

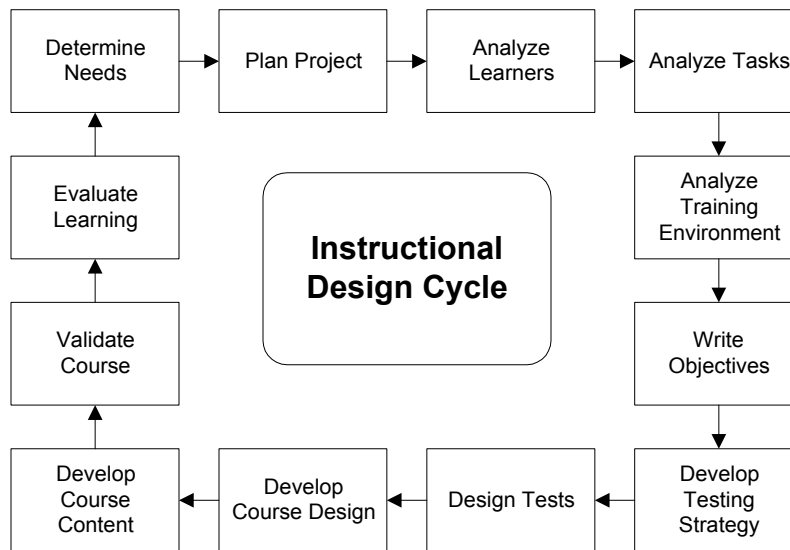


Designing Learning Activities for Distance Education Courses

Objectives of the Workshop

1. To describe learning activities that can be used in online training.
2. To modify activities for paper-based programs.
3. To consider learning objectives when designing learning activities.

Instructional Design Cycle



Notes



What is Motivation?

Motivation is what causes people to behave as they do and research has found that motivation is very complex. Motivation is:

- An unconscious psychological process, rather than a logical one.
- Individual.
- Variable over time.
- Often a social process involving others.
- Often affected strongly by experiences from many years ago.

Improve motivation by:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
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In a typical classroom environment, the instructor plays many roles including motivator, information presenter, leader of practice activities, and evaluator. However, in distance education courses, the instructor—as defined in this typical setting—is missing. But that does not mean that all these elements are also missing. Learners of distance education courses still require motivation, information, activities, and evaluation. In fact, the activities can provide the motivation, present the information, and offer the evaluation within the course.



What are Learning Activities?

Learning activities are coordinated actions that exercise basic:

- _____
- _____
- _____

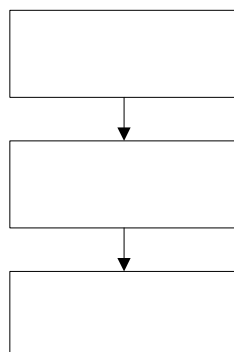
Learning activities should allow learners to be engaged and involved in the learning process. According to William Horton, "People learn by considering, researching, analyzing, evaluating, organizing, synthesizing, discussing, testing, deciding, and applying ideas." Multimedia (sound, images, animation) and online simulations can explain abstract concepts and help learners actively participate in their learning process. Many of the activities designed for online courses, however, can be modified for paper-based home study programs.

Learning activities can be used to teach, to exercise, and to test knowledge, skills, and beliefs. Activities cater to those who learn best by doing and to those who would rather discover a fact for themselves than be told about it. They can also be the mechanisms to evaluate learning, but the focus in this workshop is on their uses to teach and to reinforce learning.

Self-Assessment List activities used in your courses.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Components of Learning Activities





Learning Activities

	Activity	Description
1.	Brainstorming	Learners work together to generate creative solutions to a problem or to accomplish a goal.
2.	Case studies	Learners study a meaningful, detailed example of a real-world event, process, or system to abstract useful concepts and principles.
3.	Drill-and-practice activities	Learners repeatedly practice applying specific knowledge or a well-defined skill.
4.	Group critiques	Learners receive and react to the criticisms from their peers. Learners submit a work that others in the class comment on.
5.	Guided analysis	Learners analyze data to evaluate its validity, spot trends, and infer principles.
6.	Guided research	Learners gather, analyze, and report on information.
7.	Hands-on activities	Learners perform a real task outside the lesson.
8.	Learning games	Learners practice or reinforce concepts through play.
9.	Presentation sequences	Learners read, listen to, and watch carefully constructed explanations (video, DVD, Web).
10.	Role-playing scenarios	Learners adopt assigned roles in simulations involving complex interpersonal interaction.
11.	Scavenger hunts	Learners find reliable sources of information on the Internet or their corporate intranet.
12.	Team design	Learners work as coordinated teams to produce a single design or to solve a complex problem.
13.	Virtual laboratories	Learners conduct experiments with simulated laboratory equipment.
14.	Webcasts	Many distributed learners participate fully in a training event transmitted by a network—a live collaboration.

