

Ideas for Supporting Learners and Learning

T

his chapter highlights ideas that support learners and improve the potential for desired results. These elements are often, sadly, forgotten but they can have a huge impact.

Organizations will sometimes spend tons of money building multimedia or buying a learning management system and then forget to support learners so they can learn. It is critical for designers, instructors, and organizations to consider how learners will know what's expected of them, become prepared, stay on task, and gain support when they need it (and they will need it). Many of these simple ideas take little time and money to implement but can have huge results.

Learning Agreements

The Big Idea

What

A learning agreement helps learners clarify, for themselves and for the instructor, how they will proceed before beginning a course. Clarity helps learners develop commitment at the front end.

Figure 1.1. Learning Agreement

Learning Agreement

Name: Melane McCuller (Preview)
 Start time: November 9, 2005 10:50am
 Number of questions: 4

[Finish](#) [Help](#)

This is a Learning Agreement form.

As an adult, you are in charge of and responsible for your own learning. As an instructor I will provide expertise in the field and a structured program that you can help design and participate in. The extent of that effort in design is your choice.

Please first choose to either use the prepared plan in the syllabus (which will include Practices and Projects graded on a point system) or to design your own based on the course goals and objectives. Then refine that choice by completing the rest of the questions that follow it. Finally, sign the agreement and submit the results by clicking FINISH.

Question 1 (0 points)
 Which plan do you choose?

☐ a. Syllabus-based plan, either self-paced or due dates.
☐ b. Self-designed plan (must meet with instructor first week of classes to plan your course based on your degree plan and goals.)

[Save answer](#)

Question 2 (0 points)
 Learning Objectives: the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to be acquired. How do you plan to handle setting objectives for each major assignment?

☐ a. Use the ones stated in the syllabus (be sure to read them.)
☐ b. Set my own objectives. (Arrange a meeting with the instructor to set objectives; this works well for persons in specific degree plans that require specialized writing skills.)

[Save answer](#)

Question 3 (0 points)
 If you choose to follow the syllabus plan exactly, also choose to follow either the self-paced timing or the due-date timing as mentioned in the Schedule.

☐ a. SELF PACING: I prefer to turn in assignments on my own schedule, not exceeding the final due dates mentioned in the second column of the Schedule. (Notice that this does not free you to turn in all assignments the last week of class—it's merely a looser format than regular due dates, good for those persons who don't require regimentation.)
☐ b. DUE DATES: I prefer to turn in assignments using the Recommended Due Dates in the Schedule. (This is the safer route for those who have not yet learned self-discipline.)

[Save answer](#)

Question 4 (10 points)
 This is an official "signature" designating your choice. Delete the ones you don't want, leave the one you are agreeing to, then add your signature.

1. I agree to write my own learning agreement for each of the six major categories in the course.
 2. I agree to using the syllabus plan in self-paced mode (recognizing that there are still some deadlines.)
 3. I agree to using the syllabus plan in due-date mode as outlined in the schedule.

Signature:

[Save answer](#)

[Finish](#) [Help](#)

Question Status

☐ Unanswered
☒ Answered
☐ Answer not saved

1 2 3 4

Source: Melane Z. McCuller, http://www.oit.sfasu.edu/faculty/mmcculler/ENG_273_502_McCullerS06.html

Why

Motivation and perseverance are likely to be increased when learners are asked to consider and then commit to how they will proceed.

Use It!

How

In Melane McCuller's *Scientific and Technical Writing* course, learners complete a Learning Agreement, in which they commit to a course of action to be followed throughout the semester. Learners have the option of largely determining their own course of action or going along with the plan developed by the instructor. They can choose from a range of options including strict due dates, partially self-paced due dates, emphasis on product, emphasis on process, and others.

After using this agreement for six semesters, McCuller reports that while most learners are content to accept the traditional approach, those who choose one of the optional plans seem to be more actively involved in their own learning process and are generally more successful in implementing self-disciplined strategies resulting in better learning outcomes. Even those who choose the syllabus with due dates expressed that having a choice made them feel more committed to maintaining consistent progress. McCuller suggests that instructors wanting to implement a similar process must be flexible, diligent in tracking learner progress, and prepared for a high level of interaction with learners.

McCuller implements learning agreements using the quiz function in WebCT, but this could also be implemented using other quiz or survey programs, a Web form and database, or via email.

Adopt or Adapt

This idea can be used effectively in any classroom, blended, or online course and, if used, should be implemented at the beginning of the learning experience. It could be used in self-paced learning, with the learning

agreement sent to (and hopefully followed up by) the learner's manager. It would be beneficial to request that learners consider and commit to the effort and results they will provide.

This idea could also be implemented with an online survey tool such as Question Pro (<http://www.questionpro.com>) or Zoomerang (<http://info.zoomerang.com>) or by using a Web form, word processing document, or email.

Attribution

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URL: http://www.oit.sfasu.edu/faculty/mmcculler/ENG_273_502_McCullerS06.html

Prework Verification

The Big Idea

What

A simple Web form and database lets learners verify that they have completed the required prework prior to a learning event. A dynamically populated Web page (with the data coming from a live database) also shows course administrators who has completed the prework. In addition, this form can request important information about each of the participants so that the instructors can be prepared to meet the participants’ needs.

Figure 1.2. Prework Form

Step 5: Let us know you have completed Steps 1-4 no later than October 6:

Since preparation of your laptop greatly impacts the value of the workshop, we need to know you have completed these steps. We'd also like a few pieces of additional information in order to make the workshop a success (this information will only be shared with workshop presenters). Please fill out the following form and click the Submit button. (If you have questions about pre-work or the workshop, post them in the [discussion area](#).)

Name:

Email:

Primary job responsibility:

select one

Primary work environment:

select one

Have you completed steps 1-4?

yes

no

What 2 things do you need to get from this workshop?

Anything else we should know about you to help you get the most from this workshop?

