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Designing Activities for Distance Learning

Learning Objectives

At the end of this session participants should be able to:

1. Describe learning activities that can be used in online training.
2. Modify activities for paper-based programs.
3. Consider learning objectives when designing learning activities.

Abstract

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.

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.

A variety of activities can be used in distance education courses, including situated learning (or scenarios), learning games, fill-in-the-blanks, drill-and-practice, tutorials, guided research, and case studies. Different activities are suited to different situations. For example, situated learning is appropriate for teaching *concepts*, but not well suited for teaching *skills*.

Designing learning activities involves an important concept: designers must determine an appropriate activity that is linked to a learning objective. As a result, activities become valuable tools rather than “fillers” or distractions. In this workshop, examples of activities will be shown and participants will look at how to design learning activities.

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?

References

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