Training the Trainer:

How to Create Microlearning

Grovo
Why microlearning matters

We live in a world of distractions. In order to drive outcomes, learning needs to cut through the noise. Microlearning is the answer. And the most important component of microlearning is the content itself. Each bite-sized learning moment is where the rest of the method starts.

Microlearning’s secret is its content—digestible, point-of-need, and action-based. Learners aren’t just passive trainees; they consume and apply small moments of behavior change in the middle of the work they’re doing. No information gets lost, and transformation happens gradually, at the learner’s pace.

Want to see how to create your own microlearning content? Read on.

Microlearning builds successful behaviors in small, focused steps. To learn more, check out our other resources:

“Small Steps to Big Wins: How Microlearning Transforms Organizations”

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And for live updates from the cutting edge of microlearning research, keep up with the Grovo blog.
Table of Contents

What is Microlearning?
How “Micro” is Microlearning?
Play #1: Decide Your Learning Objective
Play #2: Choose a Rapid Creation Format
Play #3: Organize & Analyze Your Content
Play #4: Make it Granular
Play #5: Make it Engaging
Play #6: Make it Effective
Play #7: Test and Retest
Case Study: Creating a Micro Lesson, The Grovo Way
Summary & Conclusion
References
What is Microlearning?

n. The process of learning complex skills in small, focused steps.

It’s an educational approach that embraces the power of small learning moments to transform individuals and organizations.

The principle of learning new skills a little bit at a time is nothing new. In music, you practice scales before you write a symphony. In sports, you practice dribbling before you make the All-Star team. In enterprise training, the same idea applies. The goal of learning at work is to perform to the fullest of your potential. Microlearning is how you can transform from the person you are today, bit by bit, into the performer you want to be.
Microlearning isn’t just splitting an 8-hour classroom lecture into smaller chunks. Instead, it’s a system that delivers small pieces of information and helps learners practice new behaviors with action-based resources. To create each of those small learning moments, start with a big learning goal and work down to micro.

- A campaign is a learning course during which you reach for one big, aspirational learning goal. Usually these last 6–8 weeks.
- Milestones are accomplishments that indicate progress toward the learning goal. These aren’t huge accomplishments, but achieving them gets the business and learners excited.
- Learners hit milestones by consuming daily lessons. Typically these sessions last 5–10 minutes with an emphasis on making progress every day. This is where new skills are practiced, reinforced, and so on.
- Each lesson is made up of microlearning moments. These primarily come in the form of two types of resources: pieces of granular information and cues to provoke behavior-changing or reinforcing action.
How “micro” is microlearning?

Each microlearning moment is as short as possible and as extensive as necessary to cover one learning objective. While there’s no one length that’s “right” for microlearning, these units are short enough to be understandable, applicable, and immediately interactive. They need to be:

**Digestible.** With bite-sized content, learners are never overwhelmed with information. People learn and improve gradually—and sustainably.

**Point-of-need.** Learning takes place in or near the performance context. People learn on the job instead of stockpiling information they’ll forget later.

**Experiential.** Learners hit milestones with the help of action-based resources. People don’t just learn. They practice in real life.

“The single units of a defined microlearning process have to fulfill two demands: firstly, they have to be self-explanatory and self-contained. Secondly, the units have to...lead the trainee step by step towards the fulfillment of the overall learning objective.”

—Thomas Eibl

“What Size is Micro?”

“...lead the trainee step by step towards the fulfillment of the overall learning objective.”
Play #1:

Determine Learning Objective

Know where you’re going before you begin

Move 1: Employ an Instructional Design Methodology

Instructional design is a process that consists of determining the current state and needs of the learner, defining the end goal of instruction, and creating interventions to assist in the transition. Before you begin, decide to approach your content from an instructional design model, which will aid in bringing structure and intention to designing your course.