Submit

Source: Learning Peaks, LLC

Figure 1.3. Pework Results

.canon.com	Instructional design	Corporate	Yes	1) Overview of Online Learning and Training Fundamentals 2) Instructional Design Overview	instruction as well looking forward to concepts and strat implemented
@irs.gov	Trainer	Government	Yes	Hands-on experience Knowledge	First-time user.
oe.gov	Other (explain)	Government	Yes	Practical experience in developing—quick and dirty. ;>	I have developed has been some tim initiative.
erault@novell.com	Trainer	Corporate	Yes	Identify new activities to make our online learning more interactive. Gain some practical experience creating this type of training using different tools.	I split my time betw and designing anc looking at gaining that will develop sl
.ngc.com	Instructor/faculty	Corporate	Yes	Learn something about developing a web site and about putting information on the site. Plus . . . learn how to work the programs that you have suggested that we put on the lap-top. I know nothing about them . . . have never used them.	Please start with b never written in htr language. I'm a M computer user.

Source: Learning Peaks, LLC

Why

Confirming completion of prework compels learners to be accountable and allows instructors to intervene as needed with those who have not finished. Getting information about learners in advance helps instructors prepare to meet learner needs.

Use It!

How

Eric Replinger and Patti Shank taught a beginner's authoring workshop that required learners to undertake a fair amount of technical preparation prior to the course. Anyone attending unprepared would not be able to perform the activities and this would negatively impact the experience of other participants as well. To ensure that all participants had adequately prepared, Replinger and Shank developed a simple Web site with explicit preparation instructions and a discussion board so participants could ask questions or get help with preparation.

The last step of learner preparation was filling in a form that verified that all the steps had been completed and provided information about their specific needs. Form data were sent to a database. Replinger built a very simple results Web page that pulled all the data into a simple table so he and Shank could ensure that preparation was complete and understand learner needs. Development was done with Dreamweaver, PHP, and MySQL.

Adopt or Adapt

This idea could be adapted for any type of prework or follow-up for a classroom-based, blended, or online course. For example, a process like this could be used by learners before instruction to commit to the steps needed to complete the instruction or to confirm pre-reading, and afterwards to commit to follow-on activities or to confirm completion of action plan items. These measures could also be accomplished through emails or telephone calls.

Attribution

Submitted by Eric Replinger, Flambeau Productions, Inc., Centennial, Colorado, USA

Also involved: Patti Shank, president, Learning Peaks, LLC, Centennial, Colorado, USA

Study Schedule

The Big Idea

What

Online learners often experience reduced external motivation to stay on task, making it easy to fall behind and never recover. A study schedule and a weekly update can help learners stay accountable and on track.

Figure 1.4. Study Schedule

Week 1		
07 March to 11 March, 2005		
Other weeks: - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12		
Study Material	Tasks	Content
Study Guide chapter 1. Text chapters 1, 2, 3. (yes, this IS a lot - don't try to digest it all, but come back to it later as required).	Read the Course Profile Join the mailing list Thoroughly familiarise yourself with the web site!	Introduction to course and operating systems. Revision of computer system structures. Introduction to the structure of operating systems.
Week 2		
14 March to 18 March, 2005		
Other weeks: - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12		
Study Material	Tasks	Content
Study Guide chapter 2. Text chapters 4, 5	Read and try to understand. If you do, great. If you don't, ask questions via the email list . Try some of the animations . Check out the Related Links .	Introduction to the process concept. Basic overview of cooperating processes and IPC. Threads.
Week 3		
21 March to 24 March, 2005		
Other weeks: - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12		
Study Material	Tasks	Content
Study Guide chapter 3. Text chapter 6	Read and try to understand. If you do, great. If you don't, ask questions via the email list . This and any other week you can give feedback via the course barometer .	CPU scheduling algorithms.
Week 4		
29 March to 01 April, 2005		
Other weeks: - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12		
Study Material	Tasks	Content
Study Guide chapter 4. Text chapter 7	Read and try to understand. If you do, great (chapter 7 is the hardest in the	Concurrency. Mutual exclusion. Some simple, incorrect solutions.

Source: Tim Roberts, http://www.infocom.cqu.edu.au/Staff/Tim_Roberts/

Why

Helping learners remain accountable and on track improves their likelihood of success.

Use It!

How

The study schedule, which guides learners' weekly activities, is posted on the course Web site. This is a core component of all of Tim Roberts's courses. It describes the following components:

- Study materials and readings relevant to the week
- Tasks to be accomplished (with links)
- Content covered

Roberts sends an email at the end of each week to reinforce the items in the study schedule in a friendly manner, reminding learners what they should have completed during the week. For example:

Hi all,

Well, it's the end of week two already. So let me state where you should be if you're going to keep up and pass this course:

In the first two weeks you should have

1. Bought the textbook
2. Subscribed to this list
3. Read the course profile
4. Dedicated one or more blocks of time each week to coursework
5. Acquainted yourself with the Web site and read the details of the assessment items for this semester

6. Read the first two chapters in the Study Guide

7. Read the first five chapters of the textbook

An average learner will need to allow AT LEAST TEN HOURS PER WEEK to read and understand the material. Remember that if there are things in the list that you have any difficulty with, there are lots of help resources. In particular:

- PowerPoint slides
- Other texts available from the library
- Animations illustrating some of the concepts
- Other operating system resources on the Web

Most important of all, there is this discussion list, where you can ask questions about anything you don't understand. Please post questions about any of the course content. Otherwise, I will have to assume it has all been understood and hence must be easy, and I will set the exam based on this assumption. :-)

These messages reinforce the importance of keeping on track and reminding participants that they are part of a larger community whose members all face similar difficulties and challenges. Emails also deliberately remind learners of the resources available to help them learn and to encourage them to post questions and concerns.

Adopt or Adapt

The study schedule and reminder emails can be adapted easily. Although this approach is especially relevant to instructor-led online courses, it could be adapted for self-paced and ongoing classroom-based and blended courses that have readings and assignments. It could even be adapted for use with project teams.

