62 Tips

Effective eLearning Instructional Design

62 Tips on Effective eLearning Instructional Design

Introduction

Dear Colleagues,

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the new learning technologies that become available every day: mobile apps, 3-D virtual worlds, geolocation, MOOCs, new development tools, and on and on. But despite the allure of these toys and shiny objects, the success of any eLearning project rests primarily on effective instructional design, not on any mix of technologies. Only eLearning that addresses the needs of learners and stakeholders–and does it in ways that facilitate learning transfer, knowledge retention, and skills development–has any significant value.

We asked a number of eLearning professionals with a variety of expertise in instructional design to give us their top eLearning design and design-related tips. What follows are 62 tips from 12 experts that focus on topics from spaced repetition to recycling eLearning assets, and from managing eLearning design standards to designing learning for mobile devices.

We edited the tips and organized them into seven categories: Making Learning Stick, Effective Instructional Design and Development, Managing Project Costs and Time, Demonstrating Your Value, Documenting and Managing Your Designs and Standards, Designing for Mobile, and Customizing and Personalizing Learning.

I hope you find some valuable nuggets of information in this eBook, and are able to use many of the tips to help you in your instructional design work.

Sincerely,

Chris Benz
Director of Online Events, *The eLearning Guild*

About Our Tipsters

Kelley Chrouser, *Manager of Education, American Society for Healthcare Risk Management*

Kelley Chrouser is an organizational development, instructional design, and communication specialist with over 20 years of professional experience. Having designed international programs, online learning for Fortune 100 companies, eLearning strategies for associations, and blended programs across industries, her areas of expertise include pedagogy, curriculum development, transnational instructional design, instructor-led and online training, learning assessment, and leadership development. Kelley holds a doctorate from the University of Nebraska and is a certified social-media strategist.

Ruth Clark, *Clark Training & Consulting*

Ruth Clark is an expert in evidence-based eLearning. She has written seven books on how to apply research and instructional psychology to learning environments. Ruth is a former president of the ISPI and was honored with the Thomas Gilbert Award for Distinguished Professional Achievement in 2005. Ruth was a featured Legend Speaker at the 2006 ASTD ICE event and has been a regular presenter at *eLearning Guild* conferences. A past training manager for Southern California Edison, Ruth holds an EdD degree in educational psychology and instructional technology from the University of Southern California.

Joel Gendelman, *CEO, Future Technologies*

Joel Gendelman has over 25 years of experience developing eLearning for the finest organizations in the world, including Lockheed Martin, Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, and Nissan. Joel's firm helps organizations throughout the world save time and money by more closely aligning their eLearning assets with their corporate goals and strategies. He is the author of *Virtual Presentations That Work*. Joel has published two other books and over a hundred articles in periodicals, including *Chief Learning Officer* and *Performance Improvement* magazines, and serves as lead content development blogger for TrainingIndustry.com.

Jill Kirtland, *Instructional Design Consultant, SAP*

Jill Kirtland has been an instructional designer for 10 years, focusing on eLearning and mLearning solutions for various Fortune and Global 500 companies. Jill holds an MS degree in instructional design/technologies from Lehigh University and a BS degree in organizational communication, learning, and design from Ithaca College. She won a 2004 AECT Nova Southeastern Award for Outstanding Practice in Instructional Design by a Graduate Student.

Art Kohn, *Professor, Portland State School of Business*

Art Kohn is a professor of business at Portland State University. His research explores how to present information in order to maximize learning and memory. Art holds a PhD degree in cognitive science from Duke University. He was awarded the National Professor of the Year award from the American Psychological Association, and has won Fulbright Fellowships in cognitive psychology and distance education. He consults with the Centers for Disease Control on using social messaging for addressing HIV in the developing world, and develops interactive media products for higher education and for corporate training. He is the author of *Communicating with Psychology*.
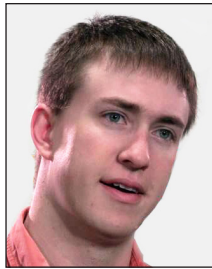
Ty Marbut, *Director, Dark Blue Morning*

Ty Marbut is a director for Dark Blue Morning. He has produced, directed, and edited more than 30 films for customers such as CareerBuilder, McGraw-Hill, Cengage, and Prentice Hall. His films have explored topics from health care to adolescent development and mental illness. Ty has also been a field producer at the award-winning AK-Learning eLearning company, where he has produced training videos in the areas of leadership, compliance, harassment training, and business acumen.