Move 2: Work Backwards From Your End Goal

Next, and most importantly, determine the learning objective -- i.e., what you hope your learners will achieve by the end. This helps narrow down what to include (or exclude) in the course content, and aids in selecting a design and format to meet both the needs of the learners, and of the organization.

“The eLearning program must be easy to access and navigate or you will lose the learner before they can even start.”
Don Eppert
Director, Corporate Learning
Sara Lee

“Keep it simple... Too many bells and whistles may cloud the message you are trying to convey.”
Brian Lauer
Customer Education Product Specialist
Freddie Mac
Choose a Rapid Creation Format

**Move 1: Opt for Rapid Creation**

Training in the digital age needs to be created and updated quickly because today’s technologies and platforms regenerate fast. Select and use a rapid development software such as Adobe’s Captivate, Blackboard, or your own proprietary tool, and you’ll be able to manage your content’s modular parts with ease. Or, use an already established content repository like YouTube, Grovo, Coursmos, etc. -- searching for specific topics or lesson lengths to meet your organization’s needs.

**Move 2: Choose a Format**

Choose an appropriate format – such as a video, game or quiz – in order to meet the needs of the content, the technological infrastructure available, the target audience, and as always, time and budget. Some formats, like emails or slides, are relatively simple while others are more complex and interactive.

“Don’t just PowerPoint. [Or] transform your existing PowerPoint slide into eLearning content.”

Mustafa Barton
Technical Consultant
Hewlett-Packard
Play #3:

Organize & Analyze the Content

Always think, ‘less is more’

Move 1: Create an Outline
Conduct a content audit, determining, prioritizing, and outlining the hierarchy of your course -- i.e. how modules, lessons, and topics will be organized into a logical and progressive order. You want to clearly separate the essential, “must-be-learned” items from secondary or supporting content (like optional links, exercises, forms, references, examples, illustrations, etc.). You will want to prioritize and position the essential content first.

Move 2: Do a Working Memory Check
Think in terms of working memory (4-5 items). Decide if you really need to include all the content you have in front of you, noting that visuals are an excellent example of a way to lessen the demands on working memory. It’s also critical that the content – and all its related activities – are meaningful and relevant.

“Don’t bite off more than you can chew. Ensure learning is in bite size pieces so it can be easily consumed.”
Danielle Colton
Human Resources
MJCROS Systems, Inc.
Play #4: Make it Granular

*A micro lesson is both a grain of sand and a beach*

**Move 1: Chunk Your Content**
Break content into units that are small, granular, and self-contained compared to your overall learning objective. This reduces complexity and allows it to fit into a timeslot appropriate for application. Your audience should be able to watch any lesson in any order, all the while gaining a broader, holistic perspective of a larger, more complicated skill.

**Move 2: Keep The Goal in Mind**
Ensure these single units are objective-oriented and based on a detected or experienced need (e.g. a company acquires new equipment, and identifies that it needs to train employees on this new equipment).

Examples of granular, holistic content include:
- Concepts
- Best practices
- Principles
- Procedures
- Tutorials
- Demonstrations
- Metacognitive strategies
Play #5:

Make it Engaging (Part 1)

Using Spin

“You spin me right ‘round, baby”

**Move 1: Use Context**
Aim to forge a strong connection between micro content and context, allowing learners to fill in the blanks and provide examples from their own lives (we call this “spin”).

**Move 2: Use Visuals**
Bullets and numbered lists are useful for presenting your information in a clear and concise way.

**Move 3: Use Story**
Stories can be told with as little as a single picture, a short animation, or just a few words. All of these grab a trainee’s attention and assist in “instant learning.” Story also adds “stickiness” to content, adding real-world and cultural context to material that aids in learning.
Play #5:

Make it Engaging (Part 2)

Making it “Sticky”

Your story, my story, our story

Move 4: Select a Small Idea
From each micro lesson, identify a small piece of an idea you want learners to learn.

Move 5: Add an Event
Next, think of a relevant event or scenario; then describe it as an example.