Attribution

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Also involved: The whole CQU InfoCom Web Tech Team

Performance Tips

The Big Idea

What

Put yourselves in a learner's place and determine what help they will need. Then add performance tips to help learners gain direction with study strategies and course activities.

Figure 1.5. Performance Tip 1

Performance Tips Access the Discussion Board [\[vii\]](#) at least once a day. Scroll down the list of forums. If you see under "Messages" a yellow highlight over a number preceding the word "New," this indicates that one or more messages have been added – messages that you have not read. Click on the underlined title of the forum to see the unread messages. Example: [11 messages] []

Source: Frank L. Christ

Figure 1.6. Performance Tip 2

Performance Tips Your catch-up week is a time to work on your remaining activities and assignments. A list of them along with point values follows: Annotated Bibliography/400 points Next Steps Paper/400 points, 230 points for interaction in weekly DB forums and with the V VS [\[x\]](#), Open Book Exam/300 points BQRQ [\[xi\]](#)/75 points for a total of 1405 points.

Source: Frank L. Christ

Figure 1.7. Performance Tip 3

Performance Tips The Help Manual, "Course Reading Questions Help Manual" which you can find in the "Learning Support" section, is helpful for you to use as you answer these reading questions. Print it and store in your Course Binder for offline study and use.

Source: Frank L. Christ

Why

Helping learners thrive is a large part of our jobs. Using existing data about common problems or questions will help learners be more successful.

Use It!

How

Frank Christ integrates performance tips into his online courses through course announcements, emails to learners, and his weekly introductions to reading assignments. As he teaches the course, he compiles a master list of performance tips and then cuts and pastes from that list into the course as appropriate. He also asks learners to contribute performance tips to help other learners.

Adopt or Adapt

As a course is used by learners, data about problems and questions become available. In addition to fixing problems that trip up learners, it's helpful to anticipate common questions and ways to get off track and provide guidance. This could be done for any type of course, whether classroom-based, blended, or online.

Attribution

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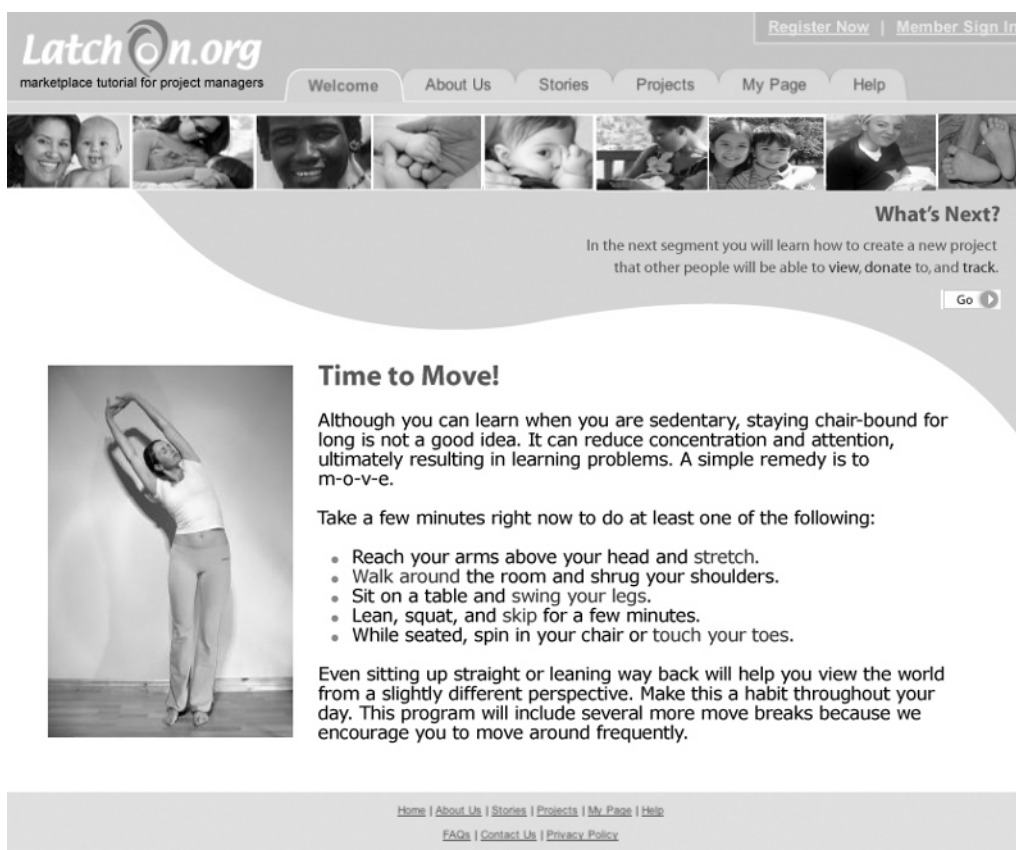
Move It

The Big Idea

What

Are we more than eyeballs? We are. Although we usually focus only on the computer portion of the online learning experience, a whole-body experience has definite merits. Consider encouraging learners to get out of that chair between lessons.

Figure 1.8. Movement Instructions in an Online Tutorial



The screenshot shows the Latchon.org website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links: Register Now, Member Sign In, Welcome, About Us, Stories, Projects, My Page, and Help. Below the navigation bar is a row of eight small images showing various people in different poses. The main content area features a section titled "What's Next?" with the text: "In the next segment you will learn how to create a new project that other people will be able to view, donate to, and track." Below this text is a "Go" button with a right arrow. The section is followed by a large image of a person performing a stretch, with the heading "Time to Move!". The text below the image reads: "Although you can learn when you are sedentary, staying chair-bound for long is not a good idea. It can reduce concentration and attention, ultimately resulting in learning problems. A simple remedy is to m-o-v-e." Below this text is a list of five bullet points: "Reach your arms above your head and stretch.", "Walk around the room and shrug your shoulders.", "Sit on a table and swing your legs.", "Lean, squat, and skip for a few minutes.", and "While seated, spin in your chair or touch your toes." Below the list is a paragraph: "Even sitting up straight or leaning way back will help you view the world from a slightly different perspective. Make this a habit throughout your day. This program will include several more move breaks because we encourage you to move around frequently." At the bottom of the page, there is a footer with links: Home, About Us, Stories, Projects, My Page, Help, FAQs, Contact Us, and Privacy Policy.