Kelly Meeker, *Community Manager, OpenSesame*

In her current role, Kelly Meeker creates, curates, and shares eLearning content with the learning and development community. From a background in communications and technology, Kelly understands how to communicate effectively using technology tools. She works with OpenSesame buyers and sellers to select courses and design learning curricula, and she creates courses that introduce social media tools for professional development and networking.

Michael Noble, *Chief Learning Officer, Allen Communication Learning Services*

Michael Noble, PhD, became the CLO of Allen Communication Learning Services in 2005. Michael consults with Allen's major accounts and strategic partners, identifying enterprise-wide targets and objectives, conducting various types of analyses, and recommending new technologies. He has presented at conferences for ISPI, ASTD, and *The eLearning Guild*. Before joining Allen in 1998, Michael taught at the University of Louisiana. He currently teaches at the University of Utah.

Trina Rimmer, *Instructional Design Consultant, Rimmer Creative Group*

Trina Rimmer is an instructional design consultant with 12 years' experience designing, developing, and delivering smart, engaging learning solutions to companies large and small. Trina's background in the financial services and healthcare industries includes the writing, design, and hands-on implementation of various programs, including workplace harassment training, management coaching, sales and service training, and software simulations. In addition to running her own consulting firm, Trina is the primary contributor to an eLearning blog for an online training start-up.

Anna Sargsyan, *Director of Instructional Design, Allen Communication*

Anna Sargsyan has over 15 years' experience in corporate training. As director of instructional design, Anna manages Allen Communication's instructional design and development processes, ensuring that they are based on sound adult learning principles and innovative technologies. She is also responsible for developing and expanding the expertise and abilities of her team. Anna's projects have received several industry awards. Anna holds an MS degree.

Monica Savage, *President, Obsidian*

Monica Savage gained most of her 15 years' experience in process and quality management, process improvement, systems implementation, root-cause analysis, and teaching and training within the chemical industry. Her straightforward, collaborative approach to communication—both internally and with customers—and her creative problem-solving abilities are fundamental to Obsidian's delivery of "out-of-the box" learning programs.

Chris Van Wingerden, *Vice President of Learning Solutions, dominKnow Learning Systems*

Chris Van Wingerden is the vice president of learning solutions for dominKnow Learning Systems. Chris has been involved with eLearning and mLearning content design and creation projects for more than a decade. A self-confessed mobile addict, Chris's background in learning and instructional design means that he is always looking for ways to ensure any technologies used in training and development serve the critical purposes of learning, for both the organization and its employees. Chris has led instructional design and training projects in many fields—from the resource industry to the financial sector, from government to retail, and most everything in between. Chris holds degrees in adult education and English literature.

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21

OPENING SESSION

101—**Multimedia Learning Research: Foundations for Evidence-based ISD,** Ruth Clark, Clark Training & Consulting

BEST PRACTICES

201—**Formal Learning on Smartphones: Better Strategies for Better Results,** Chris Van Wingerden, dominKnow Learning Systems

301—**Lead Them to the Gold—Managing Your Instructional Design Standards,** Jill Kirtland, SAP

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

202—**Strategies for Communicating Design Ideas to Non-designers,** Trina Rimmer, Rimmer Creative Group

302—**Tips for Making Courses That Count,** Kelly Meeker, OpenSesame

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22

BEST PRACTICES

401—**Recycling eLearning Assets,** Joel Gendelman, Future Technologies

501—**Using mLearning in Blended Designs to Create Communities of Practitioners,** Kelley Chrouser, American Society for Healthcare Risk Management

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

402—**Distributed—Not Destructional—Design,** Monica Savage, Obsidian

502—**Science and Memory: Seven Tips That Improve eLearning,** Art Kohn, Portland State School of Business, and Ty Marbut, Dark Blue Morning Interactive Video

CLOSING SESSION

601—**Designing the Library of Babel: Mass Customization in Learning & Performance Support,** Michael Noble & Anna Sargsyan, Allen Communication Learning Services

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Seven Tips on Making Learning Stick

If the instruction doesn't stick, the learning is ultimately a failure. Our experts offer tips on making sure learners won't forget their learning when the instruction is no longer in front of them.

