



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### All About Training Design Documents

Some of the reasons for training going awry include a delay in the start of the session, prolonged programs, a sudden need for unplanned resources to finish training on time and the inclusion of unnecessary courseware. The failure of many training programs can be traced back to a key deliverable and its usage. This key deliverable is the training design document.

#### All about designs

The design document is a summary of the structure and content of the training program. It contains:

- Performance objectives
- Structure, course content and delivery time
- Evaluation strategy
- Design review

Training managers believe that regardless of the nature of the training, organizations have a process to follow that guarantees results and helps avoid expensive errors and rework. Designed by a team of internal or external developers or designers, this training design document helps maintain control over training development and delivery.

#### Designer ware

Design document details should be adequate and catch the trainer's eye. It should show:

- *Performance objectives*: These describe the features and functions that can be put to use by the trainer.
- *Layout*: The document should show the detailed outlines of the training flow, describe all the activities and practices, and specify the duration of every training segment. The right amount of detail helps maintain adequate control over the training process.
- *Evaluation strategy*: The document should define the assessment strategies and illustrate how trainers could reach their performance objectives.

Once a design document is in place, training gets underway. It is important to detect errors at the design stage. Undoing or redoing the process once it moves into the next phase of development is an expensive proposition.

#### The design document

A training design document is divided into many sections. As a trainer or training manager, knowledge about these sections can help reduce training surprises.

**Get into the details.** Every document has a basic structure. The description of the structure should make visualization of the flow of training possible. The description



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should include details such as how the course will proceed, its content, the level of interactivity and the types of practices involved.

**Proper estimates.** A good design document specifies how long it will take for participants to go through each training module/unit. These duration estimates help plan a proper training schedule.

**Need for resources.** In every design document, the designer anticipates the resources (publications, user guides, glossaries and documentation) that he will require. A training manager should keep track of the developer's informational requirements because resource availability is often a problem. A smart training manager is well-versed in different kinds of resources and their availability and can suggest alternatives or even recommend potential resources.

**Avoid evaluation errors.** Trainers are often caught unaware when the training needs are in contrast with the evaluation strategy. If the participant's skill and knowledge evaluation strategy isn't explicit, the design document should be sent back for modifications. The design document should state in detail what the course evaluation would involve.

Most trainers schedule a final examination of sorts at the end of a training session. The document should make provision for this and specify the type of evaluation a trainer needs to use at every stage. An unclear evaluation strategy affects the success of training programs.

**Time schedules.** In their enthusiasm to present the best document, developers schedule optimistic durations for training modules and units. A knowledgeable trainer is aware of the approximate time a unit/module should take.

Often developers use 'best practices' as group discussions or games. Although these best practices usually improve interaction between participants, they are time consuming and throw training schedules off track. A trainer should negotiate the inclusion of as many activities as he deems fit.

**Delivery strategy.** Let's say an organization budgeted for minimum travel during training. The design document however, scheduled quite a few outbound training sessions. Instead, it should have scheduled classroom intensive activities. Such discrepancies arise when a trainer isn't alert. The trainer should pay proper attention to the delivery strategy specified in the design document.

**Great expectations.** It is important that a trainer demand quality work from developers and emphasize the urgency of adhering to time schedules and training needs.

Organizations often ask developers to present the document in two parts. The developer initially presents a General Design Document. This is followed by a Detailed Design Document, which is modified based on feedback.

### **A little more to go!**

A trainer should use the document correctly. To do so he should



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- Make sure that people with grounding in reality are associated with the designing.
- Ask for explanations for deviations.
- Confirm assumptions regarding the current skills and knowledge level of participants, their ability to finish a certain module in the specified time, the ability of a trainer to conduct evaluations, and so on.
- Assess the duration of training events for adequacy. They shouldn't be longer or shorter than expected.
- Determine if the developers have understood how to get the participants to perform a particular task for which they are being trained.
- Let no point in the document go unexplained. For instance, the word 'motivation' can have several interpretations. A specific definition of what it means during a particular training event is mandatory.

Great expectations from a training document result in a training program that meets training needs. This in addition to informed and timely follow-up can save a trainer from unexpected and unpleasant training surprises. A trainer who painstakingly goes over the design document will have more control over any training program he or she conducts.