

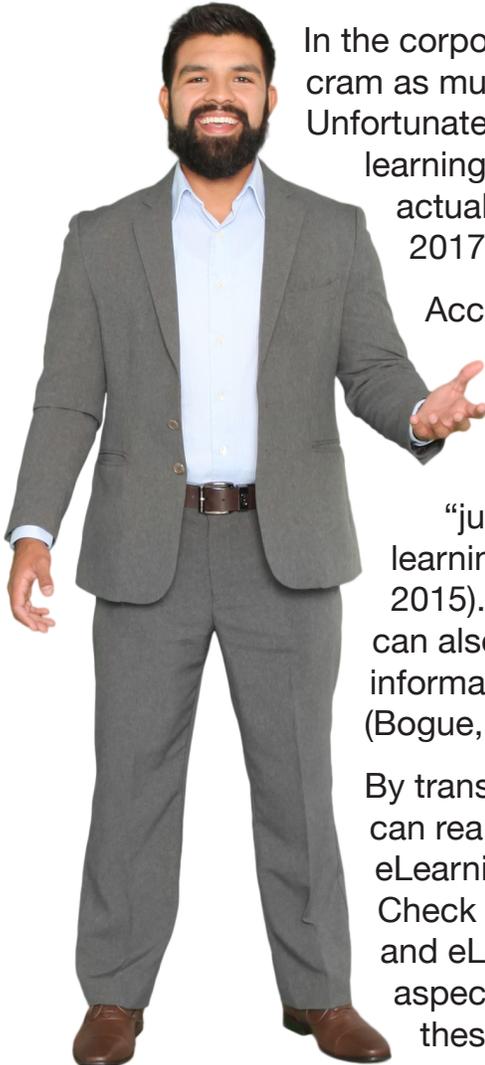


# Blended Learning

Best Practices Guide

**Pascale Libront Swanson**

# Instructor-led Training, eLearning, and Blended Learning



In the corporate world, time is at a premium. Therefore, learners often cram as much learning as they can into the shortest time possible. Unfortunately, this does not lead to persistent knowledge or effective learning transfer. As a result, as low as 12-25% of learners retain and actually apply what they have learned to the workplace (Lueck, 2017; Pandey, 2017).

According to Huhn (2013), “we can’t keep thinking of training as a one-time event.” This is one of the primary driving forces behind converting instructor-led training (ILT) into blended learning courses. The ability to teach learners in a face-to-face environment and then allow for follow-up using online “just-in-time” training is likely one of the reasons that blended learning is known to be the most effective form of training (Carson, 2015). The initial exposure followed by supplemental online training can also reduce the amount of time between a learner learning the information and actually using it, which is known to improve retention (Bogue, 2012).

By transitioning an ILT course into a blended learning course, you can reap the benefits associated with ILT and those associated with eLearning while simultaneously reducing the limitations of each. Check out the chart below for more information on the benefits of ILT and eLearning. Then, check out the checklist on the next page about aspects of training that are enhanced by using a combination of these approaches: specifically, blended learning.

## Benefits of ILT

- unlike eLearning, ILT is a direct, dynamic, and social activity
- some subject areas aren’t amenable to self-directed learning
- instructors can immediately detect misunderstandings as they arise
- ILT creates a collaborative environment that can encourage discussion
- learners who are not self-disciplined can sit and listen to the instructor speak and absorb the content

## Benefits of eLearning

- courses can be taken at any time, in any place, and on any device
- courses are cheaper, more flexible and scalable
- different learning preferences and abilities are easily accommodated
- personalized learning is easier to arrange than in an ILT environment
- delivers a consistent message across the company
- analytics are automatically obtained by CMS

# Advantages of Blended Learning over Fully Instructor-led Training or eLearning

As described on the previous page, retention and application of knowledge can be increased by converting instructor-led training (ILT) into a blended format. Now that you know specific benefits of ILT and eLearning, it is important to consider the specific advantages of combining these two strategies into blended learning. Read the list below for more information about how blended learning benefits both the learner and the company.