Spaced repetition is one of the most effective ways to move learning from short-term to long-term memory. As the name implies, this is the process of repeating instruction over a series of events spaced out in time. In many ways it's the opposite of cramming for an exam the night before. (Cramming the night before may make knowledge retrievable the next day, but has limited effect on seating that knowledge in long-term memory.) The repetition aspect of spaced repetition can range from identical learning events to minor variations of the same event through to assessments or other activities that provide retrieval practice.

The time between learning events is an important part of what's in play here—good timing between learning events is just long enough that some forgetting has already begun to take place. The activity of remembering, and even re-learning knowledge acquired previously, helps the transfer to long-term memory. Assessments, practice activities, and short refresher courses (scheduled over a series of, say, several weeks after taking a main eLearning course) are valuable ways to use spaced repetition in eLearning programs.

Chris Van Wingerden

When you are authoring your content, do not hesitate to provide emotionally-laden materials in the lesson. For example, if you are teaching line workers why people need to wear a hairnet, provide examples of how a rogue hair falling into the product can alienate customers and potentially cause the company to lose business. The simple fact is that humans are very skilled at recalling emotionally enriched material, so use every opportunity to make dreary material more relevant and arousing.

Art Kohn

The data is very clear that contextual cues significantly improve retrieval of information. This means that building the retrieval context (such as the factory floor) into your training isn't merely an aesthetic consideration—if the sights, sounds, and general ambiance of the retrieval context is clearly represented in the encoding context (your course), your learners are more likely to retrieve and apply the knowledge they took away from your course. In addition, is there any chance that your learners can take your course while physically in the retrieval context? Training kiosks can facilitate this in some circumstances.

Ty Marbut

No one learns much from a single-pass training experience. If you want to generate long-term memory and learning transfer, you need to provide booster training. For example, research shows that simple quizzes, spaced over the days and weeks following training, make it much more likely that people will retain information.

Art Kohn

No eLearning course is an island. What happens before, during, and after any form of training (including in-class sessions as well as eLearning) all contribute to the potential transfer of learning to the job. In fact, studies have shown that pre-training and post-training transfer strategies are stronger predictors of learning transfer than the training event itself. Transfer strategies before the training event can include preparing trainees for the learning process by specifying goals and expectations as well as activating existing prior knowledge. Transfer strategies after the training event can include providing on-the-job practice as soon as possible after the training event, as well as on-the-job evaluation. Too often an eLearning course is created without any planning for pre- or post-training transfer strategies, and this is a lost opportunity to improve the transfer of learning to the job. Reference: "Transfer of Training in Canada," Alan Saks, University of Toronto, presented at the CSTD National Conference and Trade Show Oct. 31, 2012 (presentation slides available here: http://www.cstd.ca/?page=conf2012materials).

Chris Van Wingerden

Spaced learning. Since we were kids in elementary school learning vocabulary words with flashcards, we've known that repetition supports learning. Research shows, however, that *spaced* repetition improves retention. So don't just present information once—design learning experiences that encourage learners to revisit the new information they've learned over time. The lag time between repetitions is less important than encouraging the learner to examine another topic and then revisit the information previously discussed. This spaced learning approach helps learners solidify their grasp of new concepts.

Kelly Meeker

Incentive systems, such as cash rewards or credits on Amazon.com, can make it more likely that people participate in training. But be careful about how you set up your program and exactly what you reward. For example, if people receive a reward for completing a lesson, then that is what they will do ... simply click fast and complete the lesson. A better idea is to provide rewards when people have proven that they have retained information over a long period of time. Better yet, provide a reward when people show that they have applied their learning and helped the company become more successful.