Move 6: Embed the Idea
When you play out the event, look for opportunities to embed the idea to be learned in the example (i.e. remind the learner what the “small idea” is).

Move 7: Make it Spin
Finally, build your lesson in a way that facilitates connections, allowing the content to “spin” into new scenarios and related information in the learner’s mind. In a group setting this could end up as conversation, comments, or stories. For a solo or online course, you might ask the trainees to think of their own examples related to the content.

Definition:
“Stickiness” is a basic principle of effective learning and encourages transfer by giving the real world application and a cultural or social context to your content. 

“Don’t be seduced by aesthetics. [Instead] use visual elements wisely to enhance the student’s learning experience.”

Jkuko Kawasaki
eLearning Design Specialist
Randstad North America
Play #6: Make it Effective

“You can’t teach people everything they need to know. The best you can do is position them where they can find what they need to know when they need to know it.”

Seymour Papert
Mathematician, A.I. Pioneer
MIT

“Our business culture is ruled by short attention spans and time-gulping demands.”

Mitch Thrower
Author
The Attention Deficit Workplace

“Better, faster, stronger”

Move 1: Add Reference Tools
Add the ability to reference your content on-the-go, in-the-field, on-the-job and in-the-moment with easy-to-navigate reference tools. Consider a clickable table of contents or a user-friendly mobile app to aid learners in finding what they want to learn, when they want to learn it.

Move 2: Use Attention Formulas
Do your homework on how to optimize your content for today’s attention spans. For instance, according to Miller’s Law, the human brain’s working memory can only hold $7 \pm 2$ objects at any given time. If you cram too many points into a given lesson or exercise, it’s not going to get remembered. That’s why at Grovo we ruthlessly simplify our lessons to get the most essential information across in 90 seconds or less.
Play #7:  

Test & Retest

“Testing, testing 1, 2, 3”

Move 1: Test & Retest Your Learners
Use a method to quickly generate exams, assessments, surveys and branded certificates for your learners. Deliver these at the point of need, such as immediately following a lesson to ensure they’re getting the most out of your learning program. Tracking participation, engagement, and completion rates also helps you and your users see the impact training is having on job performance.

Move 2: Test & Retest Your System
Microlearning allows for the easy piloting of lessons and the ability to gather feedback, iterate, and plan the next training slice without slowing down production. In addition, make sure to use an LMS with a full suite of reports and data analytics to create data-driven learning, while correlating performance metrics.

“Sustaining high business performance is a product of continuous strategic alignment.”

Med Yones
President
International Institute of Management

“The greatest value of a picture is when it forces us to notice what we never expected to see.”

John Tukey (1915 – 2000)
Mathematician
Princeton & Bell Labs
Summary & Conclusion

Microlearning must follow iterative, structured design processes in order to achieve the most efficient, engaging, and effective results.

Create Microlearning with the Following Steps:

Determine Your Learning Objective:
- Employ an Instructional Design Methodology
- Work backwards from your end goal

Choose a Rapid Creation Format:
- Opt for Rapid Creation
- Choose Your Format

Organize & Analyze the Content:
- Create an Outline
- Do a Working Memory Check

Make it Granular:
- Chunk Your Content
- Keep Your Goal in Mind

Make it Engaging:
- Use Context
- Use Visuals
- Use Story

Make it Sticky:
- Select a Small Idea, Add an Event, Embed the Idea, Make it Spin

Make it Effective:
- Add Reference Tools
- Use Attention Formulas

Test and Retest:
- Test & Retest Your Learners
- Test & Retest Your System

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About Grovo

Grovo is reimagining learning for today’s teams. The workplace learning company combines beautiful technology, engaging content, and hands-on advisory support to deliver a better way to learn at work. The heart of Grovo’s approach is microlearning — bite-sized video lessons, exercises and real-world practice delivered in the right way, at the right time. From digital skills to leadership training, Grovo teaches employees the behaviors to be extraordinary at what they do, on a platform that learners and trainers love.

Learn more at:  
www.grovo.com

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