## *Learner*

- knowledge retention rates increase by up to 60%
- learners are more involved in their own learning
- learners are more in control of their own learning
- concepts left for the online learning portion are completed more quickly than they would be during courses that are fully instructor-led
- learners have easy to access to the information at any time, any place, and with any device
- learners with differing abilities and learning preferences are accommodated effectively during the online portion and more easily during the instructor-led portion
- learners can use individualized learning paths to personalize their own learning
- theory can be taught online, at the learner's own pace, while practical applications can be completed in an ILT environment

## *Company*

- courses can be reused exactly as they are or with minimal adaptations
- once developed, the delivery costs (instructor fees, travel costs, time off work) are lower than fully instructor-led courses
- courses are scalable (can train large groups simultaneously online, with fewer instructor-led sessions required)
- allows for more consistent organization-wide uniformity
- increased productivity of workers due to compression ratio (2 hours of instructor-led training = 1 hour of eLearning) during the online portions of the course
- reduced paperwork for instructors as the CMS does the majority of the work for the online portion of the course
- opportunity to leverage new and emerging trends that resonate with learners (mLearning, microlearning, gamification, scenario-based learning) which will draw their attention and result in greater retention of knowledge

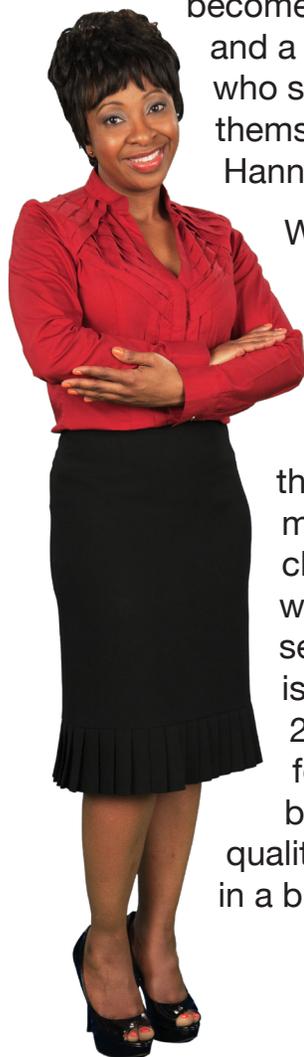
(Boettcher, 2016; Carson, 2015; Dudhagundi, 2017; Foster, 2016; Hunt, 2016; Legault, n.d.; Pandey, 2017; Pratap, 2014; Smith, 2014; Vai, 2016)

# Role of the Instructor in Blended Learning

One of the biggest benefits of blended learning and eLearning is that training moves from a top-down, instructor-centered approach to a collaborative, student-centered approach (Simonson, 2015). This benefits the learner because their learning preferences, abilities, prior knowledge, and interests are better respected than in a fully instructor-centered approach.

This means that the instructor is no longer a lecturer that stands at the front providing information; instead, the instructor

becomes a learning coach and a mentor to the learners, who seek out the information themselves (Boettcher, 2016; Hanna, 2012).



With this shift, the instructor must create learning materials that better reflect the interests and preferences of the learners. These materials need to be clear, memorable, and well referenced so that self-directed learning is possible (Hanna, 2012; Smith, 2014). The following checklist can be used to assess the quality of learning materials in a blended learning course.

## Learning Materials for Blended Learning

As an instructor of a blended learning course, it is important that you re-evaluate your learning materials to assure they meet the needs of your self-directed learners. Use the following checklist to assess the quality of the learning materials.

- Do your learning materials address a variety of modalities (reading, viewing, listening, interactive videos, etc.) to benefit learners with different learning preferences (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, etc.)?
- Do you provide options for different ways for your learners to obtain the same information?
- Are your learning materials accessible to learners with disabilities?
- Do you provide remedial and enhancement materials and activities for learners who struggle with or excel in learning a particular concept?
- Do your learning materials, learning activities, and assessment materials align with your objectives?
- Are your online materials best suited for online learning and your in-class materials best suited for in-class learning?
- Are your online materials accessible for review during in-class training (e.g., using responsive design principles so that learners can access materials on their mobile phone, or using print-ready materials)?