Art Kohn

Twenty-five Tips on Effective Instructional Design and Development

How can you ensure learners get the most out of what you provide them? Our tipsters offer guidance on areas that include enhancing your training with videos, the importance of meaningful feedback, and the value of storyboarding.

Think about features and benefits. When working with salespeople, sales experts often focus on the difference between describing the features of a product (describing the product itself) and describing the product's benefits (the ways the product will change the customer's life). As you present your course's learning objectives, make sure you're articulating the course's benefits for the learners, not just the features.

Kelly Meeker

A game is only effective when the design matches the learning outcomes.

Ruth Clark

As instructional designers it's easy to talk about all of the amazing things that will happen as a result of our training intervention. However, resist the urge to hard sell everyone on a vision of change that you can't deliver. Instead, scale down your objectives and focus on the areas you can impact:

- Break big training into small chunks so the audience can make strides towards the bigger end goal

- For each training chunk, design objectives that are realistic and measurable with a focus on actions over ideas

- Design more tools than simply training, so that trainees are better equipped for task execution on the job

Trina Rimmer

Start with a question: Training needs to be relevant, so online courses have to provide useful information. When designing a course, think about what problem it is going to solve. Ask a question. Explain what's in it for them.

Monica Savage

Consider scenario-based eLearning to build critical thinking skills or provide practice for tasks that are unsafe or infrequent in the workplace.

Ruth Clark

You will find areas of replication and absence during every eLearning asset-recycling effort. Be prepared to make hard choices in selecting the eLearning materials most aligned to your effort. Also be prepared to develop additional materials to cover performance objectives that are not supported by your organization's current assets.

Joel Gendelman

Get a second opinion. Sometimes you don't have the distance necessary to determine whether negative feedback demonstrates a usability issue or resistance to a new idea. Another pair of eyes on your work can help you see when to make the change and when to make your case.

Michael Noble and Anna Sargsyan

Ask questions to make worked examples engaging.

Ruth Clark

People love watching videos, and the bar for acceptable web-video production values is constantly falling due to the influence of YouTube. Get a camera and start shooting some video. Even your smartphone can facilitate better training content than your average PowerPoint slide.

Ty Marbut

Create a design document first: Don't jump into development. Any training piece can start with a design document or plan. Make sure that everyone is on the same page before spending a lot of effort developing the actual deliverable.

Monica Savage

Carefully craft your questions. For needs analysis, use questions that encourage respondents to tell you stories, rather than offer yes/no answers. People's stories reflect their view of the world, even if what they tell you isn't objectively "true." Their stories will often help you uncover new and unusual perspectives on an issue.

Michael Noble and Anna Sargsyan

Despite the sheer number of tools that can take slides from your instructor-led class and convert them to an eLearning course, designing for eLearning requires different thinking than designing for a face-to-face class. In face-to-face or classroom settings the instructor can carry out formative evaluation along the way, checking in with learners on their level of understanding and answering any questions they have. So it's never sufficient to just convert a slide deck to a SCORM package and plug it into your learning management system (LMS)—although that's the belief many of the stakeholders in your organization will hold. Losing that instructor means your eLearning design has to now be able to take on the role of formative assessment, making it critical that you design eLearning experiences that require the learner to answer questions and make decisions.

For the best success, your design should be able to present a different learning opportunity by offering different examples or explanations if the learners' responses and choices demonstrate that they don't understand a concept or can't perform a task.

Chris Van Wingerden

Video is an opportunity. When presenting complex, specialized, or dry information, video presents the potential to put a "human face" on your content. As you design the flow of your learning experience, consider using simple video clips in your course to increase audience engagement and emotional response by asking SMEs to explain key points or demonstrate important skills. Video can be the best way to simply display models for social interactions—for example, in a customer service or communication scenario.

Kelly Meeker

Use step-by-step worked examples to illustrate skills.

Ruth Clark

Make a storyboard. When you're designing a course, you're telling a story. An old-fashioned storyboard sketch will help you understand and focus on how a learner experiences a course from start to finish. It will also help you organize branching scenarios or experiment with different models for interactions.

Kelly Meeker

For all skills that can be practiced on a computer, eLearning has been shown to result in learning outcomes equivalent to in-person instruction. What determines the effectiveness of your training is not the delivery medium but the instructional methods used.

