

What's eLearning?

Over the last few years, I've developed training in some capacity. I've used everything from Authorware to PowerPoint to create materials. I remember a couple years ago a co-worker asked me what software program converted content to eLearning. I laughed to myself. As if it's just a matter of clicking a button and an eLearning course magically appears. In casual conversations I find that people don't understand the true purpose of eLearning. In the grand scheme of things, it's training information delivered electronically. However, if we dig deeper, it's more than that. We all know people don't remember boring content – people remember content that actively engages them. As an eLearning developer, I use instructional design principles and a few of my own techniques to create an online experience that learners will never forget. My goal is to develop memorable training that cultivates positive learning experiences.

Technology makes it so easy to develop eLearning programs. There are several rapid authoring tools on the market. Anyone can use these tools to create an "eLearning program," but is it a quality product? Upon further examination, we would probably find that most beginners develop the world's longest "page turners." I know this because it's the easiest type of program to create. When people start developing computer-based training they tend to develop "page turners." We've all seen it: content, next, content, next, knowledge check, content, next, until you reach the end of yet another lackluster course. People hate "page turners" which is why so many of us scoff at the thought of taking that dreaded human resources course every year. I'm not proud of it, but early in my career I created programs in the aforementioned format. After taking an eLearning development course, I quickly learned the error of my ways. I realized with a little planning, creativity, and patience, I could develop an engaging experience.

Here are a few things to consider when developing memorable and engaging eLearning programs.

1. **Recall.** Think about a time you completed a dull eLearning course. Jot down the features that didn't add value to the course. Refer to this list as a reminder of what not to include in your program. For instance, a few years ago I took an hour-long, text-filled, next-button driven disaster. I reflect on that old program as an example of what not to include in my courses.
2. **Set a theme.** After reviewing your course content and objectives, decide the best way to deliver the materials to your learners. For example, will the content translate well as a space journey or a treasure adventure? Does your target audience prefer animations or photo-realistic scenes? Will your program teach people how to use a device or software program? If so, use an illustration or animation of the device or software program. The immersive environment will help learners relate the device to real-world application. Begin thinking about graphics that will help you bring your vision to fruition. Use your surroundings as inspiration for themes. Research eLearning programs online to find examples of great eLearning interfaces. Refer to the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning for tips on how to organize your content in the program.
3. **Determine activities/interactions.** Based on your learning objectives, decide what interactions you can incorporate to help learners meet training objectives. For knowledge checks, use activities versus traditional multiple choice or true-false questions. For example, if your objective requires people to learn sequential steps, add a matching or drag-and-drop activity to your program. Try to include activities that will enrich the learning experience.

That's just a short list of the items I consider when I start developing eLearning courses. As instructional designers and eLearning developers we must hold ourselves to a higher standard. As technology evolves, today's learners expect more engaging and exciting programs. It's our duty to harness the power of the technology to not just make eLearning programs, but to make eLearning programs that revolutionize the learning experience.

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