# Creating Effective Discussion Prompts

Although communication between the instructor and the learners is important, it is the communication among the learners that results in the greatest learning benefit. Therefore, creating discussion prompts that invite active, vigorous conversations are important. Use the following checklist to assess the quality of your discussion prompts.

- ☑ Are your discussion prompts open-ended and exploratory? (Factual responses do not invite further discussion)
- ☑ Are your discussion prompts focused narrowly enough on a specific topic? (Too many branching sub-questions can result in cognitive overload or confused and scattered responses)
- ☑ Do you encourage learners to relate their in-class knowledge to their own real-world experiences? (This strategy can build community as well as encode knowledge more deeply through constructivist approaches)
- ☑ Are your discussion prompts “spicy”? (Adding in current events, controversy, or learner choice can increase interest)
- ☑ Do you provide variety from week-to-week? (Debates, role playing, and scenarios can revive boring question-and-answer prompts)
- ☑ Do you apply a variety of thinking types in your questions (Combining or alternating *convergent* thinking, *divergent* thinking, and *evaluative* thinking questions allows learners to think in different and interesting ways)

# Encouraging Online Communication

An important part of any course, be it instructor-led, eLearning, or blended learning, is communication. As with any learning activity, the “do as I say, not as I do” mentality is not sufficient. As an instructor, you must actively involve yourself in communication efforts to ensure your learners participate as well (Boettcher, 2016; Hanna, 2012).

A set of explicit expectations will further ensure that the learners know what, how, when, and why to communicate (Boettcher, 2016; Hanna, 2012).

In addition to providing captivating discussion prompts, it is important to ensure that the discussions are related to core course concepts (Boettcher, 2016; Hanna, 2012). It is also useful to enable customized/ personalized learning within the group discussion environment.

When it comes to discussions, variety is the spice of life! Use large groups and small groups, use synchronous and asynchronous discussions, and use an assortment of tools (Boettcher, 2016; Flipgrid, n.d.; Hanna, 2012; Jamboard, n.d.).



# Pre-planning Strategies for Converting ILT into Blended Learning

Transitioning instructor-led training (ILT) into a blended course requires a significant amount of preparation. This goes beyond checking that learners can get their passwords and navigate through the site, or developing expectations of the learners (Boettcher, 2016). In fact, it requires a full instructional design cycle. The most common instructional design framework is the ADDIE model, so let's consider that model here (Hanna, 2012). In five steps we will consider the important pre-planning strategies for converting ILT into blended learning.

## Analysis

The analysis phase of a course re-design is different than the analysis phase of an original course. Typically, information such as learner characteristics are already known, instead, you need to analyze the old course and consider how to adapt it to the new blended environment. Below are some questions you should ask yourself before beginning the conversion.

First, let's consider what you need to know about the purpose of the course:

- Why was this course originally developed?
- What objectives are you trying to meet?/ What do the learners need to learn?
- Are there any goals that can now be met in the blended course that could not be met in the ILT?

(Carson, 215; Gendelman, 2013; Gutierrez, 2017; Lord, n.d.; Pandey, 2017)

Next, let's consider what you need to know about the existing course:

- What aspects of the current course did the learners enjoy or dislike?
- In which areas did the learners struggle on the evaluations?
- What course assets already exist (e.g., slides, handouts, video, etc.)?
- Do any materials need to be removed or adapted (e.g., if they are outdated)?
- Why was the course organized in the order it was?

(Gutierrez, 2017; Jackson, 2012; Pandey, 2017)

Finally, let's consider what you need to know about adapting the course:

- Where does the emphasis lie?
- How will the course be split (time in class vs. time online)?
- Do some aspects lend themselves more to in-class or online learning?
- Can some aspects of the online learning be personalized to the learners?
- Are there ways to make the online content more interactive?

