Methods, step-by-step guides and quizzes

BLENDED LEARNING

Create your training course in 6 easy steps!

Contents

Introduction

Putting together a blended learning course—especially for the first time—can fill you with dread.

It's a feeling you'll undoubtedly have experienced yourself, whether you're an HR manager, head of digital learning, a trainer, or even a CEO overseeing the digitisation of your training department.

However, with the right approach and the proper tools, you have what it takes to make your training course a success.

For the best possible results, you need to get to grips with the ins and outs of digital technology as well as understanding the issues involved with distance learning.

Putting together a blended learning course means following a detailed plan.

This guide aims to support you through these six stages:

• Understanding digital learning and its various forms
• Analysing your business and its needs
• Planning your training strategy from start to finish
• A step-by-step plan to bring your course to life
• Publishing and promoting your training course
• Evaluating and improving your material over the long term

As you may imagine, every single step is important, as each one depends on all others. You will need to follow a single guiding principle throughout in order to successfully implement your training project. The keys to success in blended learning are thoroughness and attention to detail.
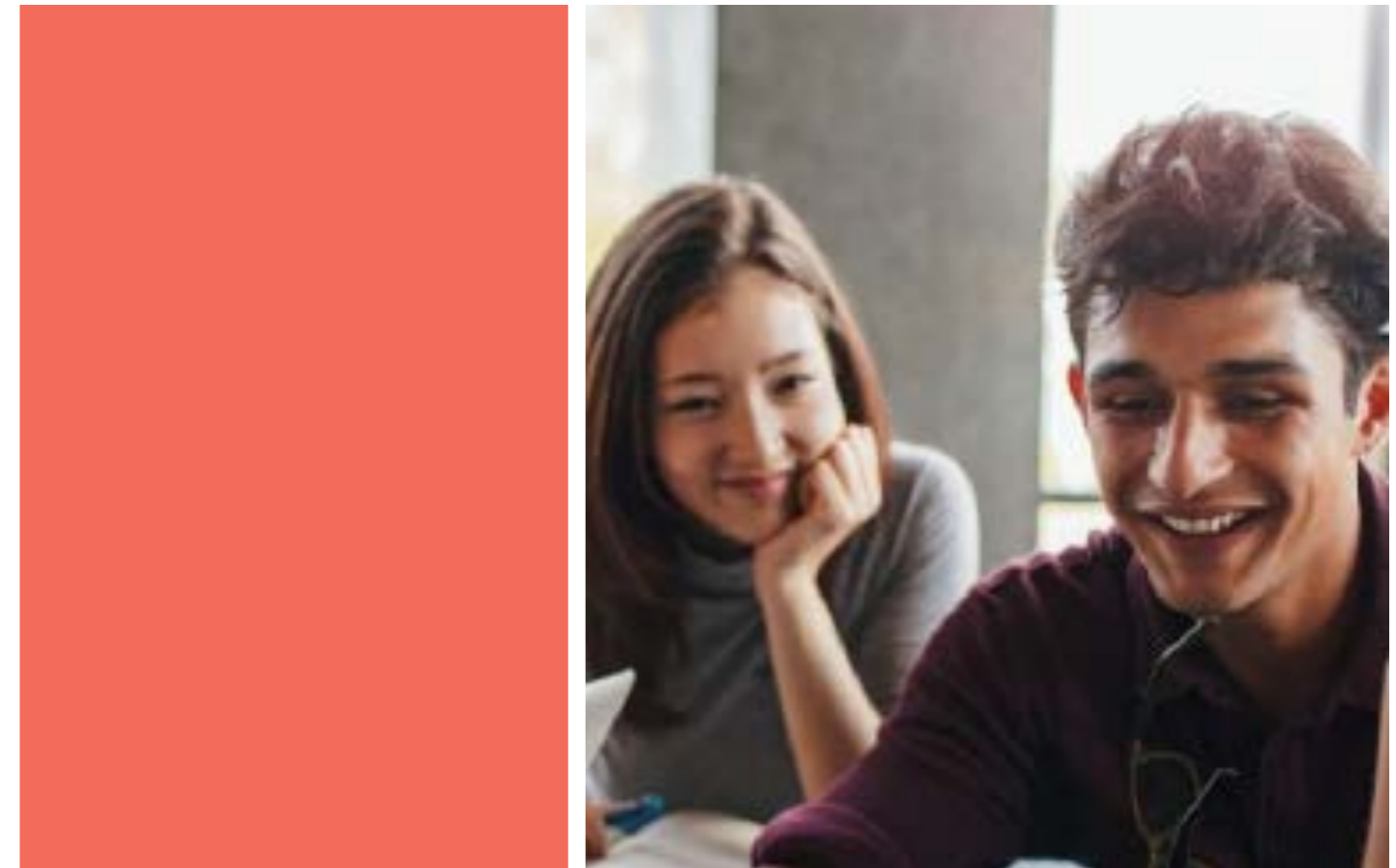
LEARNING TO LEARN

