLO of the Quiet Leadership Institute, says that “introverts thrive in learning situations that enable solitude, independent thinking, and time to process.” They may enjoy working with other people, but “they will need to have those social experiences bookended by quiet moments in order to really be their best selves.”

A [blended learning](#) or flipped classroom approach in which learners first access content online and then participate in instructor-led training can be especially helpful for introverts, considering their preference to have time to prepare. By providing readings and reflection questions ahead of time, instructional designers can ensure that introverted learners have time to explore new content and think about their reaction to it before they have to share their thoughts with others.

In fact, any type of [asynchronous](#) e-learning provides that crucial processing time for introverts. On the other hand, it’s possible that extroverts benefit more from e-learning when it is designed as part of a blended learning experience, so that they are still able to reap the benefits of interacting with other learners, energized by the dynamic conversations that happen in the classroom.

E-learning also can provide more opportunities for one-on-one interactions than in-person classroom training. Communicating via an online chat, for example, may be more comfortable and impactful for an introvert than speaking up in a classroom full of other learners. And because it typically takes much more energy for an introvert to be in a group of people, being alone can be energizing, especially if paired with the interaction that is still beneficial for learning.

Tips for Training Professionals

While introverts are not necessarily shy, onboarding can be a draining experience, as they are pushed into a new situation with a new group of people. Using e-learning for onboarding can be an effective way to increase engagement for introverted new hires. Incorporating social media can maintain an aspect of socialization, especially if such platforms are a key component of the organization's culture.

When delivering a virtual session, use feedback tools like “hand raises,” chats, polls and videos. Keep track of which participants have asked and answered questions. Just like in a classroom, make sure that a few students aren't dominating the conversation and that you are engaging all learners. Establish behavior guidelines so that expectations are clear for all learners.

[Machine learning](#) is changing e-learning by enabling automatic personalization of learning experiences and helping to eliminate biases. Take advantage of the tools you have to adapt learning to individual preferences and to make sure evaluation doesn't favor extroverted personality traits, such as speaking up more in meetings or training.

Before, during and after training, collect feedback from participants. Ask specific questions to measure learners' comfort levels and to determine if they felt empowered to participate fully. While it's important to get introverts and extroverts outside their comfort zones by challenging them to communicate in new ways, it's also important that they feel valued and encouraged to participate.

The key to remember when designing a training program is to ensure that it is inclusive of diverse learning styles and communication preferences. [As many as one-third](#) of the global population are introverts, and in the U.S., that number [could be as much as 50 percent](#). Our workplaces are a mix of introverts, extroverts and people who fall somewhere in between. E-learning can help ensure that employees across that spectrum are successful.

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Culture Shapes Digital Learning Success



JR Burch is a principal consultant for the learning experience design team at [Intrepid by VitalSource](#).

[Research from MIT and Deloitte](#) found that 90 percent of organizations anticipate their industries will be disrupted by digital trends, but only 40 percent are preparing for the impact of these disruptions. With such a significant variance, what's a learning leader to do? How can you assess your company's digital readiness to reskill, redeploy and redefine while cultivating support and generating results?

A strong learning culture is a competitive differentiator; however, it's not enough to throw new learning technology into the enterprise and expect it to be successful. Change requires a plan that starts with awareness, as well as the creation and communication of a clear vision, and if your vision ignores your current culture, it will never lead to successful change.

Earlier this year, we challenged people to think about the learning culture in their organizations by assessing audience readiness as well as leadership support. What came from that conversation is a powerful list of things we should be doing but that are often left out in the rush for a solution. Here are a few tips and takeaways from the experience.

Determine Audience Readiness.

If you're going to create a new culture of learning, you have to fully understand your audience and its needs. Talk to the people for whom you intend the new digital learning vision, and find out what they are looking for. Here are some questions to consider:

- What attitudes about learning do they currently hold?
- What prior learning experiences influence their attitudes?
- What approaches have been tried in the past that they liked?
- Is training positioned positively, or is it typically associated with mandatory compliance e-learning?
- How are they currently learning at work?
- How do they learn outside of work?
- What are they looking for in the learning environment?
- What would be most helpful to them?