(Carson, 215; Gutierrez, 2017; Lord, n.d.; Pandey, 2017)

## Design

The design phase of a course conversion can be quite substantial, depending on how much of the content is being fully re-invented and how much is being simply altered to a digital format. Also, the organization, chunking, and timing of the information may need to be updated due to the different mode of presentation (Gutierrez, 2015). Similarly, the learning activities may need drastic overhauls for the portions being moved online.

There are several important points to remember when converting to a blended format:

### General Planning

- All activities, whether online or face-to-face must be rigorously connected to the core concepts and learning outcomes of the course (Boettcher, 2016).
- Although it is tempting to create a template for the online portion with a certain number of activities that are repeated week after week (e.g., video, readings, discussion board, assignment), this is very tedious to the learners and should be avoided (Boettcher, 2016).
- When choosing which aspects of the course to present online and which to present in a face-to-face environment, consider the strengths and limitations of each environment (Lord, n.d.).
- Learners' attention spans are limited. You may be able to get 15 minutes of focused attention in an in-class session and 5 minutes of focused attention in an online setting. Add in activities after these intervals. Conclude an online session within 45-60 minutes and 2-3 hours for face-to-face training if you want the learners to absorb any information (Gendelman, 2013).
- The more personalized the content and the learning path, the more engaged the learner (Bogue, 2012).

### Learning content and activities

- In designing your activities, remember to include variety in the types and styles of the learning content, in the types and styles of the learning activities, in the synchronous or asynchronous nature of the activity, and in the size of the group completing the activity. This goes for both online and face-to-face parts of the training (Boettcher, 2016; Vai, 2016).
- For the online portion in particular, include a variety of multimedia sources such as audio, video, illustrations, photos, infographics, charts, graphs, motion graphics, etc. as well as interactive multimedia, exploratory learning activities, and games (Gutierrez, 2015; Hanna, 2012; Vai, 2016; Zaineb, 2017).
- Storytelling is one of the more memorable methods to transfer knowledge. Include aspects of storytelling in both the online and face-to-face portions of the course (Elkins, 2016).



## Assessment

- Assessment should be about more than the typical multiple-choice tests at the conclusion of the course. Instead, incorporate a range of assessment activities throughout the course, while learners are exploring the content (Elkins, 2016; Zaineb, 2017).
- Consider incorporating models, case studies and authentic applications to the learning content. Learners will be more successful at transferring their knowledge if they have practice. Even smaller activities that engage learners in critical and creative thinking, analysis, and problem solving can aid in knowledge retention (Gutierrez, 2015; Vai, 2016).

## Technology to Consider Incorporating During the Design Phase

To help improve the interactivity of your blended learning course, consider introducing some of the following technological tools into your design:

### *In-class*

- Kahoot!
- Nearpod
- Socrative
- Clickers
- YouTube and Vimeo
- Google cardboard
- QR codes
- Zap codes
- Buncee

### *Online*

- Jamboard
- Flipgrid
- Adobe Captivate or Articulate Storyline
- Articulate Rise, Adapt Learning, or Evolve Authoring
- Vyond
- Adobe Animate
- Adobe Character Animator
- Motion graphics with PremierePro, Cinema 4D, or Maya

## Development

The development of learning and assessment materials for the in-class portion of the course are identical to development for fully ILT courses. However, the development of the online portion does have some significant differences. We will focus on these here.

Online course development can be time-consuming, depending on the degree of interactivity and personalization planned, as well as the experience level of the developer. However, the time is worth it, as some truly amazing instruction can come of it.

Remember, you cannot simply take an existing PowerPoint slide deck and publish it online or take the content and insert it into a rapid authoring tool as is (Carson, 215; Gendelman, 2013).

Content must be re-organized, re-written, and supported with a variety of different visual elements. Also, PowerPoint on its own is not an interactive medium. To truly engage the learners, you should include clickable, draggable, and thought-provoking interactions that allow the learners to explore (Gutierrez, 2015).

To help with this transition, if a storyboard was created in the design phase, there is less temptation to simply convert a boring PowerPoint into a boring online slide deck (Carson, 2018).