Do you know how you learn new things?

The human brain weighs around 1.4 kg—and around 75% of that is water. However, it also consists of 90 billion neurons, and uses 15–20% of your body's energy.

Your brain is what allows you to learn, gain skills, and to retain information that you can then put into practice in the real world.

The brain is made up of white and grey matter. The **white matter** is made up of nerve fibres known as axons, and links the different regions of the brain. The **grey matter** consists of neurons, which communicate with one another via synapses.

When we learn, **our neurons form connections**. Messages pass from one neuron to another, creating a "pathway" in our brain. The more often we use these connections, the more our brain retains the information.

Understanding the functions of the brain and the way it learns remain some of the key questions in neuroscience today.

THE 7 PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

1 LEARNERS AT THE CENTRE

2 THE SOCIAL NATURE OF LEARNING

3 EMOTIONS ARE INTEGRAL TO LEARNING

4 RECOGNISING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

5 STRETCHING ALL STUDENTS

6 ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

7 BUILDING HORIZONTAL CONNECTIONS

Source: OECD

Memory: the key to learning

All of the learning the brain does would be for naught if it wasn't for our memory.

Memory exists both in the short term and long term. Short-term memory is what allows us to store information temporarily—for example, a phone number or an address. This information is short-lived and easily replaced. Long-term memory, meanwhile, enables us to retain information more permanently.

Top tips for improving your memory include **repetition**, **putting theory into practice**… and getting a **good night's sleep!**

Quiz

1. How much does the brain weigh?
- ☐ 860 g
- ☐ 1.4 kg
- ☐ 1.8 kg

2. How much of the body's energy does the brain use?
- ☐ 3–5%
- ☐ 15–20%
- ☐ 55–60%

3. What is the brain's white matter made up of?
- ☐ Axons
- ☐ Neurons
- ☐ Grey matter

4. Which of the following helps to improve your memory?
- ☐ Drinking coffee
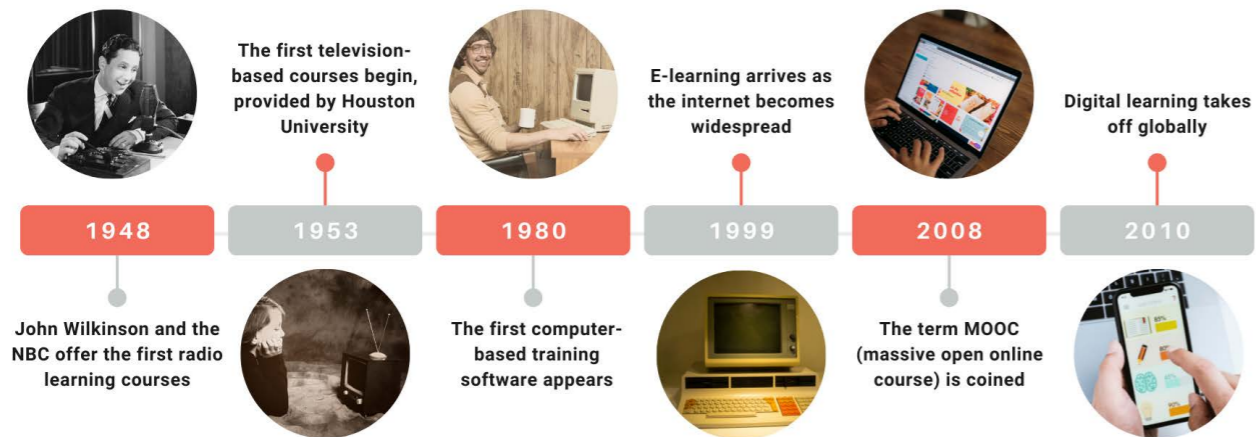- ☐ Repetition
- ☐ Getting enough sleep