Without this depth of understanding, you may end up creating something – albeit a new bright, shiny object – that people don’t want and won’t use or that won’t work for them. In other words, you’ll have spent a lot of effort on a surefire failure.

Garner Leadership Support.

Perhaps you have buy-in from your leadership, at least in the form of budget approval and town hall rhetoric, but we all know that to guarantee digital transformation success, leadership support needs to extend beyond signoff. You need a learning champion: someone who fully understands and supports what you are trying to do and will generate excitement across the enterprise.

“Talk to the people for whom you intend the new digital learning vision, and find out what they are looking for.”

To find this champion, take a similar approach to what you did with your audience: Know what’s important to your leaders and the business, and identify how changing the learning culture can make an impact. Have a conversation with your leaders to find out what they need. Here are some questions to consider:

- What pressing problems in the business are they trying to solve?
- How are they currently using learning to solve these problems?
- What’s working well?
- What’s not working well?
- What skills need to change in the business?
- What new skills are needed?

Sell your leadership on the potential of a new digitally powered learning culture, and let them be the power users who shout the benefits from the rooftop. The show of support and participation of leadership can be a great boost to bringing everyone else on board with the new learning culture.

Create the Vision.

Now that you know what your audience, leaders and business need, you can craft the learning vision that best fits your organization – one that blends the mission of the business with the needs of the learners. The answers that you'll receive from your fact-finding will likely be complex and a little scattered, but you should identify common themes. From those themes, you'll start to see what the future vision should include. Here are a few examples:

- Offer just-in-time learning.
- Learning at work should closely match how people learn outside of work.
- Learning is a journey, not an event.
- Learning needs to allow for self-direction.
- Learning should be social and collaborative.
- For learning to stick, learners need to use the concepts in the workplace.
- Learning must address the needs of the business.
- Learning must address the needs and interests of the learners.

“Sell your leadership on the potential of a new digitally powered learning culture, and let them share the benefits.”

Once you have the vision, share it, and ask for feedback. You're trying to change the learning culture of the entire organization, so you want to make sure you have it right. An empowered learning culture can set you apart from your competitors.

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How One-Off Learning Gets it Wrong: 5 Ways to Transform Learning from an Event to a Journey



[Josh Cardoz](#) is the principal learning strategist at [SwissVBS](#), an award-winning, full-service digital learning design and production agency focused on providing value at every step of the learning journey.

Let's face it: Learning is tough. It's messy. It's effortful. And of course, it takes time. As learning professionals, we all know these truths, but the realities of our organizations and our learners often dictate otherwise. We focus on one-off "events" (e.g. online courses, [ILT](#), bloated PowerPoint decks, etc.) in the hopes that something will stick and transfer of learning will occur, but everyone familiar with the [Ebbinghaus forgetting curve](#) knows just how much is retained in the days and weeks after those events. The need for journey-based learning is an imperative for organizations looking to secure better training ROI. Of course, these habits are difficult to break, so here are five ways you can start moving the needle toward journey-based learning within your organization.

1. Start With a Learner Journey Map.

Journey-driven learning is all about knowing what your learners need in any given moment. To develop this knowledge, empathy is key. A good empathy exercise is learner journey mapping, a strategy borrowed from customer journey mapping, which attempts to map out the entire customer buying experience in order to make sure the customer is supported at every stage. A learner journey map does the same for our "internal customers" by breaking down the various stages of the learner's journey and mapping out their needs, thoughts and feelings across that journey. A learner journey map is a great way to gain internal buy-in by illustrating how learner needs are constantly evolving and need to be accommodated. Learner journey maps show how long, effortful and messy the journey to competency and performance is, emphasizing how ineffective one-off solutions can be.

