116

Proven eLearning Design and Development Tips

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Preface

It is common knowledge that eLearning is used extensively in the corporate training world. But, what does it take to create the perfect eLearning course? How can you deliver wonderful experiences to your online learners? What are the aspects you need to focus on to develop a highly effective course that leaves your people spellbound? Well, here is an eBook that contains 116 tips to help you harness the power of eLearning to deliver top-notch training.

These tips are a product of 15 years of experience in providing online training solutions and go a long way in unleashing the power of the online training format. The tips are organized in 5 sections. The first section provides invaluable insights into instructional design, critical to the making of a good online course. We then proceed to see how rapid eLearning can be utilized in an effective and efficient manner. The third section contains tips to produce first-rate translations of online courses, quickly, in a cost-effective manner. We then move on to see how the mobile device can be used to deliver excellent training to your workforce. Finally, we come across tips that help you the most of your Learning Management System (LMS).

We hope that this endeavor helps you develop incredible eLearning courses and utilize the online medium to create learner delight.

28 tips to design the perfect eLearning course

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Before you start designing the course

1. Know your audience

Audience analysis needs to be conducted in the first stage of project planning. In order to communicate the purpose of your course, you need to know who your audiences are. Depending on your learners' profile and experience, you need to shape the online course in such a way that it accommodates the needs of the learners. Here are a few questions to help you know the target audience better.

- Who is the course for?
- What do they want or expect to get out of the course?

- How will they use the information and skills they learn in their job? What do they know about the topic?
- Are they white collar or blue collar employees?
- What is their comfort level with computers?
- Is the training under consideration compulsory or voluntary?
- What are the pre-requisites for training?
- In what settings will they use this training?
- Are they native speakers of English or is English their second language?
- Are they likely to get inspired by game-based learning or would they prefer a more formal approach?

2. Frame effective learning objectives

Learning objectives (also called course objectives) specify what learners are expected to do at the end of the training program. They set the direction of the course to the learners. The desired learning outcomes can be achieved only if the learning objectives are framed appropriately. In order to enhance the learning process and increase the scope for progress, an instructional designer should be clear with the objective of the program. Learning objectives should be framed in such a way that they

- Specify what the learner will be able to do by taking the course
- Are brief and easy to understand
- Are attainable and realistic
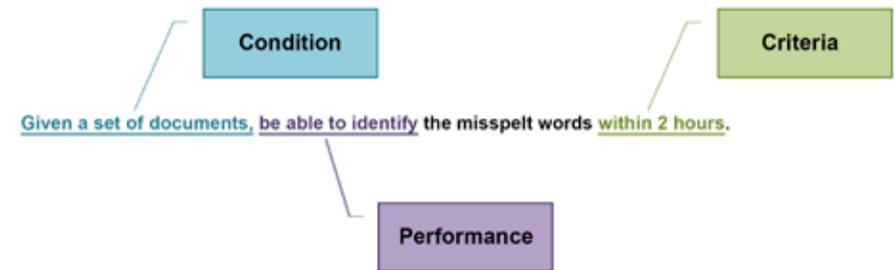- Communicate the purpose of the course clearly

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An example

Steps to write good learning objectives

Step 1: Create a stem: The stem or how you start a learning objective is important. Here you can address the learner and tell when they will achieve the objectives (after completing the unit, lesson, etc.)

A few examples

- After completing the lesson, you will be able to …
- On completion of this unit, you will be able to …
- By the end of this course, you will be able to …

Step 2: Add a verb to the stem: An action verb is critical for the learning objective. Adding verb to the learning objective specifies clearly observable and measurable action. You can always refer to the *Bloom's Taxonomy* for choosing the appropriate verbs.

According to Robert Mager, an ideal learning objective should contain three components, viz.

Performance – What should the participants be able to do?

Conditions – Under what conditions do you want the participants to be able to do it?

Criterion – How well must it be done?

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A few examples

- After completing the lesson, you will be able to *list …*

- On completion of this unit, you will be able to *explain …*

- By the end of this course, you will be able to *identify …*

Step 3: Determine the process, or outcome: You should define the process, procedure, or outcome the learner will achieve after completing the course.

A few examples

- After completing the lesson, you will be able to list the steps to shutdown the computer.

- On completion of this unit, you will be able to explain the communication process.

- By the end of this course, you will be able to identify the key steps in project management.