Ruth Clark

Scenario-based learning: We all know that instructor-led training has to be learner-centered. We design it to take the accountability from the instructor and place it on the learner. How should we do it in online courses? Build the course around relevant problem-solving scenarios. Keep it simple, though realistic, and fit for purpose.

Monica Savage

Provide meaningful feedback. In a decision-making activity, consider including feedback that completes a story or scenario by showing the positive or negative effects of the learner's choice.

Michael Noble and Anna Sargsyan

Most eLearning asset-recycling efforts require the development of additional materials to aid in aligning existing assets to the business goals and strategies that your course was developed to support. These materials often include course road maps, activity support, resource maps, job aids, and assessments.

Joel Gendelman

Less is more: Keep the number of words low, audio narration brief, and avoid gratuitous stories and visuals.

Ruth Clark

All courses or learning modules require distinct elements, including (1) a description of significance for the learner or a component that directly answers the question, "Who cares and why should I know this," (2) content regarding the process, concept, or procedure, (3) instructional scaffolding, (4) learning prompts, (5) personalized assessment, (6) learning transfer or performance activities, and (7) feedback.

Understanding and then matching the technologies that can best address each of these elements is critical for optimizing learning outcomes. Consider, for example, using the push capacity of mobile technology for creating a learning prompt, particularly if the prompt is then associated with a job aid available for immediate download for an upcoming project or a rich discussion regarding changes in variables that would distinctly impact the ways in which the process or concept demands particularization based on situational constraints. In short, identifying the performative capacity of each technology and pedagogical approach and using "best of fit" for each requisite learning asset or component can optimize learning outcomes for organizations and for individual learners.

Kelley Chrouser

Blended learning environments that make effective use of synchronous and asynchronous technology have demonstrated better outcomes than either in-person alone or self-study eLearning alone.

Ruth Clark

Don't be afraid of using external web content! The Internet is a vast sea of information (much of it useful), and better still, your learners usually like using the Internet to find things out. So send them off to external information sources such as Wikipedia and YouTube when you'd like your course to not only be a transmitter of selected knowledge, but a portal to everything you could ever want to know about a subject. Pro tip: You might use quizzing on their return to the course to make sure their Internet research was productive.

Ty Marbut

Creating quality eLearning is expensive. Begin any effort, big or small, by analyzing the business objectives and strategies that the course will support. This includes defining the audiences involved, documenting the specific behaviors they need to demonstrate or not demonstrate, defining their on-the-job environment, and specifying any constraints they will be working under.

Joel Gendelman

Focus on prior knowledge as the most important individual difference. Ignore unsupported individual differences such as audio, visual, or kinesthetic learning styles.

Ruth Clark

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Seven Tips on Managing Project Costs and Time

You can unexpectedly find time and cost savings, from recycling eLearning assets to acquiring free tools and templates. Even the ever-present learning objective can serve double duty as a way to save.

Recycling eLearning assets enables your department to decrease development costs and time, as well as increase organizational responsiveness.

Joel Gendelman

Leverage low-hanging fruit: Use humble methods such as learning objectives, which are inexpensive to provide and have proven to give at least a small learning improvement versus the more complex methods such as problem-based learning, which may have large learning advantages but are costly.

Ruth Clark

Use the cloud to collaborate. Experiment with cloud tools to enable collaborative working. Tools like Google Docs and Dropbox enable you to work collaboratively with colleagues on the same product—reducing overlap and making sharing frictionless. If you're developing eLearning, Lectora Online enables colleagues to work on the same project at the same time, making team communication smooth and speeding up development.

Kelly Meeker

Save time when interviewing SMEs: Create a series of questions you always ask an SME at the beginning of a training piece and send it to him or her in advance. Focus on "clarifying" questions regarding audience, learning objectives, "what's in it for me" info, testing and assessment needs, etc. The SME can be prepared or may even answer some of the questions ahead of time.

Monica Savage

A key element of recycling eLearning assets is conducting a comprehensive analysis of related materials that you already have in your organization's inventory. Go far beyond the standard information commonly provided with those assets.