2. High Context Is High Value.

How do you meaningfully break down a three-hour course into a six-month learning journey? What goes where, and in what format? Journey-based learning instills a new cadence of learning into your organization. Large, one-off events are replaced with shorter, more frequent interactions, forcing learners to re-engage at every touchpoint. How do you make these interactions meaningful? By giving learners what they want! Understand who they are and what they need in any given moment throughout their journey. The higher the context, the greater the buy-in. This strategy will provide you with focus when designing the journey.

3. Know When to Switch to Performance Support.

Training is a means to an end, and at a certain point, learners stop caring about “learning,” because they are too busy “doing.” Support them in their performance moment by providing them with instant impact instead of forcing them to deviate from their workflow. Work within your organization to [curate](#) the right resources. Involve your learners in the design of your performance support pieces so that you give them exactly what they need. A strong performance support strategy will provide tremendous impact in bridging the learning/performance gap.

4. Pay Attention to the UX of the Journey.

Journey-based learning requires multiple learner touchpoints, so it’s important to pay attention to how learners access them. Here, learning technology typically plays a critical role. If it takes five clicks and two minutes of troubleshooting for learners to reach where they want to be, there’s a good chance they won’t try it again. If your technology is prohibitive to accessing the learning experience, your learners will not make the investment. Make sure the technology aids, not impedes, the experience. Mobile technology has become an effective solution to this [user experience](#) (UX) challenge because of how well it aligns with the high-frequency, high-touchpoint cadence that journey-driven learning requires. Whether you are executing a reinforcement strategy or providing job aids, mobile deployment allows for quick access to what learners need, when they need it, in an easily digested format.

5. Data Is a Game-Changer.

In journey-driven learning, multiple touchpoints with the learner means multiple data points as well. From the learning designer’s point of view, access to these data is like finding gold. Now, you have a benchmark to measure change, a way to understand current and future learner needs, and tangible insight into what is working and not working at any given point in time along the journey. Whether it is knowing that after the six-month threshold, all your learners tend to struggle with topic A (rather than topic B), or that they prefer infographics to video in the performance moment, using data to better understand your learners on an ongoing basis will help you design smarter. That way, you can optimize your learner’s journey and help them reach where they need to be as quickly as possible.

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Promoting a Continuous Learning Mindset with Online Training



As the content marketing strategist at [BizLibrary](#), Krista Brubaker helps to research, create and enhance resources that are helpful to human resources and learning and development professionals.

We're all very aware of the short lifespan of skills these days. Many of the skills taught in training sessions on specific processes and programs are obsolete less than a year later. As a result, the value of soft skills, especially [learning agility](#), has increased exponentially. Without employees who can adapt quickly and create new solutions, organizations won't be able to provide the value that retains clients and keeps customers coming back.

In a 2015 SHRM article, Josh Bersin said, "The single biggest driver of business impact is the strength of an organization's learning culture." To achieve a learning culture, we have to understand what practices and tools encourage learning agility in individual employees.

Learning agility is that golden mindset of being curious, open to new knowledge and experiences, and resourceful in new situations. How do we train people to be agile learners, though? Point them toward ways they can flex their learning muscles on the job, anytime, anywhere, and reward them for it!

Offer Accessible Content in Various Formats

Online training options are plentiful, and some employees may seek out these opportunities on their own, but if you want to foster a strong learning culture, you have to be invested in providing content that meets their needs and preferences. Make sure that up-to-date content in a variety of formats (videos, interactive e-learning, e-books, etc.) is available at employees' fingertips whenever and wherever they need it. This approach allows them to learn in the more autonomous, self-directed capacity that underpins a learning culture. The short, single-subject nature of [microlearning](#), in particular, makes it easy to fit into employees' busy schedules, so they can cultivate a habit of developing new skills every day.

