



Learning
Light

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Learning Light's Quick Guide to Blended Learning

Quick Guides are a series of short guides about learning technologies and trends written by experts in the field.

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About Learning Light

Learning Light is a non-profit organisation that builds relationships between learning technology researchers, suppliers, buyers and learners providing learner-centric information to encourage the growth of learning technologies. By sharing comprehensive research, highlighting successes and failures, Learning Light helps to promote the learning technologies community.

Learning Light provides bespoke and individual services to help both buyers and suppliers of learning technologies (e-Learning). Its current services include:

Research Services : Providing access to expert insights, advice and guidance built on in-depth research. Helping organisations to effectively implement learning technologies (e-Learning) and integrate them within their workflow processes.

Membership Services: Partnering with leading thinkers in the industry and providing a network for all interested in the field to share information, knowledge, insight, experience and expertise, through utilising online community tools, networking events, conferences and guru seminars.

Professional Services: Our highly experienced team offers organisations access to range of competitively priced consultancy services supporting buyers with the effective implementation of their learning technology (e-Learning) requirements. And, for suppliers, helping to provide a range of services to assist market awareness and generate growth.

In addition, Learning Light provides a comprehensive Professional Development programme to help Learning & Development professionals understand the significance of learning technologies in the workplace today and how to effectively implement them within the workflow processes of their organisation.

Sheffield-based Learning Light is supported by Yorkshire Forward, the regional development agency for Yorkshire, and the Humber and Objective 1 South Yorkshire.

About the Author



Dr. Celia Richardson is an independent learning designer with over 12 years experience working with corporations, universities and governments in the strategy, design, development and implementation of technology and learning solutions.

Dr. Richardson's area of research for her Doctorate was educational technology, with an emphasis on e-learning and instructional design. Her dissertation title was *Changes in Teaching Strategies Enabled by Internet and Communications Technology*.

While Dr. Richardson remains active in pursuing her academic and research interests, she predominately works with corporations, helping them to design, develop and implement e-enabling strategies. Dr Richardson is a Learning Light Associate.



What is blended learning and why is it important?

Before we define blended learning, it is important to look at the concept in perspective. The rhetoric that technology will revolutionise training has been echoed repeatedly over the years. Computer-based training (CBT), videos and CD-ROMS all represented some form of an extension of the classroom. With the advent of e-learning, computers and the internet became a key component in extending and expanding training.

For the past forty years the learning and development industry has had to frequently reinvent itself with the constant introduction of new tools, different platforms and different approaches to learning. With better and faster technology we started to use e-learning. While e-learning was met with high expectations, we now know more about when and how to use it and that the most effective e-learning programs are ones that are *blended* with other training resources.

The idea of blended learning is to synthesise a number of different approaches in order to create high impact learning. While a blended approach is not a new concept, many organisations are now combining on-line learning resources with classroom training or mixing the use of a self-paced workbook with one-to-one coaching. In this way, organisations are maximising and optimising the use of resources. This combined approach to using resources and providing linked options to learning can often increase what is learned.

We all know how effective classroom training can be. We also know how well e-learning can deliver basic skill instruction, procedural training and simulations to a wide and geographically dispersed audience. The value of on-the-job training, one-to-one coaching and a mentor cannot be denied either. We know the strengths and weaknesses of these resources, so what we try to do is *blend* using the most effective components from each approach. In this way, learners get the best bits from each resource in order to have relevant, high impact training.

Blended learning is therefore a combination of approaches to teaching and learning. Blended learning uses a variety of different delivery methods such as combining e-learning with more conventional instructor led training. Blended learning is important as it allows for a variety of different teaching modes and can address different learning needs and styles.

Blended learning is not about providing learners with a number of choices on how to complete their training. Nor is it about offering lots of choice or combining similar media to create one solution. Blended learning is mixing different kinds of media and resources in order to achieve an optimum training solution.



What do blended learning solutions look like?

Combining a number of different resources and media may sound easy but arriving at the right blend entails a detailed and well thought through plan. It is important to examine your training need and to then determine what combination of tools and resources will make the biggest impact. Of equal importance is to know your audience well and to understand their needs.

Here is a table of possible and popular components to blend:

OFF-LINE	ON-LINE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Instructor-led (classroom)• Workshops• Face-to-face coaching, tutoring and mentoring• Print media (job aids)• Distributable electronic media (e.g. CDs)• On-the-job (OTJ) training• Role modelling• Job aids• Work teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On-line ('e') learning• e-coaching, e-tutoring, e-mentoring• e-mail• Bulletin boards• Collaboration tools• Mobile learning (using phones, PDAs)• Web based learning modules• Simulations• Performance support tools

Blended learning is complex, however, there are a few simple models that can be used and adapted to suit your training needs.

The following models A, B & C all use a combination of on and off-line learning but in different ways to achieve different goals.