Latchon.org
marketplace tutorial for project managers

Register Now | Member Sign In

Welcome | About Us | Stories | Projects | My Page | Help

What's Next?
In the next segment you will learn how to create a new project that other people will be able to view, donate to, and track.
Go

Time to Move!
Although you can learn when you are sedentary, staying chair-bound for long is not a good idea. It can reduce concentration and attention, ultimately resulting in learning problems. A simple remedy is to m-o-v-e.

Take a few minutes right now to do at least one of the following:


- Reach your arms above your head and stretch.
- Walk around the room and shrug your shoulders.
- Sit on a table and swing your legs.
- Lean, squat, and skip for a few minutes.
- While seated, spin in your chair or touch your toes.

Even sitting up straight or leaning way back will help you view the world from a slightly different perspective. Make this a habit throughout your day. This program will include several more move breaks because we encourage you to move around frequently.

Home | About Us | Stories | Projects | My Page | Help
FAQs | Contact Us | Privacy Policy


Source: Marcia L. Conner, <http://www.agelesslearner.com>

Figure 1.9. Movement Instructions in an Online Community



Ageless Learner
COMMUNITY
NETWORK
Version 1.0

Whole-body Learning



The physical exercises throughout this community are designed to help you become more aware of how you learn, how you create new patterns, and how you establish new pathways to learn more. If you're considering skipping these in an effort to learn even faster, let me assure you that these activities shouldn't take long, and they will help you establish your learning in more of your body than if you only read and took notes. I promise to keep exercises short and focus on making the most of your time.

— [Marcia Conner](#), Chief Learning Officer

Search: All Modules


[advanced search](#)

Course Statistics


Getting Started

People in Network: [1753](#)
Discussions: [386](#)
Modules Available: [88](#)
Message Posts: 16077
Shared Resources: [684](#)

Feeling overwhelmed? Don't know where to start? [Get help here!](#) Next, find a photo of yourself to [upload for your profile!](#)



Spotlight Move



Instructions

Inhale while sweeping arms up, raising rib cage and extending spine. Exhale while returning.






Repeat 10 times.

Do this between every module.

Additional Resources

Training the Olympic Athlete
Sports science and technology are today providing elite competitors with the tiny margins needed to win in world-class competition by Jay T. Kearney

<http://www.sciam.com/0696issue/>

Select A Language:  English  Español  Deutsch  Français  Italiano [About language...](#)

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This site was built by GoLightly Community using [PHP](#), [Smarty](#), [MySQL](#), [freeBSD](#), [phpBB](#), and [plog](#). — version 1.007, 2005.07.22 17:53PDT
Please email us if you find any problems with the site.

Source: Marcia L. Conner, <http://www.agelesslearner.com>

Why

Sitting in a chair for long periods leads to lethargy, drowsiness, and decreased attention, which are not the best states for learning. A simple remedy is to encourage learners to *move*.

Use It!

How

Even though it's possible to learn while sedentary, staying chair bound for long isn't a good idea. Sitting for a long time takes its toll on your body. It can result in poor breathing, back trouble, poor eyesight, body fatigue, and a limited perspective. These problems can reduce concentration and attention, ultimately resulting in difficulty staying focused and learning. Something as simple as changing posture can energize and encourage the learning process.

A simple remedy is to encourage learners to get up, walk, swing their legs or arms, lean, kneel, squat, spin, or skip at different times throughout the day. Instructional designers and developers can incorporate a movement break between content modules.

Some ideas: Invite learners to stretch, juggle, jog in place, walk to get water, or spin in their chairs. Even sitting up straight or leaning way back will help learners view the world from a slightly different perspective. Have learners stand and turn one rotation to the left or right and then sit back down. Ask them to tap the length of one arm with one hand, then change arms, and then reach up and stretch. Or have them create a figure eight in the air in front of them, focusing on a thumb, then on the wall behind it and then back at their outstretched arm. Have them wiggle their toes and rotate their heads from side to side, shrug their shoulders, or march around the room.

Marcia Conner came up with this idea after working with countless groups of learners whose attention was wandering after trying harder and harder but never getting up from their desks. Researching the body-mind connection led her to see that even a little movement would help regain focus. She has included movement in large curricula, in callouts on Web pages, in accompanying handbooks for e-learning courses—wherever she can stick a few lines of text (and maybe a simple picture or two) that encourage people to get up from their chairs.

Adopt or Adapt

This idea can be used in any classroom, blended, or online program.

Attribution

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Confirm Exercise Instructions

The Big Idea

What

After giving instructions in a synchronous online classroom, ask a participant to reexplain the instructions to the group before sending them off to work in breakout rooms, to share applications, or to view Web sites.

Why

To avoid frustration and potential rework, learners need to be sure they know what to do. Instructors often think they're being perfectly clear, but learners tell us this isn't so.

Use It!

How

When giving exercise instructions in a synchronous online classroom, make sure people understand what you are asking of them. Post the instructions on a slide, then explain the instructions, then ask someone to repeat what they think you just said.

Jennifer Hofmann's Example

"Since you'll be working on your own for the next ten minutes and I won't be able to see if you are moving in the right direction, can one of you please repeat the instructions back so I can be certain I've clearly explained the exercise? Mary, would you like to explain *your* understanding of the exercises?"

Adopt or Adapt

This idea can be used in classroom-based, blended, or online courses where synchronous activities are occurring.