## Creating Excellent Online Materials

Without a facilitator actively engaging the learners, online material can become dull. Therefore, you must use graphic design principles and interactivity to engage the learners. Use the following checklist to assess the quality of your online materials.

- Did you chunk the information into smaller pieces?
- Did you make sure that the most important points came up first?
- Did you use more visual elements than you would have in an ILT course?
- Did you remove extraneous information and graphics that could distract or confuse the learner?
- Did you consider presenting information in graphic or infographic form, rather than using text to convey the message on every slide?
- Did you use handouts or job-aids to present extra details and links?
- Did you add animations?
- Did you add interactive videos?
- Did you add gamification elements?
- Did you add personalization elements?
- Did you add social learning elements?
- Could you adapt the content to a more microlearning style? (this is the general trend in the future of learning)
- Could you adapt the content to mLearning? (this is the general trend in the future of learning)



## Implementation

Implementation of the blended learning course will not be discussed in detail here because the face-to-face portion will be the same as the typical ILT. The online portion will typically be controlled by the learning management system (LMS) administrator. However, a couple things to keep in mind are that you should be clear with the learners the expectations of both the online and in-class portion, you should communicate regularly with the learners through the LMS, and you should examine the analytics that are provided by the LMS.

## Evaluation

During or at the conclusion of the course, it is wise to conduct an evaluation. Common evaluation tools include Kirkpatrick's Four Levels, Simonson's AEIOU, and the Quality Matters Rubric (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Quality Matters, n.d.; Simonson, 2015).

Much of the data can come from learner surveys as well as LMS analytics. The LMS can provide information such as log-ins, download statistics, progress, assessments, and certificate completions (Carson, 2015). Advanced analytics such as those provided by analytic companies (e.g., Intelliboard) can further help you understand your learners and how to improve your training program.

Ultimately, the goal of the evaluation is to determine if you have met your training goals (course outcomes, learner satisfaction, and learner engagement) and if there are any opportunities for you to improve the training program for the next round of learners (Lord, n.d.). It will also help work out some hiccups that may exist in the first version or two of your newly transitioned blended learning solution.

Below are some considerations for evaluating your training goals.

### Measuring course outcomes:

- Can be assessed using grades, online activity and in-class participation, attendance and drop-out rates.

(Bowyer, 2017)

### Measuring learner satisfaction:

- Can be assessed using self-report questionnaires.
- Can be based on overall course satisfaction, perceived quality of teaching, and perceived value of blended learning (over other forms of learning).
- Can also include aspects of course design, user interface and ease of technology.

(Bowyer, 2017)

### Measuring learner engagement:

- Three aspects include behavior, emotion, and cognition.
- Behavior relates to attendance and participation, and submission of work.
- Emotion relates to degree of interest according to learner.
- Cognition relates to whether the learner meets or exceeds course requirements.

(Bowyer, 2017)