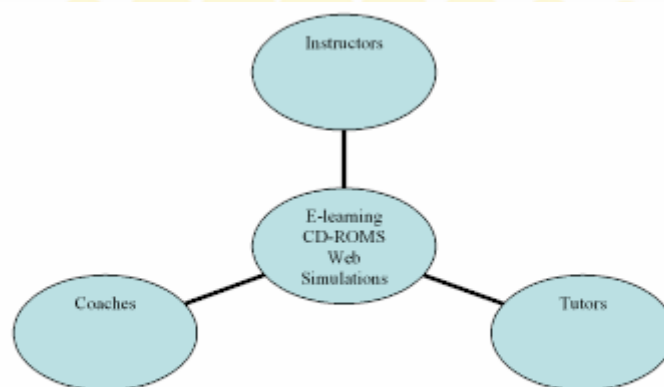
After each model, a brief example is outlined in order to better illustrate how the models can be applied.



Model A

This model is to create an e-learning module (or other electronic based learning), and surround that module with more human, interactive content. This allows for a core, on-line, resource to be supported and complimented by human interface.

This model can be built in stages and allows for consistency and continuity in content and then high personal interactivity to hone and master skills.



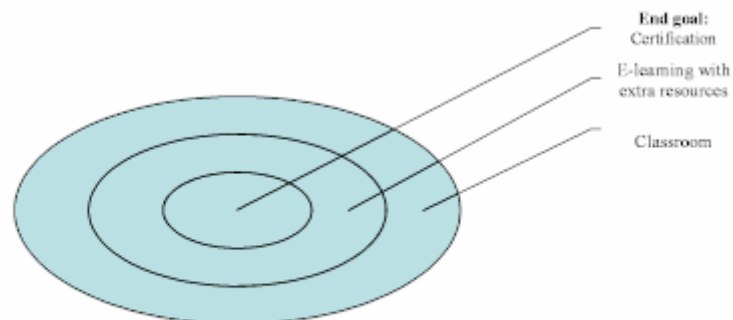
Let's look at an example of customer service training. A company has chosen a CD-ROM to introduce telephone etiquette skills. All learners are required to complete the learning on the CD-ROM before attending an instructor led session to engage in some in-depth role play. Learners are given two weeks to complete the CD training. The workshop is announced well in advance to provide for appropriate planning. By blending the two approaches, learners all arrive at the interactive role-play session with a common set of skills and the same foundation of knowledge. This allows for the maximum effectiveness of the time and effort of the instructor. The learning is then evaluated based on customer feedback and a decreased number of complaints.

The above model is best used for learning that is self-paced and geared towards knowledge and behavioural skills. It allows learners time to develop, practice and renew learning as needed. It is a good blend of on- and off-line learning.



Model B

This model creates layers of learning using a variety of resources to target a specific goal.



If we look at an example of Health and Safety training, a course could start with an instructor-led workshop which is followed up by two to three e-learning modules on Government legislation in the workplace.

The e-learning is self-paced and includes several links to other resources, should the learner need to use them. After two weeks, another workshop is scheduled for more interactive, scenario based training. Finally, the training culminates with a written examination for certification.

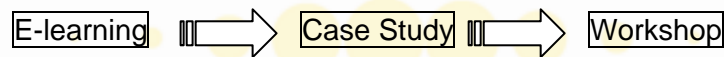
This model is concentric to allow for the information delivered in the classroom session to wrap around the e-learning modules and other resources. The end goal is to be certified as a designated Health & Safety worker.

Model B is best suited for skills-based training, certification training or any other type of learning that is linear and process or goal oriented.



Model C

This model channels learners through the learning in a very structured way.



An example is a finance course. It starts with a series of e-learning modules. The learners have six weeks to complete the self-paced modules and all learning is tracked via the company Intranet. Three times a year case studies are handed out based on the six week cluster of e-learning modules.

Learners are divided into groups (from across the EU) and need to consult and collaborate in order to complete the case study activities, using both on and off-line collaboration tools. After one month to complete the case study activities, a one-day workshop is held with senior executives of the company. The purpose of the workshop is to consolidate all the learning from the theory introduced with the e-learning modules, through to the activities completed in the case study.

The workshop also allows for expert advice on how to handle certain situations and a large group discussion on the case study scenarios. The e-learning provides the foundation information and the case study allows for use and application of the knowledge. The workshops then sharpen and hone the learning as well as direct the participants as to how to use the learning in the workplace, based on the executives' collective experience.

This model is excellent for knowledge and application. It allows for self-paced flexibility, collaborative work and synthesis. It is easy and straightforward to develop.

It is difficult to get the blend right. Models can help you to begin to think about how to learn from combining information, collaboration and interaction tools.

To explore more models and to review some in-depth case studies, please refer to:

Bersin, Josh. *The Blended Learning Book. Best Practices, Proven Methodologies, and Lessons learned.* Pfeiffer, 2004.