Attribution

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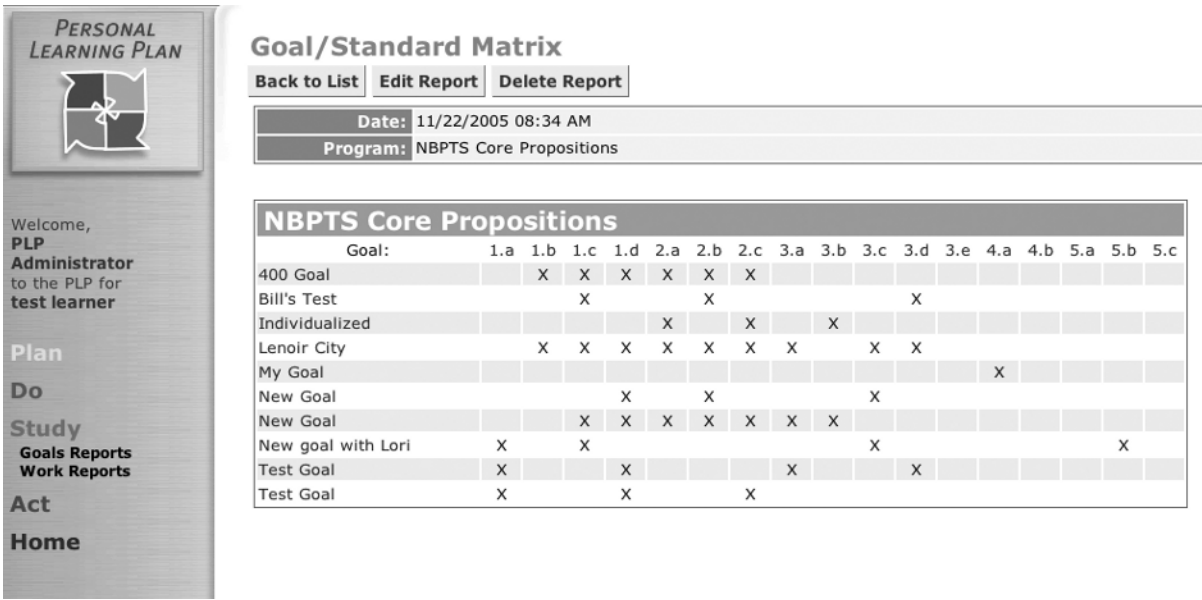
E-Portfolio

The Big Idea

What

Learners can plan, create, organize, and reflect on work samples using an online portfolio.

Figure 1.10. Personal Learning Plan Goal Achievement Matrix



Source: David Gibson, <http://www.curveshift.com>

Why

Portfolios are becoming more and more popular as a means of demonstrating achievement of instructional outcomes and growth. E-portfolios allow this to occur online, making it easier for others to see the portfolio and provide input. E-portfolios can provide a place for learners to organize evidence of meeting instructional goals.

Use It!

How

E-portfolios often include the following elements:

- Coursework samples
- Artifacts from noncoursework (work or personal) activities
- Commentary about the portfolio items

More and more instructors ask learners to publish online course portfolios. Some universities are requiring online portfolios as a graduation requirement. The portfolio development process encourages learners to become more responsible for achieving educational goals. Learners benefit by

- Sharing work samples with instructors, peers, and potential employers
- Demonstrating mastery of skills beyond the classroom
- Reflecting on their learning

An electronic format allows learners to share work more easily.

The Personal Learning Plan is an e-portfolio application that can be used individually or as part of a team. The instructor gives learners the URL and the password so they can post their work and track achievement of their goals. Instructors, teaching assistants, and peers can provide online feedback.

Adopt or Adapt

Although they are most commonly used in a K–12 or higher education setting, portfolios could also be used to demonstrate progress and mastery in a training or coaching setting. They are especially useful where standards and professional outcomes are important benchmarks of achievement.

The portfolio products could be organized in a three-ring binder or electronic folder. If an electronic and publicly available version is desirable, a wiki or Web site could be used to describe and link to portfolio products.

Attribution

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URL: <http://www.curveshift.com>

Anonymous Weekly Survey

The Big Idea

What

Anonymous forms are used to solicit honest responses from learners. These responses can be summarized by the instructor, a learner, or a team.

Figure 1.11. Weekly Survey Form

Anonymous Weekly Survey

1. What questions or problems came up this week that will require further investigation (or, that you'd just like to know more about)?	
2. Are you experiencing any challenges with key course activities -- discussion, group work, and projects? What are your suggestions from improving these activities?	
3. Was the pace this week too fast, too slow, just right? What would you suggest as a way of changing the pace? e.g., cover the topics in less depth, restrict discussion, change project/s, etc.	
4. Why did I ask you to complete this week's activities? What was the purpose of each activity?	
5. What did you learn from the activities completed this week?	
6. What activity was the most useful for you this week? Why?	
7. What activity was the least useful for you this week? Why? How would you improve it?	
8. Other comments, concerns, issues?	

Submit Query

Source: Joanna C. Dunlap

Why

An anonymous survey lets learners provide timely feedback to the instructor that can be acted on immediately. Waiting until the end of a course to ask learners what needs to change doesn't allow the instructor to make needed changes for current learners.

Use It!

How

Online instructors need to create environments in which learners feel safe to express themselves, share their ideas, and ask questions; otherwise, learner concerns can escalate into significant problems. It is important to provide a variety of ways for learners to communicate with the instructor. An anonymous weekly survey lets learners ask questions and voice concerns.

To gather information that can lead to appropriate enhancements, provide learners with specific questions to answer, such as those shown in Figure 1.11. Once you receive learners' responses, it is imperative to respond in public with points of clarification, modified plans of action, and appreciation. Besides helping learners feel more connected to the course and instructor, this activity can encourage learners to reflect on their achievement, learning processes, and progress toward learning goals as well as recognize how the course is supporting or derailing their efforts.