After framing the learning objectives

3. Develop assessments first before "sourcing" the content

Many a time, instructional designers (ids) focus on creating the content once they have clear learning objectives and put the development of the assessments on the backburner. This forces them to fit the assessments within the ambit of the content. A major advantage of reversing this general trend and creating assessments first is that it helps you know what you need

to test. You need not spend a lot of time on writing content in between the formulation of learning objectives and testing them because it is easier to come up with questions that are directly linked to learning outcomes.

Another advantage of developing assessments first is that you get clarity about the topics that the learning content needs to cover. Once you have developed assessments that "match" the learning outcomes, it becomes easy to identify the topics that are necessary to complete these assessments successfully. This goes a long way in segregating the 'must know' and 'nice to know' aspects of the learning content.

4. Ensure that the content is relevant to the learners

Your learners spend time to take your course because they expect it help them resolve their problems and enhance their productivity. They expect the content to be relevant to their job and want to apply the learning at the workplace. You can make sure that your content is relevant by mapping it to the learning objectives using this simple matrix.

Learning Objective	Item of the content that meets the objective

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5. Prepare a detailed outline of the content

Prepare a detailed outline of the content to provide an overview of the course, a brief description of the target audience and a list of modules and lessons. A detailed outline helps:

- Include whole content as representation for instruction
- Detail the objectives, modules, lessons and topics
- Classify terminal learning objectives and associated enabling learning objectives to establish the instructional objectives
- Create a basis of instructional design

A Sample DCO

Course Objective:

After completion of this course, you will be able to:
- Explain the types of minerals transfer situations related to welding.
- List the used gases in welding and how they can be used.

Scr. no.	Screen title	Slide No.	Content strategy	Notes/Questions/ Connections
1.	Welcome	0	Animations	
2.	Navigations		Text + Animations	
3.	Learning Objectives		Text + Images	

6. Map the assessments to the learning objectives and the content

Clearly defined objectives help you know what to expect from the course and stay on track. They enable you to check the comprehensiveness of your course. For instance, let us suppose that you are building a course on industrial safety and have identified 3 learning objectives for the course. You can check whether the content of the course and the assignments meet these objectives using this simple matrix.

Learning Objectives	Item of the content that meets the objective	Assessment questions that are in tandem with the objective

A few tips to design effective assessments

7. Make assessments interactive

Try to embed different interactivities for assessment questions so that learners could approach these assessments with the same zeal and interest as they take the online course.

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8. Create module wise assessments

Assess the learner after the completion of each module. This helps recognize and address problems immediately. These assessments generally need not have points or scores as they merely prepare the learner for the final assessment at the end of the course.

9. See that gamified assessments help assess the learner

Remember that the purpose of a gamified assessment is to evaluate the learner and fun element is secondary. For instance, when you develop a gamified assessment based on the folktale Aladdin and the Magic Lamp, make sure that the assessment helps you measure the learner's comprehension of the subject-matter and does not merely entertain him.

10. Provide proper feedback

E-learning courses commonly make use of feedback. Here are some ***dos*** and ***don'ts*** for good feedback.

How NOT to give the feedback?

▸ **Do NOT overload**

Never include more than one idea in the feedback or connect it to the other learning objective.

▸ **No one-line feedback**

Never give one liners in the feedback. This will not help the learner understand why he is right or wrong.

▸ **Avoid negatives**

Make sure you avoid negative feedback. This may de-motivate the learner. You always need to provide constructive and positive feedback for the learner to feel motivated.

▸ **How to give effective feedback?**

Properly offered feedback will make the learner feel motivated and makes the course more interactive.

Have a look at the tips below on how to give effective feedback.

▸ **Give it immediately**

Always give the feedback for an assessment question immediately after the learner chooses the answer. This will help the learner understand what is correct then and there so that he need not wait till the end of the course.

▸ **Give explanation**

In order to make the learner understand better, it is necessary to give the correct explanation for the questions they answer.

▶ **Maintain consistency**

It is necessary to maintain consistency in giving feedback. The feedback should be given in the same manner for all questions.

Here is an infographic which lists 5 proven tips to give feedback on assessments.

A few tips for a good narration

11. Add pronunciation notes for:

▸ **Acronyms**

We may use several acronyms in our script. So, we must make sure to give a clear pronunciation note for each acronym. For example, the term ISO must be pronounced as I-S-O (individual letters) or I-So.