Classroom training has its benefits, but your organization can't rely on in-person training alone if you want to develop a culture that is continuously learning. Training content today should be available 24/7 and adapt quickly to the shifting skills needed in today's workforce. A curated, on-demand [content library](#) that's consistently updated provides a simple solution to helping employees direct their own learning and develop their innovative thinking. Always-on training plays a central

role in moving organizations from an event-based training mindset to a mindset of continuous learning.

Gain Insights and Reward Curiosity

Providing an online training content library is the first step toward developing a high-performing organization through fostering learning agility. Beyond delivering content, take advantage of all the insights that online learning platforms have to offer. By tracking elective learning, you can see which topics are most popular among your employees and use that insight to encourage those who aren't participating as much in learning. You can also use gamification features to challenge teams to view and share content, discuss what they've learned, and foster collaboration.

Be sure to pay attention to which employees are engaging in learning most, and reward their curiosity. Use the online learning platform to deliver feedback and publicly praise employees who lean into self-directed learning. Managers can be helpful here, so give them access to learning insights for their team, and encourage them to share content and facilitate discussions around it. Understanding what an employee is interested in learning sets up the relationship for a plethora of great conversation points, including the employee's strengths and weaknesses, company values alignment, career pathing, and more.

Make It a Shared Effort

The Corporate Executive Board Company [defines a learning culture](#) as “a culture that supports an open mindset, an independent quest for knowledge, and shared learning directed toward the mission and goals of the organization.” The way your organization provides training will have a considerable impact on how employees approach innovative thinking and sharing ideas. With self-directed, online learning, you can put training into the hands of every employee and help them take ownership over their own skill development. Learning cultures view training as a joint effort, where the organization guides and empowers employees in building their skills sets.

When your people are [primed to look for learning opportunities](#) every day, they'll generate innovative ideas, big and small, that help your business overcome challenges and easily adapt to changes that come its way.

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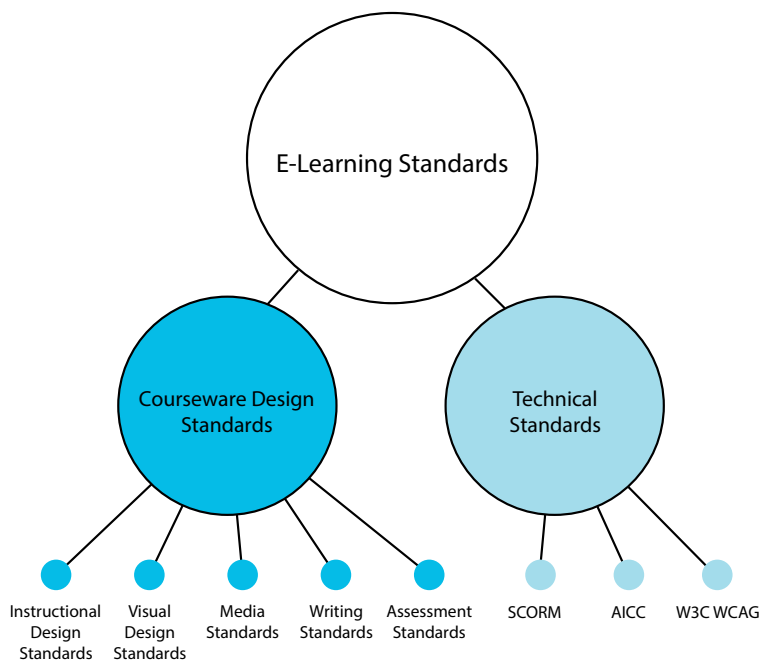
Implementing E-Learning? What Standards Should You Consider?



RK Prasad is the CEO and co-founder of [CommLab India](#), a global learning solutions company with expertise in custom e-learning design.

E-learning standards are a set of common rules that apply to content, authoring software and learning management systems (LMSs). They provide all stakeholders with guidelines for designing and developing content, deploying it across platforms, and ensuring interoperability across devices.