How to design a blended learning solution

There are five key steps to creating an effective blended solution:

1. Strategy
2. Design
3. Create
4. Deliver
5. Evaluate

1. Strategy

The first step is to begin with a strategy or framework. The strategy outlines all the pieces to the puzzle and maps how the pieces can fit together. To develop a strategy, you should:

- State the business need. Ensure you know both the performance gaps and the training need for the programme.
- Determine whether the need is a gap in knowledge or information. Define your challenge
- Create a list of all the resources you have available to you. Include items you may want to develop, try or create. For example, on-line collaborative tools and/or video conferencing. Remember to include things like Power Point slides, pamphlets and other informal learning items
- Outline a cost matrix. If you are using technology, create a cost list of hardware, software and licences. Don't forget human resources and the design costs
- Analyse your audience. What are their characteristics? How many people need training? Who are they and what do they need?
- Think about time. Outline the time involved in the design and development of the training
- Create a map of when and how you want to use your resources
- Create the links between the resources and document how you want learners to move from one resource to another. Take the time now to decide how you will tell learners when and how to move from one resource to the next
- Outline support structures. If learners are using different resources, ensure they are supported throughout the process
- Explore any organisational changes you may have to address. For instance, do all the trainees know how to use a computer and do they have access? Will the training be supported and recognised by the executive tier?
- Think about how to track the learning. Will you use a Learner Management System (LMS?) How will instructor-led training be logged?
- Brainstorm evaluation strategies. Write down what the success of the training programme will look like so you can better design your evaluation tools
- Create a marketing strategy for the programme. How will you communicate the programme and to whom do you need to send information to?



2. Design

Once you have developed your learning strategy, it is important to think of the design of your blend. Here are a few tips and suggestions on how to design a blended approach:

- Analyse the training need. Create a task analysis that will identify the type of learning required, i.e. the knowledge, skills or attitudes that learners will need in order to perform the job
- Create a list of learning outcomes or objectives and determine how much interactivity is required for each one
- Review your list of resources and decide which ones you want to use. You may want to assign a resource to a cluster of outcomes or objectives
- Decide how best to address the need by asking when and where human touches need to be in place, when you can use technology, and so on
- Examine your content closely. Determine how stable it is. Content that is subject to frequent changes is not a good choice for bespoke e-learning modules, for instance
- Further analyse your audience. Do they all have access to the learning tools you want to use? Do they have the skill to use the tools in your blend?
- Create another map with the specific resources you want to use as well as the links to take learners from one resource to another
- Ensure your learners are at the centre of the blend and that they know how to transition from one resource to the next. Ensure they know what is expected of them
- Design your infrastructure and ensure you have proper technologies in place (if appropriate)
- Design your evaluation strategies. Decide what you want to evaluate. If you outlined what success looked like in the strategy phase, then designing your evaluation tools should be straightforward.

3. Create

- Storyboard all electronic material. Create one page for each page of screen for e-learning, mobile learning (m-learning) and other. Effective design at this stage is critical for successful e-learning
- Control timelines and budgets
- Develop evaluation materials and state when and how they will be used
- Chart the Instructor led portions of the training (if appropriate)
- Ensure external resources (i.e. Instructors) are made aware of the blended approach
- Create the links between resources and decide how you will communicate these links to learners.



4. Deliver

- Market the solution and ensure you have buy-in from all stakeholders
- State expectations. Ensure learners know what they need to do, how they can access resources and whether they have the choice to move between resources
- Include some rapid feedback systems. Some problems will appear immediately and should be fixed right away so that learning is not interrupted
- Ensure learners know how to access help and support structures.

5. Evaluate

Evaluating a blended approach to learning is not so different from evaluating traditional training. The blend is only a means to an end; the end is what we evaluate.

In the strategy stage, you outlined success criteria and evaluation strategies, now they must be put into play.

- Divide your evaluation chart into two sections. The first section should be an evaluation of the delivery methods; the second an evaluation of the learning
- In order to effectively evaluate your solution, it is often helpful to consider the following items:
 - attendance
 - engagement
 - completion
 - satisfaction
 - personal impact (performance)
 - business impact.

Summary

There are many different tools and approaches being introduced into the world of learning. Each new tool may enhance the learning process but no one tool can effectively address the entire learning journey. Blending is nothing new or special. It is simply another way for us to continue to work toward creating the most meaningful and high impact training. We know one size does not fit all and therefore we should continue to merge resources, integrate delivery platforms and blend our learning solutions.



Recommended resources

In order to further your knowledge about blended learning and how to build effective solutions, please refer to the following resources:

1. Bersin, Josh. *The Blended Learning Book. Best Practices, Proven Methodologies, and Lessons Learned.* Pfeiffer, 2004.
2. Bonk, Curtis J., Cross, Jay, Graham, Charles R., Moore, Michael, G, *The Handbook of Blended Learning: Global Perspectives, Local Designs.* Pfeiffer, 2006.
3. Rosenberg, Marc J. *E-learning. Strategies for Delivering Knowledge in the Digital Age.* McGraw-Hill, 2001
4. Valiathan, P. (2002). "Blended Learning Models" *Learning Circuits.* www.learningcircuits.org/2002/aug2002/valiathan.html
5. www.astd.org (American Society for Training & Development. Good web site for articles, further reading and links to other training resources.
6. www.learnativity.com (Learnativity. An independent site focussing on organisational effectiveness. Many excellent links and articles.
7. www.e-learningcentre.co.uk (Excellent site with a wealth of information and resources.)