As an alternative to the instructor responding, individual learners or teams can take responsibility for summarizing and responding to each week's survey responses. An interesting outcome of this is that it requires learners to think about their comments from the instructor's perspective and consider why the course is set up as it is. It can give them a newfound appreciation for the level of commitment it takes to create successful online learning opportunities. It can also be a particularly enlightening experience for learners who are preparing to be online educators, because they get to

experience firsthand the reflective process behind making instructional strategy decisions and then defending or modifying them as appropriate.

Finally, the valuable information shared during these exchanges can be turned into a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document to benefit the class participants, both currently and in the future.

Joanna Dunlap explains that this approach addresses her need to anticipate and proactively address learners' questions and potential problems as the course progresses, as opposed to waiting for end-of-semester evaluations. She wants learners to have a clear voice in the process and outcome of their experience throughout the course. She also wants to improve her skills as a teacher and realizes that honest, constructive feedback from learners will help her to do so.

An anonymous Web form, instead of email, allows learners more freedom to share concerns they might otherwise not disclose. These forms send the data to Dunlap's email address.

Adopt or Adapt

This technique would work well for any classroom-based, blended, or online course. A survey tool such as Question Pro (<http://www.questionpro.com>) or Zoomerang (<http://info.zoomerang.com>) would also work for this purpose, as would email, but as already noted, the latter would not be anonymous. This approach could also work in ongoing classroom-based courses, using either electronic or paper forms.

Attribution

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Personal Wishes

The Big Idea

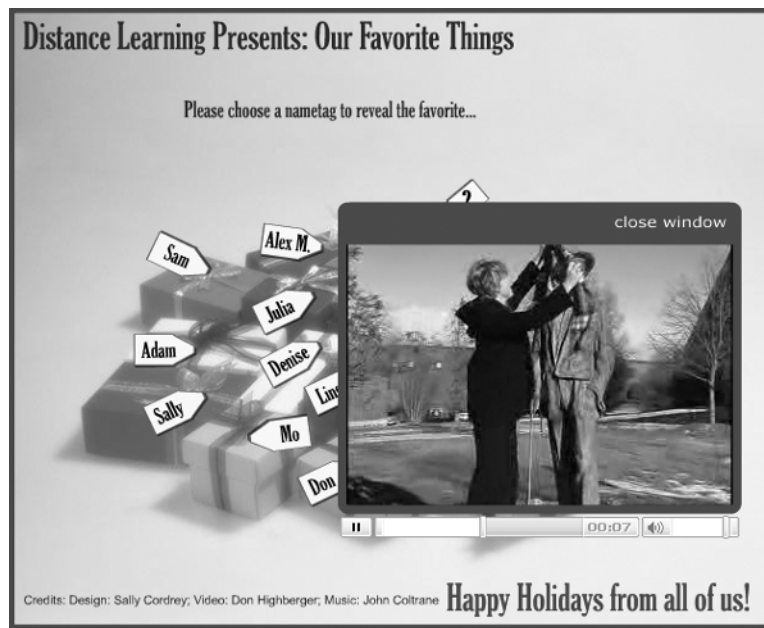
What

Use media to send holiday or other greetings to learners.

Figure 1.12. Web Card



Source: Distance Learning, Regis University, School for Professional Studies,
http://support.regis.edu/holiday_card05/holiday_card05.html

Figure 1.13. Ellen's Video Message

Source: Distance Learning, Regis University, School for Professional Studies, http://support.regis.edu/holiday_card05/holiday_card05.html

Why

Graphics and audio and video messages can help people at a distance connect with people they have not met in person and feel part of the greater community.

Use It!

How

Regis University's School for Professional Studies, which includes the group responsible for distance learning, developed a holiday greeting that used graphics, audio, and video to wish learners, faculty, and others involved in the school a happy holiday. The greeting provides personal video messages from each staff member.

Adopt or Adapt

Media-based welcome messages, birthday greetings, and faculty course introductions can help learners connect with people involved in course development and implementation, including designers, faculty, multimedia developers, tech support people, registrars, and others. This approach could provide a warm touch from training developers too.

Attribution

Submitted by Ellen Waterman, director of distance learning, Regis University, School for Professional Studies, Denver, Colorado, USA

URL: http://support.regis.edu/holiday_card05/holiday_card05.html

Also involved: Sally Cordrey, multimedia specialist, Regis University, School for Professional Studies, Denver, Colorado, USA

Really Simple Syndication Feeds

The Big Idea

What

Provide critical information to employees and customers with a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed so they can get critical information quickly.

Figure 1.14. RSS Feed

Security Advisories

New! Cyberworlds Security Advisory RSS Feed

RSS

RSS (for "Rich Site Summary" or "Real Simple Syndication") is a great way to keep tabs on your favorite sites. It requires the use of a special program, known as a "feed reader" or "news aggregator." If you already have a reader, use the RSS button above to set up your CSA link. If you don't have a feed reader, check out [FeedDemon](#) (commercial) or [FeedReader](#) (free and Open Source).

Cyberworlds Security Advisories:

Note: The advisories are not integrated into the website navigation system, so you will need to use your browser's "Back" button to return to this page.

[01-25-06: Beware the Blackworm]
[01-11-06: QuickTime Critical Flaw Fix]
[01-11-06: MS January 2006 Updates]
[01-05-06: MS WMF Fix Released]
[12-27-05: WMF 0-day Exploit]
[12-27-05: Dell Battery Recall]
[12-13-05: MS December 2005 Updates]
[11-23-05: New Sober on the Loose]
[11-21-05: MS IE Flaw Allows Remote Attack]
[11-10-05: MS November 2005 Updates]
[10-12-05: MS October 2005 Updates]


Source: Jack Johnson, <http://www.cyberworlds.com>

Why

RSS feeds can be more effective than email as a way to provide critical information.

Use It!