There are two main types of e-learning standards. Courseware design standards refer to the different aspects of course design and development, and technical standards refer to the deployment of courses on an LMS or other portal.



Courseware Design Standards

Courseware design standards include instructional design, visual design, media, writing and assessment standards.

Having **instructional design standards** in place before developing a course helps developers clearly define the purpose, objectives, and strategies and choose content, interactivities, assessments, and feedback methods. [Bloom's taxonomy](#) is a good guide for

developing a logical framework for training content and ensuring congruence among the instructional objectives, activities and assessments.

Visual design standards refer to graphical user interface (GUI) and navigational elements. Course navigation must be intuitive and user-friendly to be successful. The objective of visual design standards is to ensure design consistency across lessons and modules.

Media standards ensure consistency and compatibility across the media elements used in a course, such as the screen layout/size, textual elements, graphics, animation, audio and video. While deciding on the media standards, factor in the end users and how they will access the courses. Do they have access to headphones? Will they access the course on desktops, laptops or mobile devices? Answers to these questions will dictate the use of media elements in the course.

“E-learning standards provide guidelines for developing content and deploying it across platforms.”

It is always a good practice to have writing guidelines or a style guide for instructional designers and course developers. These **writing standards** act as a reference for the use of language, punctuation, bulleted lists, abbreviations, acronyms and other elements of text. For example, you might recommend using active voice instead of passive voice and simple, straightforward language rather than academic, abstract language. Standards like these should be included in your writing or style guide.

Assessment standards, which should align with instructional objectives, define how you evaluate learners’ understanding upon course completion. Bloom’s Taxonomy or Kirkpatrick’s [Four Levels of Learning Evaluation](#) provide some guidance on assessment. These [guidelines on multiple choice questions](#) could also be useful.

Technical Standards

Technical standards pertain to the interoperability and portability of e-learning courses across devices, browsers and platforms. The most commonly used technical standards are SCORM, AICC and WCAG.

SCORM stands for Sharable Content Object Reference Model. It is a technical standard developed by the Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative (ADL), and it defines how e-learning courses interact with LMSs to facilitate course tracking. SCORM compliance makes it easy to record elements such course completion, number of times a learner has accessed a course, time taken to complete the course, assessment scores and points.

AICC stands for the Aviation Industry Computer-Based Training Committee, which developed technical standards for computer-based courses in the airlines industry. Though the **AICC standards'** objective is same as that of SCORM, they use HTTP messages to communicate with an LMS and involve multiple steps, and its popularity is diminishing due to that complexity.

WCAG stands for Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, which the World Wide Web Consortium developed in order to make web content more accessible to people with disabilities. Many countries, including the U.S., have passed laws requiring that any material shared digitally is accessible to all.

Multiple software products, LMSs and e-learning developers are involved in the development of e-learning courses. In the absence of clear standards, coordinating and integrating content would be a laborious and costly exercise. Therefore, it's important to understand your organization's e-learning standards at the beginning of implementation. The end objective is to ensure that all stakeholders are on the same page with respect to the content and develop learning objects that can be used seamlessly across software programs, platforms and devices.

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3 Ways to Humanize Distance Learning Experiences



Farhan Quasem is a digital learning project manager at [Valamis](#).

The World Bank [designated](#) education and training as the first of four “requisites for a country to be able to fully participate in the knowledge economy.” The proliferation of e-learning has enabled a transformation across many industries, redefining how information is acquired, retained, shared and acted upon by 21st-century consumers.

L&D professionals are spearheading this shift on a global level. Developing, deploying, nurturing and measuring the efficacy of learning solutions is a tall order in any setting, but it comes with a unique set of challenges when the audience is remote, scattered and engaged primarily (or exclusively) via technological mediums. This paradigm has come to characterize the distance learning ecosystem today.

