YOUR GUIDE FOR

CREATING BETTER ONLINE COURSES

4 RESEARCH-BACKED TIPS

4 Research-Backed Tips for Creating Better Online Employee Training Courses

Online learning reached $107 billion in 2015. Yet, experts are still learning how to create courses that engage students, help them learn, and achieve business-training goals.

Luckily, several research studies and expert personal experience have already discovered powerful ways to boost the success of online corporate training courses - by going beyond merely using PDF documents, boring videos lectures, and occasional multiple-choice tests.

In particular, there are four research-backed ways your company can create training courses that better engage your employees, help them learn faster, and ensure they are properly trained for their jobs:

1. **Video** - Including lecture-style videos significantly boosts student engagement.
2. **Exams and Quizzes** - Regularly injecting short tests boosts students' comprehension.
3. **Supplemental Information** - Adding optional information helps students learn more.
4. **Student Collaboration** - Building a foundation for student interaction improves results.

This blog post shares insights on these four ways you can create more impactful and successful training programs to populate your online Learning Management System - today.

Tip 1 - Add Lecture-Style Videos

Videos are a powerful medium. This explains why YouTube is one of today's leading social media platforms and the second largest search engine (after Google).

Video is so popular - especially with the millennial generation - that it's expected to be 75 percent of all social media by 2020. And the power of videos is not just for entertainment - it's also extremely effective for education, as well. For example, a study of 6.9 million lecture videos across four edX courses found that short videos significantly elevate student engagement.

Another study at Park University in Missouri looked at the impact of online courses with and without video. Researchers found that without video lectures student withdrawal and failure rate was relatively high. When videos were added to courses, student attention and learning increased with much less instructor intervention. What's more, students were more satisfied with the course and more likely to stay in the course with a passing score.

Here are a few tips for adding better videos to your online training programs:

- Shorter videos are more engaging. Student engagement levels drop sharply after six minutes.
- Student engagement is higher with lecture-style videos, because they are more intimate and personal versus classroom-style videos.
- For tutorial videos, the Khan-style format, where the instructor draws on the screen and narrates, was found to engage students more effectively than just screen casts.

Course Creation Tip 2 - Add Frequent Small Tests

It may seem counterintuitive, but research has uncovered an important fact about online learning -frequent short tests boost student engagement and retention. The reason, according to two Harvard University researchers, is that interruptions as short at 2.8 seconds can double the rate of errors in sequence-based tasks. Meanwhile, frequent tests help hold students' attention.

The researchers split 20-minute lectures into four five-minute segments. Some research subjects were presented with math problems after each segment, while others were not. Then all subjects were tested on the material of the lecture. The subjects who were quizzed in between segments scored higher than all other groups, even outperforming a group that was allowed to review the material from the lecture.

The researchers believe that quizzes keep learners' minds engaged. "It's not sufficient for a lecture to be short or to break up a lecture as we did in these experiments. You need to have the testing. Just breaking it up and allowing them to do something else, even allowing them to re-study the material, does nothing to cut down on mind wandering, and does nothing to improve final test performance. The testing is the critical component."

With online learning systems, creating tests and quizzes is simple. Here are a few tips:

- Avoid multiple-choice quizzes, because they tend to be oversimplified and give too much credit for those who simply guess.
- Consider allowing students to answer multiple times until getting it right, or display the right answer after theirs is submitted.
- Mix up question types - multiple choice, labeling, ordering - so the process doesn't become routine.
- Create questions that force students to apply lessons from the course material to real-life scenarios, often called "story problems."

Tip 3 - Add Supplemental Learning Materials

When designing online course, Dr. Renne Aitken, who conducted technical training at AT&T/Lucent for 24 years, always includes three types of learning assignments: reading, video lectures, and supplemental materials. Her rationale for including supplemental material is that a percent of students will use those materials, she wrote in an article for Online Learning Consortium.

She learned from personal experience that "those students exist. They love the subject, certain ideas intrigue them, or they just love to learn. And those are the students I think about when posting supplemental materials."

She explains that one reason she began adding supplemental material to her courses was because an educator once told her that of students in an online classes:

- 10% will read the minimum amount to complete the assignments
- 80% will read what is assigned
- 6% will look for extra help
- 4% will read everything

If you choose to post supplemental materials for your employees, good options to beef up the basic lessons include additional relevant videos, lectures, research papers, blog posts, books, and podcasts.

Tip 4 - Create Opportunities for Student Collaboration

An often overlooked opportunity with online training is the chance to improve results by supporting student collaboration. Research has shown that engagement stimulates cross-cultural exchange, exposes students to new ideas, and forges relationships that can significantly increase their understanding of the material and their likelihood of success.

According to research conducted by St. Germain, online trainers should use features inside their Learning Management System, like discussion boards, to help students share opinions and viewpoints about course topics and build on each other's knowledge.

Here are a few student collaboration tips:

- Encourage students to share personal information like hobbies, interests, and demographic data to build community and create a friendly online environment.
- Monitored student discussions to ensure that students aren't being excessively polite, which will undermine genuine sharing.
- Foster a secure online setting that affirms diversity of thought and critical inquiry into the subject matter.

Online learning research is just in the early stages of learning how to create the most impactful and successful training courses. In the coming years, researchers will uncover more insights. Until then, you can make significant forward strides in your corporate training program's courses by adding short videos, short test, supplemental materials and a structure that supports collaborative employee training.