	When to Use
a.	To give learners experience performing a task without the risk or cost of the real activity. To provide a fun way to explore concepts.
b.	To help learners memorize facts that they must be able to recall without hesitation.
c.	To make learners more self-reliant by having them locate reliable sources of information on the subject they are studying.
d.	To prepare learners to operate real laboratory equipment or to guide them to discover principles and trends on their own.
e.	To provide a consistent high-quality explanation to all learners.
f.	To teach a formal analysis technique or to guide learners to discover trends and principles for themselves.
g.	To teach brainstorming in its own right or a part of a course involving problem solving, creative thinking, or team design.
h.	To teach complex knowledge that cannot be reduced to a simple formula. To use specific, concrete particulars to teach abstract, general principles.
i.	To teach design skills that are applied as part of a team or to teach basic teamwork skills.
j.	To teach hands-on tasks and to show learners how to apply abstract knowledge gained in other activities.
k.	To teach learners how to use critical comments of others to improve their own work and how to offer helpful criticism of the work of others.
l.	To teach learners to conduct informal research on a subject (valuable for learners who conduct information research as part of their job).
m.	To teach material best taught by traditional classroom activities, especially ones that require extensive interaction between the instructor and learners.
n.	To teach subtle interpersonal skills and to reveal the complexity of many human endeavors.



Select Appropriate Activities

Successful activities precisely target what learners need to learn. An activity's success depends on the design—that is:

- How clearly it is organized.
- How it is presented to learners.
- How their actions are guided.
- What external resources are used.
- How your workload is managed.

Before you begin designing learning activities, ensure you have asked yourself these questions:

- What is the purpose of the activity?
- What exactly are learners to learn?
- How long will learners require to complete the activity?
- How open-ended should the response be?
- Will responses of one learner be available to others? When?

Ensure Instructions are Complete and Clear

1. **Put the activity into context.** Point out how the activity fits within the course. What will the learner learn or practice? How is this activity related to other material? Does it complete or continue work begun in other activities?
2. **List requirements.** List everything the activity requires including knowledge, tools, computer, internet connection, and data.
3. **Mention information sources.** Identify information that learners must find and read. In scenarios, start by telling learners their role and describe the challenge to overcome.
4. **Tell learners what they must create.** Tell learners exactly what they must do to complete the activity. Provide complete instructions if they need to submit the exercise or activity, including a due date.
5. **Define the rules.** Explicitly state how the work is to be done. Individually or in teams? What's allowed in collaboration?

Notes



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Provide Hints

Provide hints in all complex activities in case learners get stuck. Hints can be presented in many forms:

- Principles that help turn separate events into a comprehensible pattern.
- Cautions about unexpected events, hidden features, exceptions to rules—anything people are not likely to figure out on their own.
- List of things to try when stuck.
- Suggest order in which to perform activities.
- More specific instructions on how to perform the next step.
- Background information that the learner may be missing.

PRACTICE Be creative! Activities can be combined to create effective learning tools for your learners. Select learning activities (as directed to in the workshop) and identify modifications needed for distance learning.



Case Studies

Case studies provide a realistic situation for the learner to analyze. Case studies use specific details to teach abstract principles and are good to teach complex knowledge that cannot be reduced to a simple formula. Use case studies to have learners analyze complex situations and use judgement skills to resolve problems or to make recommendations.

Sequence of Events

1. **Present case and questions.** Present facts surrounding the situation and a list of questions. Offer different perspectives of the case.
2. **Study the case.** Learners read the case and study any other sources.
3. **Answer the questions.** Learners answer the questions directly related to the case study. Examine both advantages and disadvantages of possible solutions.
4. **Generalize concepts.** Learners answer questions related to applying the concepts, principles, trends, and guidelines presented in the case study. Specify how this knowledge can be applied to real cases in the learners' environment.
5. **Define the rules.** Explicitly state how the work is to be done. Individually or in teams? What are the rules for collaboration?

Case Study Materials

Consider the following list of materials for use in your case study activities:

- Business reports
- Charts, graphs, drawings
- Interviews with subject experts
- Letters and memos
- Magazine articles
- Newspapers
- Spreadsheet of data
- Training courses
- Videos
- Websites

Analyzing Case Studies

Help learners analyze the complexity of the case study and consider all issues before determining a solution or recommendation. Ask the learner to summarize ideas into other forms such as:

- Advertisement
- Article abstract
- Book summary
- Executive summary
- Newspaper heading
- Poster
- Press release



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Self-Assessment Questions

1. What does activity mean to me?

2. What activities do I provide to the learners?

3. How can I provide a variety of activities within my course?

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Learning activity																						
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