Incorporating three key elements into distance learning initiatives can humanize the learning experience and empower learners to succeed as individuals.

Autonomy

All distance learning environments have one thing in common: A geographic distance separates learners from instructors and, in many settings, one another. Although it may seem that this setting is a difficult one in which to provide agency to students, it actually lends itself well to establishing learner autonomy and [the expectation that](#) the instructor is a facilitator, counselor and resource. Within this framework, the roadmap for knowledge acquisition is one in which the learners build, modify and iterate by setting their own goals and metrics for success.

Learners could design their own curriculums in a multi-stage process, first by working individually, then collaborating in small teams to share ideas and finally proposing them to an instructor for approval. The instructor and learner could decide on a few checkpoints during the course of study to ensure that the learner is making meaningful progress.

How could autonomy be advantageous to learners studying remotely? For one, it fosters independent engagement and a “roll-up-your-sleeves” attitude to accountability, putting the learner in the driver’s seat of the learning experience. [Research suggests](#) that learners who are granted autonomy have higher intrinsic motivation, perceived competence and self-esteem.

Accessibility

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to training, and L&D professionals must always contend with variability in learning profiles. Despite these variations, organizations should give all learners equal access to the learning experience. [Universal design for learning \(UDL\) principles](#) provide three guiding principles that all distance learning programs should incorporate:

- Provide multiple means of engagement.
- Provide multiple means of representation.
- Provide multiple means of action and expression.

For example, if your content is text-heavy, [UDL principles](#) would support building a text-to-speech capability that enables learners to listen to an audio recording if desired. For videos and multimedia, ensure the availability of captions as well as downloadable transcripts. When creating assessments, provide learners the option to showcase their knowledge visually. The more accessible the design, the higher the likelihood of its meeting the diverse needs of distance learners.

Adaptability

The digital marketplace of e-learning tools is growing each day. When pursuing a particular technology solution, evaluate how adaptable it is to the changing needs of learners and how successfully you can deploy it with minimal effort. In some instances, a combination of platforms could offer the best value for distinct activities, such as video conferencing and file hosting. Take the time to diligently research whether third-party integrations are available to make management an easier task for instructors and administrators.

Validate assumptions on how these moving parts will come together to build the learning experience for distance learners. Resource-hungry applications may thrive in areas where a strong internet connection is taken for granted but suffer in areas where the requisite infrastructure is lacking. Bear in mind that the technologies themselves may require tweaking or replacing if the learning experience begins to deteriorate, which can result from inefficient (click-heavy) workflows, slow response times or clunky user interface, to name a few of the most common culprits.

Provide distance learners with the capability to share feedback to identify gaps and enhance the learning experience as often as is feasible. This feedback will make scaling to more users an informed process, one that will enhance the overall quality of learning (and facilitation) across the board.

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5 E-learning Errors in Global Employee Training



With 15 years of experience teaching and developing instructor-led training and video-based e-learning curricula, Dan Biewener is director of training research at [Simplilearn.com](https://www.simplilearn.com), where he conducts and compiles research on the latest content and training best practices.

Today's internet-driven business world has made it more common for companies to employ workers in multiple locations, whether across the country or around the world. According to Upwork's [Future Workforce Report](#), 63 percent of companies have remote employees, and [fewer than one in 10 managers](#) believes it is important for all personnel to be physically present in the same office.

This trend toward a dispersed workforce renders traditional classroom-based employee training so expensive and impractical as to be obsolete – especially considering rapidly evolving and emerging technologies that demand continuous learning and upskilling.

E-learning is the obvious solution for distance learning. However, simply producing and posting a playlist of training videos online is not the best strategy. Here are five common e-learning traps and how you can bridge geographic gaps at the same time you bridge skills gaps.

1. Using One Method to Train Them All

Because of its consistency and repeatability – regardless of time or location – e-learning makes a much better solution than classroom training for training dispersed employees. However, not everyone prefers to learn from self-paced videos. Some people prefer live instruction, in which case a live virtual classroom would be a better modality. Others gain the most from social interaction and would benefit from an online collaborative forum.