# References

- Admin. (2018, February). *The manager's guide to converting classroom training to eLearning*. Retrieved from <https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/converting-classroom-training-elearning>
- Boettcher, J.V. & Conrad, R.-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide: simple and practical pedagogical tips (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Bogue, R. (2012, May). *Everything you think you know about learning retention rates is wrong*. Retrieved from <https://trainingindustry.com/articles/strategy-alignment-and-planning/everything-you-think-you-know-about-learning-retention-rates-is-wrong/>
- Bowyer, J. & Chambers, L. (2017). *Evaluating blended learning: bringing the elements together*. Retrieved from <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/375446-evaluating-blended-learning-bringing-the-elements-together.pdf>
- Carson, S. (2015, Aug). *5 tips to successfully convert instructor-led training to eLearning*. Retrieved from <https://www.skillbuilderlms.com/5-tips-to-successfully-convert-instructor-led-training-to-elearning/>
- Dudhagundi, D. (2017, April). *Converting classroom training to eLearning – making a business case*. Retrieved from [https://blog.commlabindia.com/elearning-development/building-business-case-for-converting-classroom-to-elearning?utm\\_campaign=elearningindustry.com&utm\\_source=%2Fconvert-classroom-training-to-online-training-4-best-practices&utm\\_medium=link](https://blog.commlabindia.com/elearning-development/building-business-case-for-converting-classroom-to-elearning?utm_campaign=elearningindustry.com&utm_source=%2Fconvert-classroom-training-to-online-training-4-best-practices&utm_medium=link)
- Elkins, D. (2016, March). *7 tips for converting classroom training to elearning*. Retrieved from <https://www.mimeo.com/blog/converting-classroom-training-to-elearning/>
- Flipgrid. (n.d.). *Flipgrid*. Retrieved from <https://flipgrid.com/>
- Foster, T. (2016, May). *Online training vs face-to-face – and the winner is...* Retrieved from <https://www.e3learning.com/confidentbusiness/online-training-vs-face-face-winner/>
- Gendelman, J. (2013, January). *Converting classroom training to virtual instruction: some tips*. Retrieved from <https://www.learningsolutionsmag.com/articles/1084/converting-classroom-training-to-virtual-instruction-some-tips>
- Gutierrez, K. (2015, November). *3 big don'ts when converting instructor-led training to eLearning*. Retrieved from <https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/3-big-donts-when-switching-from-instructor-led-training-to-elearning>
- Gutierrez, K. (2017, March). *Moving your existing training content to eLearning – a step-by-step guide to successful conversions*. Retrieved from <https://www.shiftelearning.com/blog/moving-your-existing-training-content-to-elearning>
- Hanna, D. (2012). *Converting your course to a blended format*. Retrieved from [https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/instructional/instructor\\_guide\\_hybrid.pdf](https://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/instructional/instructor_guide_hybrid.pdf)
- Huhn, J. (2013, June). *Blended learning and mobile performance support: ahead of the curve*. Retrieved from <https://www.bottomlineperformance.com/blended-learning-basics-mobile-performance-support/>
- Hunt, V. (2016, December). *Pros and cons of blended learning at college*. Retrieved from <https://elearningindustry.com/pros-cons-blended-learning-at-college>
- Jackson, R. (2012, December). *Converting classroom training to e-learning: key questions*. Retrieved from <http://elearninguncovered.com/2012/12/converting-classroom-training-to-e-learning-key-questions/>
- Jamboard. (n.d.). *Jamboard*. Retrieved from <https://gsuite.google.com/products/jamboard/>
- Kirkpatrick, D.L. & Kirkpatrick, J.D. (2007). *Implementing the four levels: a practical guide for effective evaluation of training programs*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Legault, N. (n.d.). *What's easier: converting ILT to e-learning or starting from scratch?* Retrieved from <https://community.articulate.com/articles/convert-ilt-e-learning>
- Lord, E. (n.d.). *Converting classroom training to eLearning*. Retrieved from <http://www.icslearninggroup.com/whitepapers/converting-classroom-to-elearning/>
- Lueck, S. (2017, June). *Hijack learning retention rates by teaching learners to fish*. Retrieved from <https://www.dashe.com/blog/hijack-learning-retention-rates-by-teaching-learners-to-fish>
- Miller, D.M. (2014). *Minds online: teaching effectively with technology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Pandey, A. (2017, April). *How to convert instructor-led training to eLearning*. Retrieved from <https://elearningindustry.com/how-to-convert-instructor-led-training-to-elearning>
- Pratap, D. (2014, September). *10 surprising statistics about E-learning*. Retrieved from <https://blog.commlabindia.com/elearning-design/statistics-about-elearning>
- Quality Matters. (n.d.). *Helping you deliver on your online promise*. Retrieved from <https://www.qualitymatters.org/>
- Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., & Zvacek, S. (2015). *Teaching and learning at a distance: Foundations of distance education (6th ed.)* Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Smith, R.M. (2014) *Conquering the content: a blueprint for online course design and development (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Vai, M. & Sosulski, K. (2016). *Essentials of online course design: a standards-based guide (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zaineb, A. (2017, August). *4 best practices to convert classroom training to online training*. Retrieved from <https://elearningindustry.com/convert-classroom-training-to-online-training-4-best-practices>