▸ **Units**

Include the pronunciation notes for the units of a number as it can be useful to the narrator. For example:
"100 kg."- Should be read as "Hundred Kilograms"
"2 cm."- Should be read as "Two Centimeters"

▸ **Unfamiliar terms**

E-learning courses often deal with different subjects - medicine, industrial safety, compliance, etc. Not all narrators are familiar with the terminology used in them. To avoid mistakes in pronouncing unfamiliar terms, we need to provide pronunciation notes for them.

▸ **Numbers**

In order to avoid mistakes when pronouncing numbers give a note to the elearning course narrator on how to read them. For example:

"263"- Should be read as "Two Sixty Three" or "Two Hundred and Sixty Three"
"2015"- Should be read as "Two Thousand Fifteen" or "Twenty Fifteen"

Provide a separate column for the pronunciation notes in the audio script, so that it will be easy for the narrator to understand.

▸ **Global abbreviations**

Provide a global abbreviations list on the top of the script. This helps avoid confusion when the narrator encounters the abbreviations in the script. For example, include things like:

"i.e."- Should be read as "such as" or "that is"
"e.g."- Should be read as "for example"
"etc."- Should be read as "etcetera"

12. Emphasize the "needed words"

If you want some words to be emphasized, then make sure you underline, bold, capitalize or italicize the words. This helps grab the narrator's attention and makes the narration easy.

13. Include slide numbers

Include the slide numbers in the script, and this helps both the narrator and the people who are embedding the audio in the elearning course.

14. Give a pause wherever required

The animations in the course should be shown along with the audio. So, a little pause in the audio may be needed to maintain synchronization. So, by adding the word pause in the script, you can let the narrator know that he needs to give a pause there. This makes our task easier.

Once you have the assessments and the content in order

15. Make an interesting start

Starting your course with learning objectives will make it uninteresting and monotonous. There are many ways to make your course interesting right from the beginning. For instance, you can start your course with statistics about the subject being taught. This approach will help in two ways.

- Your course starts with a "big bang" and engrosses your learner.

- Your learners get a gist of the subject being taught in the course.

Let's take a look at how statistics were used at the beginning of a course on Ergonomics.

16. Add videos to break monotony

Add videos to your eLearning course. Two minute snippets on complicated processes or procedures facilitate a great level of interaction. Videos generate a sense of personalization and help the learner connect with your course instantly. This makes him continue with the course enthusiastically and finish it. Here are a couple of things that you need to remember about using videos in your online courses.

- Videos need to be short to let the learner focus effectively
- Learners can be asked to perform an activity based on a video.

17. Follow a style guide

A style guide is a document that sets the standards and ensures uniformity in style throughout the course. Following a style guide helps maintain consistency, avoid mistakes and provide a better look and feel to the course. A style guide tells you how content should be written and abbreviations need to be used, when and where to capitalize and italicize etc. It provides guidelines that help you use fonts properly, set a color scheme for your course and give information on a host of other aspects. You can use style guides brought out by Associated Press (AP) or other reputed organizations.

Serial No.	Issues	What Styles Guide Says:
1.	Article title and section heads	• Do not number sections heads
2.	Navigations	Ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups: Capitalization these as noted (unless author objects): African, American, Afro-American, and Alaska Native. • Lowercase these terms as noted: aboriginal (where not Australian or Canadian); black; highlander, but Highlander)where referring to Scottish)
3.	Learning Objec-tives	Spell out number in the following instance: • One through ten • Number at the beginning of a sentence

Visuals and designs

18. Add interactivities

By using the interactivities, you can ensure that your learners "connect" themselves with your elearning course. This is required to retain their attention throughout the course and keep them "glued" to their screens. Proper use of interactivities goes a long way in overcoming the problems caused by the absence of instructor in elearning. You can add interactivities like roll over, drag & drop, slide shows etc. For more on using interactivities to present the learning content, refer to this ebook.

19. Use attractive GUI

In elearning, the Graphical User Interface (GUI) is considered to be an important part. It displays the buttons that guide the learners and help navigate through the course smoothly. An attractive GUI that is easy to understand and navigate enables the learners to explore and learn what they want.

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Let's look at an example of a GUI that that has the theme of water and sea for orientation of new employees for a company operating off-shore rigs. The GUI was designed using an image of the sea in the background. The 'Next', 'Previous', 'Play' and 'Audio' buttons are designed in the shape of water droplets, so that they are pleasant to the learners' eye.