How

RSS is an XML format for sharing content items. Once information about each content item is in RSS format, an aggregator can check the RSS feed for changes and display new items. RSS is now used for many purposes, including news headlines, bug reports, and periodic updates. On Web pages, the XML used to link to the RSS feeds is found by clicking on the universal RSS icon. 

One of the services that Cyberworlds, an information technology consulting firm, provides its clients is the Cyberworlds Security Advisory. When Cyberworlds becomes aware of a security issue that clients may need to know about, it publishes an advisory on its Web site and sends out an email notification. Because email is becoming a less reliable way to communicate critical information (because of email spam filters and so on), Cyberworlds now provides an RSS feed so clients can get needed information in a more reliable manner.

Adopt or Adapt

Learn about RSS (a good place to start would be <http://weblogged.com/wp-content/uploads/2006/05/RSSFAQ4.pdf>) and consider using this technology to get critical information to employees and customers.

Attribution

Submitted by Jack Johnson, president, Cyberworlds, Beloit, Wisconsin, USA

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URL: <http://www.cyberworlds.com>

Contingency Plans

The Big Idea

What

Have in place contingency plans in case of technology failures or other typical technology-based learning problems, and have others who are involved in the process develop them too.

**Figure 1.15. Contingency Planning Activity
for Instructors, Facilitators, and Administrators**

Program Component	Situation	Contingency Plan
Participants	Several participants monopolize the question-and-answer segments, keeping others from contributing.	
Guest Expert(s)	An interviewee, who was scheduled to be at the instructor’s site, calls 15 minutes before the session to say she has car trouble and will not be able to make the session.	
Site	The Site Coordinator calls in ill shortly before the program is to begin.	
Activities	You have planned a group interaction at each site. Because of extenuating circumstances, one of the sites has only one person.	

Source: Rosemary Lehman, <http://www.uwex.edu/ics/design>

Why

Some people say there are only two types of technology-based learning events—those that have encountered glitches and those that will! Glitches and problems happen and back-up plans make them easier to deal with.

Use It!

How

Rosemary Lehman's team develops activities and plans for use in the event of video or audio failure or both (sometimes even instigated by the instructors to illustrate technology failure) during live online learning events. A colored envelope with an activity inside is included in class materials for each site to "open in case of emergency." Instructions on how to complete the activity are included. The content of the activity can be either general or specific to the session. Activity results can be used as discussion points when reconnection is made, at the following session, or for discussion about contingencies.

Developing contingency plans is a good activity to do "on purpose" when training instructors, facilitators, and administrators how to handle glitches and problems.

Adapt or Adapt

This idea can be adapted for use in any learning environment. Have contingency activities available and have instructors, facilitators, and administrators develop contingency plans for the most common problems. Show examples of plans that others have successfully implemented. This would also be a good activity to use when training classroom trainers (for example, how to handle rude participants, use of cell phones during instruction, and so on).

Attribution

Submitted by Rosemary Lehman, senior outreach/distance education specialist and manager, Instructional Design Team, Instructional Communications Systems, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Madison, USA

Contact: lehman@ics.uwex.edu

URL: <http://www.uwex.edu/ics/design>

Also involved: Richard A. Berg, instructional design/distance education specialist, and Bruce E. Dewey, outreach/distance education specialist, both from the Instructional Design Team, Instructional Communications Systems, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Madison, Wisconsin, USA

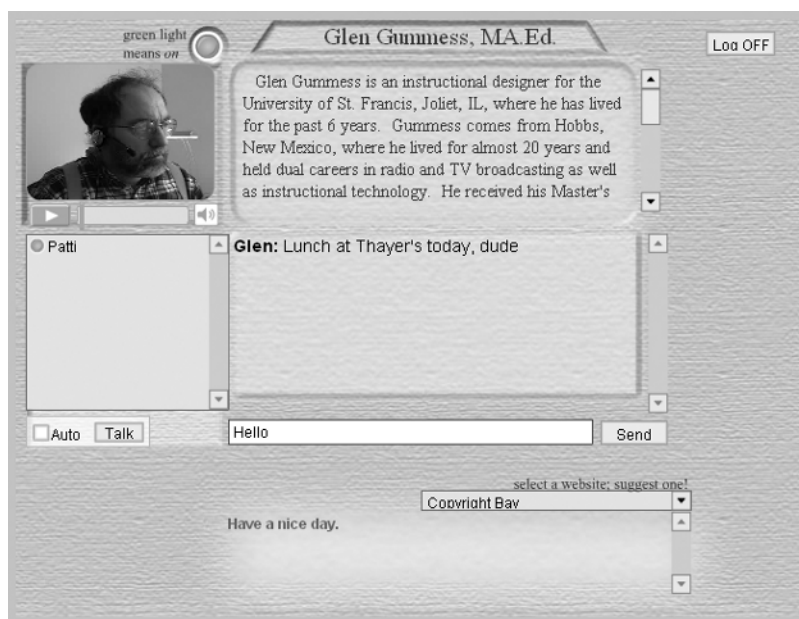
Virtual Office Hours

The Big Idea

What

Virtual office hours with text chat and real-time video and audio conferencing allows instructors and learners to interact easily in real time.

Figure 1.16. Virtual Office Hours



Source: Glen Gummess, <http://www.stfrancis.edu/cid/gummess>

Why

Learners and instructors can easily communicate at a distance, improving the sense of connection.

Use It!

How

Glen Gummess created a virtual office hours application using Flash to build the interface and the Flash Communication Server to build the application. It allows text-based chat, audio- and videoconferencing, and instructor controls for changing passwords, erasing chat messages, and dropping the learner, if needed.

The application is easily customized for each instructor by changing one line of ActionScript code. Deployment takes a few minutes after a request is received. Users need only have basic skills in accessing the Web page to use this application. A less experienced user may use just the text chat, but with an additional webcam, microphone, and minimum broadband connection, the whole range of videoconferencing possibilities are within reach.