Joel Gendelman

Can you get components free or off-the-shelf? There are new resources for instructional designers and eLearning developers springing up every day. From course templates, video clips, illustrations, color schemes, and game templates to free online authoring and design tools, you may be able to find some of what you need already made—freeing up your time to focus on the big-picture design challenges.

Kelly Meeker

Document everything when you are involved in an eLearning asset-recycling effort. It is like high school and college math, you only get partial credit for having the right answer; you receive most of the credit for documenting your work.

Joel Gendelman

Four Tips on Demonstrating Your Value

Don't let anybody put your learning and development team in a corner. Whether it's dealing with stakeholders or SMEs, sometimes you need to be a thorn in the side to best advocate for your program.

The learning and development team often gets a bad rap from business leaders because of our tendency to show up to gunfights with water pistols. The truth is most organizations simply need help aligning problems that hamper performance with solutions that support performance. As I see it, our greatest strength is the ability to be a thorn in the side of organizational complacency—to ask "why" a lot. Only by having the tough conversations and really helping organizations identify core problems and sustainable solutions will we, as a business partner, elevate our profile from "water pistol slingers" to "straight shooters."

Trina Rimmer

One of the trickiest challenges I've encountered is dealing with an SME who thinks that the instructional designer is simply a conduit for moving their brilliant vision from the page to the screen—the kind who'll say, "I'll give you everything, and you'll just make it look nice and upload it to the LMS."

In these cases, I've had some success using a little reverse psychology to get SME buy-in for my ideas. For example, when describing my ideas to the SME, I've used phrases like, "I was inspired by your work on…" or "This design really represents your ideas (or content) re-conceived with a tighter focus on instruction…"

I've also found that phrasing my ideas in the form of recommendations helps to assert my expertise and gradually build my credibility in a way that's less threatening.

Trina Rimmer

Many of us work for companies that value maintaining the status quo above all else. In those kinds of environments, it's really difficult to embrace one of the essential elements of our role as instructional designers—to ask questions. Afraid of being seen as a pest? Here are some ideas to keep in mind:

- Asking questions is a sign of strength, confidence, and intelligence.

- Allow enough time for questions. If you've got SMEs who are hard to access, plan a series of short interviews to get what you need from them.

- Asking open-ended questions is a great way to give other people the spotlight. Their answers, in turn, may open up opportunities for additional questions.

- Be a good listener. Good listening deepens the conversation and makes sure you're asking the right questions.

Trina Rimmer

One of the biggest barriers to conducting a needs analysis is a lack of time. To overcome this challenge, spend some time educating clients, SMEs, or stakeholders by explaining the cost of not doing needs analysis. By spending a little more time up front to thoroughly understand the root causes of a performance gap, organizations may actually save time, money, and resources by ensuring that training really addresses needs.

Trina Rimmer

Seven Tips on Documenting and Managing Your Designs and Standards

If you don't document and manage instructional designs and standards right from the beginning, you can run into problems later. Our experts steer you through this essential process with simple, effective tips.

Provide clear standards (a style guide) on how to format your eLearning: fonts, colors, logos, resolution size, file types, etc.

Jill Kirtland

Create a website that has all of your best practices and templates available for download for instructional designers and content providers (SMEs). Keep it as current as possible. Give people an incentive to use the site.

Jill Kirtland

A storyboard is not only the place to outline the design of each page for an eLearning project, but also the best place to explain the rationale behind the design choices you and your team have made. Use it to explain why you are suggesting the creation of specific learning activities (include references to support the recommendations and decisions, if you can). This helps as the project moves forward: for example, when new team members get added for later reviews. The storyboard will help them understand not only how a page or interaction is supposed to look or behave but also why—helping avoid confusion and establishing credibility for the decisions that were made and agreed upon.

Chris Van Wingerden

Provide real-life examples of what best-in-class training should look like for each delivery method. One idea is to have a contest where people submit courses they've designed and a panel of judges picks the best-in-class courses to showcase on the website.

Jill Kirtland

When creating a site to house your instructional design standards, organize the pages by delivery method. Explain when it is best to use that delivery method.

