



Best Practices for Developing eLearning Courses

Overview

This fact sheet offers program managers a brief description of some best practices for developing eLearning programs (learning enhanced or delivered by technology) or adapting classroom-based content for eLearning delivery.

Best Practices to Consider

Develop meaningful learning objectives. As with traditional classroom-based training, eLearning course objectives are developed so that participants clearly understand the learning they are required to demonstrate at the end of the training. Quality eLearning limits instruction material to essential information defined through development of clear, meaningful, performance-based objectives that are achievable in the allotted time.

Choose the appropriate technology. Learning objectives, the characteristics of the target audience (e.g. level of education, technological savvy, etc.), the teaching target KSAs (knowledge, skills, abilities) and the teaching organization's technology logistics resources heavily drive the eLearning course design and technology selection. Technology and its features can be engaging to some learners but frustrating to others, so selecting technology that is suitable for the intended audience is critical. Given the broad range of available features and costs of eLearning technologies, program managers who may not have eLearning technology expertise should strongly consider consulting with an instructional design specialist before making their decision. Selection of the appropriate technology supports the learner's ability to demonstrate repeated successful integration of the training information into their knowledge base, improvement in their relevant skills and/or positive change in their attitudes. Furthermore, this new set of KSAs persists long after learners leave the training.

Organize course content logically. Well-designed courses include a timed agenda, learning objectives, instructional content and exhibits and examples. Thoughtfully chosen graphics and animation convey learning points, further detail content and help enhance recall. Limit the use of branched interactions and extensive hyperlinks that send learners to outside websites, content areas or on a path that travels far from the original topic. This is especially important for navigating through simple or obvious information so that distraction and wandering is minimized and tempo, organization and focus are maximized. Providing glossary definitions and content for further study such as downloadable/printable documents or Web links in a reference section rather than as part of the core course content improves the organization and flow of the training.

Update course content regularly. Courses should be reviewed at least annually to ensure that the most current information is presented. Subject Matter Experts can review learning objectives and course content for technical accuracy and relevance.

Interactivity is essential for learner success. Effective "interactive" learning uses various methods to engage the learner with the content and decreases passive receiving of information from an instructor or content on a screen. Additionally, careful design of content layout, overviews, summaries and information sequence can improve learner engagement. For example, interim test questions offered throughout the course can provide immediate, detailed feedback to the learner on his/ her performance that clearly explains why the answer selected was right or wrong, encourages the learner to select again and/or provides a link to the subject matter for further study.

Interactivity is enhanced by	Interactivity is NOT enhanced by
Embedding varied learning activities	Surfing the internet to locate and read reference material
Embedding quality interim review questions	Clicking on the "next" button
Providing unique interim feedback to the learner	Misusing animated graphics or images for distraction or entertainment

Use interim review questions. Often required at timed intervals for continuing education credit, the use of well-designed and timed interim review questions can also capture the learner's progress and provide real-time feedback during course delivery. Objective questions (i.e., those with one correct answer that minimizes use of forced choice, e.g., true/false) are most effective. Varying the types of questions also enhances interactivity, such as the use of interactive puzzles or drag/drops that require more learner attention and critical thinking than standard multiple choice questions.

Soliciting Feedback. Timely and accurate learner feedback is an essential component of health care education. For maximum accuracy, feedback should be obtained as soon as each course session is complete. Immediate learner feedback improves the overall course because instructors can integrate quality suggestions into future editions of the training.

Summary

Development of eLearning programs is most efficient and effective when best practices are used to guide the effort. Implementation of time-tested processes leads to high-quality training that minimizes delivery challenges and maximizes success.

About the DCoE Training & Education Directorate

The Training & Education (T&E) Directorate's mission is to assess training and educational needs in order to identify and promote effective instructional material for stakeholders resulting in improved knowledge and practice of PH and TBI care.

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1335 East West Highway ★ 6th Floor ★ Silver Spring, Maryland 20910 ★ 301-295-2751
www.dcoe.health.mil ★ Training & Education Directorate