This idea requires a Web server of sufficient size and speed to host Flash Communication Server, which establishes the paths for communication between client computers and streaming video and audio. The Flash Communication Server is a relatively inexpensive streaming technology that Gummess says is quite challenging to learn. The developer must be competent at writing both client-side and server-side ActionScript. Gummess cautions that it's also critical to make the finished application easy to use. "In fact, usability is so important that to disregard the issue is to invite serious technical and administrative support ramifications." Once developed, the application should be instantly usable for the online novice instructor and learner, with very little support required.

The idea grew out of a need expressed by nursing college professors who wanted to afford learners a rich interpersonal experience. Gummess developed a pilot and then mass-produced it after successful testing with instructors.

Adopt or Adapt

Although the development technology may be daunting for some, once developed it is easy to implement and use. Other Web conferencing applications could be used for the same purpose.

Attribution

Submitted by Glen Gummess, instructional designer, University of St. Francis, Joliet, Illinois, USA

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URL: <http://www.stfrancis.edu/cid/gummess>

Chatbots

The Big Idea

What

Chatbots (also known as chatterbots or talk bots) can help prepare online learners, initiate conversation, respond to questions, and break the ice.

Figure 1.17. PhiliPa

The screenshot shows the SCH.gr website interface. At the top, there's a header with the logo 'SCH.gr' and the text 'ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΟ ΣΧΟΛΙΚΟ ΔΙΚΤΥΟ' and 'Το δίκτυο στην υπηρεσία της Εκπαίδευσης'. The user's name 'nikilambropoulos nikilambropoulos' and 'Έξοδος' are in the top right. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: Αρχή, Πανελλήνιο Σχολικό Δίκτυο, Σελίδες της εκπαίδευσης, mySch, Υπηρεσίες, e-υλικά, Ενημέρωση, and Η σελίδα μου. A secondary bar contains: Αλληλογραφία και Οργάνωση, Συζητήσεις, Νέα, Τηλεκπαίδευση, Υπηρεσίες Πολυμέσων, and Άμεσα Μήνυμα.

The main content area is divided into sections:

- 2 Σχεδιασμός Βασικής 1ης Σελίδας**: Includes text about web design and a list of resources: ΜΕΡΟΣ Α: Οδηγίες για Πρώτες Ιστοσελίδες, Συζήτηση, ΜΕΡΟΣ Β: Δεσμοί (/linkς), ΜΕΡΟΣ Γ: Επεξεργασία Εικόνων, ΜΕΡΟΣ Δ: Ανέβασμα - Μεταφόρτωση, and Μεταξύ μας βοήθεια. There is a 'Μηνιαία' (Monthly) section on the left with links like 'Πληροφορική', 'Εισαγωγική ενότητα', 'Ελληνική Γλώσσα', and 'Δοκιμές'.
- 3 Επεξεργασία εικόνων για το Διαδίκτυο**: Includes links for 'Μικρές εικόνες..', 'Ελεύθερο (free) πρόγραμμα επεξεργασίας εικόνων', and 'Ελεύθερο (free) πρόγραμμα για να βλέπουμε εικόνες'.
- 4 Χρήσιμες Πληροφορίες**

On the right side, there's a chat window titled 'σχεδιασμό και την κατασκευή ιστοσελίδων αναλυτικά. Η προσέγγιση είναι βασισμένη στην εβδομαδιαία ανάπτυξη προβλημάτων από τους χρήστες. Κάθε εβδομάδα παρουσιάζεται ένα καινούριο πρόβλημα και οι χρήστες καλούνται να συνεργαστούν για να το λύσουν.' It features a cartoon character and a text input field with a 'Μιλείτε στη Φιλίππα:' label and an 'Αποδοχή' button.

The footer contains: 'Αρχική σελίδα', 'Όροι χρήσης και δήλωσης εχεμύθειας', 'Η παλιά ιστοσελίδα του Π.Σ.Δ.', 'Επικοινωνία', and a disclaimer: 'Το Πανελλήνιο Σχολικό Δίκτυο δεν ευθύνεται για περιεχόμενα που εμφανίζονται στο sch.gr και προέρχεται από τους χρήστες του ή από άλλες εξωτερικές πηγές. Η πύλη του Πανελλήνιου Σχολικού Δικτύου δημιουργήθηκε και συντηρείται με Ελεύθερο Λογισμικό και Λογισμικό Ανοικτού Κώδικα - PHP Apache Horde'.

Source: Niki Lambropoulos, <http://nikilambropoulos.org>

Why

This is a relatively new technology with a great deal of promise for supporting online learners. Although it's not in widespread use yet in learning, it's being used more and more to encourage online sales (see <http://www.oddcast.com/sitepal> for an example). This technology may soon be used to help online learners feel more connected.

Use It!

How

Chatbots are computer-generated, simulated "people" that can conduct a conversation with a human being using text or audio. Niki Lambropoulos's research suggests that chatbots can provide needed information and break the ice. This helps learners get started and stay engaged.

Lambropoulos's chatbot, PhiliPa (which can be seen at <http://e-mmersion.net>), can appear above discussion forums, ready to answer learners' questions. PhiliPa informs and also questions learners about course elements, their aims and objectives, assignments and submission details, how to get connected and use the course management system, how to learn online (such as study habits and time management), and how to communicate with communication tutors, developers, and so on. The instructor can program new information into the chatbot based on what is happening during the course (emails, content of the discussion forum, and so on). For example, if the instructor sees that learners are having problems with finding resources, he or she can program the chatbot to answer questions about resources (and recommend that learners see what the chatbot has to say).

PhiliPa is programmed with PHP (PHP Hypertext Preprocessor) and AIML (Artificial Intelligence Markup Language) using Ajax technology for instant messaging.

Adopt or Adapt

Although this is a relatively new technology and not yet in widespread use, it has a great deal of promise for augmenting online instruction. Enter “chatbots” into your favorite search engine to learn more, or start with the Wikipedia description (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chatbot>) for a good introduction. I’ve been hearing people talk about Flash-based chatbots too.

Attribution

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