There is no single best way to train everyone, nor on every topic. In a [Wired article](#), neuroscientist and science writer Christian Jarrett writes, “Usually the most effective way for us to learn is based not on our individual preferences but on the nature of the material we’re being taught.” Whether it’s the learner or the subject matter that determines the preferred online method, [blended learning](#) is often the best solution, because it provides the variety and flexibility that employees (especially global ones) demand. Online blended learning optimizes upskilling at a distance by enabling workers to learn at the pace and in the ways that work best for them.

2. Getting Lost in Translation

Today's automatic translation tools make it easier than ever to globalize e-learning content. However, when creating instructional videos or graphics for use across multiple languages, there are several issues that even the most accurate translations can cause or exacerbate. These risks include:

Character and audio expansion: Sometimes, text translated from English simply won't fit in the space or duration that's available on the screen, whether it's for subtitles, charts or graphics, or voiceovers on clips. Provide free space in graphics and at the bottom of the frames for subtitles, and have on-camera presenters stand still after speaking to allow translations to catch up before the next clip.

Acronyms and jargon: Many acronyms and buzzwords can be difficult to circumnavigate in multilingual training. This issue is true even for American English versus the English spoken in the U.K., India and other "countries divided by a common language," as George Bernard Shaw is said to have written.

Untranslatable words: There are a few common English words, like "trade-off" or "cheesy," that have no direct translation in some languages.

"There is no single best way to train everyone, nor on every topic."

Avoid cultural misunderstandings and blunders from creeping into your training. For example, opening a training video by showing the instructor with his feet casually propped on the desk (showing the soles of his shoes) could be offensive to learners in the Middle East. Even something as simple as a cartoon hand making an "OK" gesture or "thumbs up" may carry an unrecognized or insulting meaning in a different culture. Before rolling out your e-learning program, ask someone from each anticipated training location or culture to review your finished courseware (or at least your scripts). Another way to ensure the dialectical and cultural integrity of your training is to offer a blended learning solution that includes a live virtual classroom option led by a local instructor.

3. Lacking Clear Learning Objectives

When choosing or designing any learning and development program, start with a clear understanding of the executives' and employees' goals for the training. Aligning these objectives becomes especially important when expanding training on a global scale

Questions to ask include:

- What training should all employees in every region undertake?
- Are there specific technologies or skillsets that only employees in one location need to learn?
- Are there specific state or country-specific regulations that mandate training or certification?
- What training or topics are valued more by employees in one location compared to others?
- What technological infrastructure does the training program require, and what platforms and delivery options would be best, considering any deficiencies faced by each region?
- What is the global training budget?

Being clear about all learning objectives and making these goals clear to all managers and participants helps to motivate employees, gain leadership support, and manage the overall cost of the program. A quality blended learning system offers the advantage of flexible online modalities as well as a learning management system (LMS) or similar dashboard through which both local and central managers can administer and monitor training.

“Aligning objectives becomes especially important when expanding training on a global scale.”

4. Playing the Waiting Game

Once you have established your organizational and employee training goals and developed and tested the program, e-learning will enable your employees to engage in the coursework at any time. One of the most effective capabilities of e-learning is the ability to parse course content into [microlearning](#) elements. Chunking instructional material into smaller units improves comprehension and retention and is especially helpful for dispersed learners who may face technology limitations or translation issues. Microlearning also enables just-in-time learning, so employees can quickly upskill in a specific topic or technology to solve a problem or accomplish a goal.

5. Training in a Vacuum

An effective e-learning program is not simply a static library; it's a process, as much for managers and instructional designers as for the employees. The process begins with understanding your learners and how they are different, based on their locations, language, culture, objectives, technologies and preferences. For example, while Americans may favor group discussion, learners in some Asian cultures may expect content to be delivered solely by an instructor. Survey your employees in all locations, and then monitor learning progress through an LMS or periodic quizzes, surveys or informal manager/learner discussions throughout the training. Finally, measure the results after completion, and make improvements.