20. Add info-graphics

Info-graphics are ideal tools to make huge content look attractive and visually appealing. We can present any form of content attractively, using an info-graphic with different colors, charts, notes etc. They are now being increasingly used to enable quick learning and help recall the knowledge gained. They give an 'at-a-glance' view of the entire content and reinforce learning. Here is a [good blog](#) that lists the 3 steps involved in the making of a good info-graph.

21. Maintain a striking design
We all love to see good colors and designs on our screens. The same applies to elearning courses. Good, striking visuals make a far reaching impact on the learner. Designing doesn't mean just adding an image to the text; it can be anything from a proper screen layout to an info-graphic that breaks your topic into understandable points. A striking design:

- Provides consistency throughout the course
- Helps understand visual elements better

Let's take a look at how striking designs were used to explain Pharmacokinetics, using Adobe Captivate.

Using Images

22. Maintain a balance between text and images

In elearning, we use images to educate and not to decorate the screen. Images should enhance learning, and therefore, only relevant images need to be included in the content. This will help the learner to understand the information quickly. It's important to strike a balance between text and images because using too much of text or too many images does not help retain knowledge. On the other hand, if the image does not support the content, the

learner may get distracted, and he may not be visually engaged.

23. Placement of images:

Images should be placed in such a way that they grab the attention of the learner. A very important point is that an image should never be placed at the bottom right corner because it goes unnoticed. Another important point is that always place the content and image in correlation so, that it is easy for comparison and analysis.

24. Educate, but do not decorate:

A relevant image will help the learner understand and absorb information quickly. The selected image should be as per the content which will add some color or interest. On the other hand, irrelevant images can distract the learner.

25. Right choice of characters:

Characters play a very important role in an eLearning course; they also create a good human touch. For example, while developing an eLearning course about health care, use a character that plays the role of a doctor and use it throughout the course to provide a good understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a doctor.

For example, here is the screenshot showing how a character guides the learner throughout the elearning program.
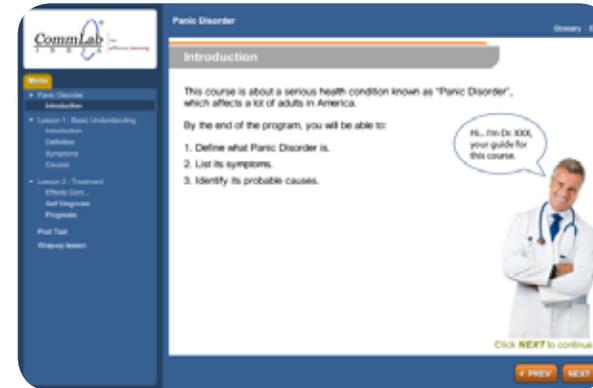
Allow the lessarner to think (use problem-based learning)

26. Tell stories that have conflicts

Stories are great tools to impart knowledge, and you can explain a complicated process or procedure with the help of a story. For instance, if you create a story on a sales process, you can add the element of conflict between the sales representative and his manager. You can use this conflict to explain the sales process.

Making use of conflict will help you in two ways:

- Creating conflicts in stories will 'increase' suspense and keep your learner hooked for a long time.
- The entire process is explained and learnt effortlessly.

27. Include scenarios:

In an elearning course, a scenario can be created where the learner is given a situation and a problem is posed to him. Then, the information that is required is presented as a process of solving the problem

Adding a scenario that a learner may face at work can help the learner grasp the topic quickly and recall information easily. For more on the creation of a good scenario, refer to this blog.

28. Include case-studies:

Case-studies are a form of problem-based learning. Case- studies are based on real-time situations which contain information about the problem. These make the learner concentrate more on a situation.

For example, in online medical cases, the learner is presented with a patient complaint. The learner can enquire about the patient's background information. He can also get feedback on the diagnosis method. A resemblance to the real world situations keeps the learner motivated, and he feels that he is truly preparing to confront his future challenges.

How can you ensure maximum value from the case-studies in an e-Learning course?

- Case-studies come handy when imparting training on a specific skill or explaining a concept. Case-studies usually have lots of details. Collect and explore the relevant facts. In a good case-study, there are more facts than what you actually need, for your analysis.

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