Jill Kirtland

Provide tips on how to integrate various types of delivery methods into instruction—give the designer or SME ideas on how to create more engaging learning through social media, informal, gaming, etc.

Jill Kirtland

Create a community-of-practice site for your instructional designers and content providers to share best-practice articles, and allow for discussion around trends in learning. This site will give people ideas on how to create better learning. It also is a great way to recognize the training leaders in your company.

Jill Kirtland

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Seven Tips on Designing for Mobile

Mobile learning has some particular opportunities—and constraints. Find out how to make the most of your mLearning, from haptic technology to apps.

For designing engaging learning experiences, think about the possibilities of using haptic technology (i.e., simulates the sense of touch) and ambient intelligence (i.e., electronic environments that are responsive to the presence of people).

Michael Noble and Anna Sargsyan

Fingers and thumbs are far less accurate and finite than a mouse pointer. Design for human clumsiness by making buttons and hotspots, etc., big enough to be easily touched. Apple's design standards specify 44x44 points as "the comfortable minimum size of a tappable UI element." Make your selectable page elements too small (or put them too close together) and you'll likely create frustration for your learner. (See http://developer.apple.com/library/ios/#documentation/userexperience/conceptual/mobilehig/Characteristics/Characteristics.html.)

Chris Van Wingerden

Watch your graphics: Make sure you design graphics that can be easily resized and still maintain their quality. Test first. Just because you measured the screen and set your margins doesn't mean it will look right. File type also matters. Not all mobile devices support all file types.

Monica Savage

When developing an app, invest the time to create the right architecture up front. If it is an afterthought, users will know.

Michael Noble and Anna Sargsyan

Using mLearning in blended designs solves for five distinct issues:

1. Professional networking needs blocked by time, space, or organizational and geographical boundaries

2. Reduced travel due to economic constraints for professional development programs

3. Inadequate assessment or understanding of learning transfer rates

4. The learning preferences or needs of a time-strapped audience and generational shifts in the workforce

5. The need for a rich library of distinct learning assets for just-in-time needs for the innovative organization

Solving for these issues, however, requires optimizing the right technologies and pedagogies for distinct elements of the instructional design process.

Kelley Chrouser

Practice the three Rs when designing mobile learning events: reduce, reduce, reduce! Less visual space on a device like a smartphone and the potential of a limited attention span on the part of learners in a complex and distracting environment means mobile learning (especially on smartphones) needs to get right to the point. Here's a good rule of thumb: The greater the learner's speed of need, the simpler your design should be.

Chris Van Wingerden

Mobile is not for everything: think "fit for purpose." Taking a 45-minute online course with narration will not be comfortable on a smartphone. However, watching a one- to two-minute video on a specific transaction you are trying to master may be fun on an iPad.

Monica Savage

Five Tips on Customizing and Personalizing Learning

The most effective education allows for personalization. These tips from our experts will help you incorporate learner control, skill level, and other methods to improve the learning experience.

Don't forget social learning: A great way to incorporate the social learning concepts in eLearning is to incorporate discussion threads, surveys, and issue reporting in the online course itself. With the use of web objects, you can link directly from a course to a database-powered social-learning tool (for example, SharePoint). Why does it work? It's dynamic data; learners don't have to exit the online module to access email or a discussion thread on a different page. It's immediate and accurate.

Monica Savage

Including activities that require user input (e.g., action plans, job aids, calendars, etc.) and that learners can save and print helps learners adapt the tools to their own needs and situations.

Michael Noble and Anna Sargsyan

No surprise: People will learn more from your training when they have some degree of volition about exactly what training they take. If you can manage it, find a way for learners to choose which course they take in a given training session based on their own interests when possible. You'll find a greater degree of engagement and satisfaction with the training, meaning it's more likely to be applied later.

Ty Marbut

Use learner control for learners with higher prior knowledge. Consider adaptive control for learners with mixed prior knowledge.

Ruth Clark

Consider including a pre-test to direct learners to those topics in the course that are tailored to their specific training needs. The learning experience will be more meaningful and, possibly, shorter.

Michael Noble and Anna Sargsyan