“Make sure to foster a continuous learning culture.”

The Long and the Short of Distance Learning

Just because e-learning programs are easier to scale than other training methods doesn't mean their development should end once they're delivered. Make sure to foster a continuous learning culture where employees feel that they are not only gaining skills but that their needs and preferences are considered. By using a blended learning approach and showing you respect and adapt to their regional linguistic, cultural and personal norms, you'll improve future learning outcomes and motivate and unify your entire global team, creating a borderless workforce.

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Structuring and Applying the Changing Shape of Microlearning



Matt Donovan is the vice president of [digital learning strategies and solutions](#) at GP Strategies Corporation, where he leads global learning design, development and delivery.

I was looking forward to teaching my son how to tie a tie. As he gets older, I look forward to those little moments, and being in the training and development field only makes them more notable for me. About an hour before we were leaving for an event, I walked up the stairs practicing with my own tie. I opened the door to his room to find him standing with his tie in a perfect double Windsor knot that he had already tied himself. He learned from YouTube. And it looked better than mine.

I admit, I've learned in similar ways. Chances are we all have. Forms of [microlearning](#) have increasingly become intertwined in our lives to the extent that we don't even recognize it as microlearning anymore. The question for training and development professionals is: How do we take the changing shape of microlearning and use it to create meaningful learning experiences?

The True Face of Microlearning

Microlearning delivers information quickly. It improves the attention paid to a particular topic and often produces higher engagement and retention rates. The real power behind microlearning is that it provides flexibility in a workforce that is increasingly faced with less time and a need for relevant information amid a sea of overwhelming information. This flexibility empowers your learners by providing choices and more control over their learning. It offers training in shorter, manageable bursts when and where learners need it.

At the same time, microlearning isn't simply a shortened version or a snapshot of a course. Although it can be used as a standalone method to learn a specific skill, it is most effective when it is carefully designed as part of a comprehensive learning experience.

Integrating Microlearning into Training Programs

Learning professionals shouldn't try to pack too much information into each microlearning instance. Instead, each instance should link to only one learning objective. This approach helps provide focus to the shorter learning formats and ensures that learners don't feel cluttered or overwhelmed with seemingly unfocused information. Learning programs often have objectives that are excellent candidates to pull out of a module to use as microlearning. While employees can accomplish

the objective before or after a training event, it is still contributing to the learning program.

Designing Each Module as a Complete, Measurable Learning Experience

An effective way to design microlearning is to work backward and start by deciding what learners should be able to do after each module. Then, map how each one contributes to a larger set of skills. Once the purpose is clear and mapped back to the learning program, choose a modality that best fits the specific purpose.

Microlearning can take on many formats, and each has its own benefits. Formats include the following:

- Infographics
- Infomercials
- Short interactive videos
- Games
- Simulations
- Podcasts
- Animations
- 3D models
- Blogs
- Slideshows

It's important to include a measurement and evaluation plan during the design so you'll be able to learn if and how the training is successful. These plans help create clear definitions for what success looks like and how that success is demonstrated on the job. Once established, the plan should also include how the microlearning will be updated and adjusted based on the results.

Don't Reinvent the Content Wheel

Many times, training developers and instructional designers feel they need to start from scratch. In most cases, material already exists but is considered outdated or in the wrong format. Reviewing this content to see if there are ways to chunk it into single learning objectives and determining how you could convert them into newer formats can save time and give you a head start when working with subject matter experts.

Infusing your learning programs with elements of structured microlearning helps to balance your training and provides a flexibility that learning programs often lack. In addition, giving each microlearning module a clear and singular focus that learners can access as needed provides your audience with an enhanced experience both in and out of the classroom.

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