



## TenStep Supplemental Paper

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### Engaged to e-Learning!

Organizations are constantly looking for ways to deliver cost-effective training to their employees. Web-based training reduces spending on items such as booking training facilities, travel for employees and trainers, and employee time away from work. However, only a few organizations have benefited economically from their e-learning efforts. This is because organizations often hastily adopt e-learning. While implementing e-learning, training managers often assume that “if you build it, they will come,” only to realize that in actuality “they may come, but they won’t necessarily stay.”

#### Capturing Learners

Capturing the on-line learner’s attention is an arduous task. Employees expect on-line learning to be ‘flashy.’ While the net is engaging, interactive and meets the information demands of the user immediately, e-learning programs appear pedantic, dull and irrelevant. This dissuades the learner.

It is not enough if WBT merely delivers information and training. Whether an organization uses a stand-alone WBT program or blended learning (online learning coupled with classroom instructions), it must be designed to stimulate and grab learner attention. This is critical for the success of any WBT program. The **five** key elements of WBT (**entertainment, interaction, control, usability** and **customization**) keep the learners ‘hooked.’

#### Entertainment

While the purpose of e-learning is to teach and not to entertain, plain text and line drawings alone cannot hold the interest of users already exposed to the Internet. Making e-learning entertaining with multimedia ensures learner attention and retention.

WBT should thus include:

- **Backgrounds and borders.** These add visual appeal without diluting the message. The text should be presented with subtle images and pleasing palettes. Designed to be eye catching, supporting elements should not overpower or distract the user.
- **Graphics.** 2-D and 3-D messages capture learner attention better. Dimensional images increase the visual impact.
- **Photographs.** A picture is certainly worth a thousand words! With visual dynamics and real-world relevance, pictures can retain learners.
- **Animation.** Animation has always had great entertainment value. It conveys and clarifies concepts better than text.

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- **Sound.** Sound is another powerful medium of attracting learner attention. For effectiveness, narration should be limited to 20 seconds and should directly address the listener.
- **Video.** A video presentation combines image, motion and sound. Short and user-specific video clips are more meaningful and relevant to learning.
- **Themes and progressive storylines.** These non-media elements attract and engage learners. A theme or storyline can tie concepts and guide learners through e-learning courses. For instance, a sports theme such as baseball works well for team building, leadership and other soft skills. Online experts can act as ‘coaches,’ ‘running the bases’ can take the learner through content and ‘hits and misses’ can describe the effective and ineffective ways of managing teams. Storylines involving mystery solving can help link content.

### Interaction

At one time, learner interaction meant a multiple-choice question at the end of every lesson or concept. A web-based learner demands more impressive interaction. Even in the absence of an instructor, it is necessary to create points where the learner is required to either respond or take initiative.

Effective WBT can actively involve the learner through interaction on practically every page.

#### Interaction techniques:

- **Rollovers.** A learner has to roll the mouse over a designated text to get a pop-up capsule of added information.
- **Hot text or click zones.** When the learner in this interaction clicks on a designated text, it throws up a pop-up text, image changes and additional features linking inside and outside program information.
- **Drag and drops.** A learner can click on a marked element and move it to another location on the page. It enables learners to build concepts and sequence procedural steps.
- **Questions.** Questioning is a tested approach to get learners thinking. Combining the basic question types (multiple-choice, true or false and matching), with multi-media elements besides click zones with questioning, improves learner interaction.

### Control

In a restrictive learning program, the interest of a learner wanes steadily. Incorporating easy access to information and encouraging learners to play direct roles in managing their training encourages greater participation. An effective WBT provides:



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- **Course selection and progression.** Learners should be given the freedom to select and schedule courses with minimal managerial intervention. Making them responsible for their progress increases motivation.
- **Menus.** Learners like to access information quickly and efficiently; therefore, content should not be more than three clicks away from the main menu. Progress or completion flags prevent misuse or confusion resulting from total menu freedom.
- **Lesson length.** Learners are often disinclined to commit to lengthy single sitting training programs. Programs divided into small instructional bits of 15 to 20 minutes are ideal. They also allow the worker to attend to his routine duties.
- **Performance support.** WBT provides training to anyone, anytime, anywhere. This is advantageous because training events can be presented to employees at specific intervals, especially when their motivational levels are high. Learner attention is optimal at such times. WBT can also be used as a performance support tool.

### Usability

WBT is least user friendly when content is difficult to find, course tools don't work and navigation is inconsistent. Addressing usability guarantees a non-restrictive learning environment. Learners should be able to work through an e-learning course with minimal distraction and frustration.

Usability includes:

- **Instructional design.** The instructional flow in an e-learning program should be smooth and cover the learning objectives. Instructions should be well-focused to avoid wasting time.
- **Tutorial/help.** Short tutorials with helpful information are necessary for new web users. Online features and functions should be available for assistance.
- **Prompts.** Simple and obvious prompts like "Click the links for more information" and "Click next to continue" enhance usability.
- **Standards.** Using standardized, well-designed and consistent interaction types across the entire e-learning program reduces confusion among learners.

### Customization

A learning program customized to suit different learning styles is a must. Incorporating the 'what-is-in-it-for-me' element enhances learner engagement at a personal level.

- **Customize content.** WBT elements provide program designers with various combinations to customize content.



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- **Learning style.** Some employees respond well to audio aids, while others might prefer the video. For instance, WBT can be designed for a learner who prefers textual representation by liberally using visuals.
- **Environment.** The layout could be customized using colors and themes that match employee preferences. The more the WBT pleases the learner, the greater his involvement.

### Summary

To be engaging, web-based learning should stimulate the senses, actively involve the learner and give him or her freedom of movement within the program. It must be relevant, flexible and personal because learner engagement is critical to training.