Answers: 1.: 1.4kg / 2.: 15–20% / 3.: Axons / 4.: Repetition; Getting enough sleep

01 Understanding

Blended learning—also known as hybrid learning—is an educational method combining the benefits of in-person training (e.g., personal connection, practical exercises, real-life scenarios) with those of e-learning (e.g., accessibility, lower costs, time savings, tracking learner progress).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DIGITAL LEARNING

| 1948 | 1953 | 1980 | 1999 | 2008 | 2010 |

The first television-based courses begin, provided by Houston University

E-learning arrives as the internet becomes widespread

Digital learning takes off globally

John Wilkinson and the NBC offer the first radio learning courses

The first computer-based training software appears

The term MOOC (massive open online course) is coined

Internet use in the UK

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen UK internet use hit new heights. 40% said that their internet use had increased since before the first lockdown, and adults spent 15% more time online daily during the first lockdown than during the previous September.

The way UK internet users communicate has dramatically changed since the start of the pandemic, with online messaging platforms overtaking texts and 70% of online adults now making weekly video calls. More than a temporary shift, these changes appear to be here to stay, with 8 in 10 firms planning for a hybrid workforce after the pandemic.

Sources: Financial Lives 2020 survey: the impact of coronavirus, FCA; UK's internet use surges to record levels, Ofcom; City A.M.

The role of interaction

By now, you already know that our ability to learn is shaped by our brain and our memory. However, other factors also come into play.

You may have already heard of the concept of **decentering**, which consists of taking others' points of view into account and acknowledging that one subject can be interpreted in multiple ways. This requires peers to be able to communicate with one another.

Discussion with trainers or colleagues enables us to gain additional information—something we need in order to strengthen our knowledge. **Albert Bandura's social learning theory** follows along these lines and describes the way in which, starting from childhood, we learn new behaviours by observing and imitating those of others. It continues to state that, as children, we copy behaviours which bring rewards and avoid those associated with punishment.

Meanwhile, Harvard researcher Richard Light found that there was no better way to predict a student's success in university than their ability to join or create a study group. **Being part of a group builds self-esteem, enables conversation and makes it easier to retain information.**

When it comes to online training, it's even more important to focus on social interaction, which can combat feelings of loneliness—often cited as one of the main disadvantages of digital learning.

The role of support

In keeping with the importance of social interaction in e-learning, support can be vital to ensuring learners have the best possible chance of success.

Support means that you have someone at your side in the pursuit of your goals. We may more commonly use the term **tutoring** when talking about support within the context of education. No matter what you call it, its principal goals are to prevent the learner from feeling isolated and to help them with their learning efforts. Beyond this, tutoring also helps to **reduce the number of learners who give up on their studies altogether.**

A personalised tutoring plan can be put into place so as to best meet the needs and wishes of the learner. Together with the tutor, they can then determine the **structure and pace** of their training and plan out **how to cover key teaching points.** The tutor, meanwhile, must be willing to accommodate the learner's requests, such as answering questions, helping them to use the e-learning platform or simply getting them motivated to learn!

The role of assessments

We doubt that there are any readers who *haven't* experienced the anxiety that comes before an important test, spent a sleepless night studying or even woken up in a cold sweat dreading an upcoming exam. It's no wonder, then, that the very concept of assessments can cause learners to panic. Nevertheless, they remain a **crucial part of the learning process**.

Firstly, assessments show tutors **how well learners understand their training** and, if possible, enable them to adapt their material to get better results. Meanwhile, learners can also benefit, as they get an opportunity to **review and reinforce** the skills they have gained. Additionally, assessments help to **keep learners motivated**. Doing well in a test helps them to grow in confidence and self-esteem. Conversely, a poor result can encourage learners to step up their efforts in hopes of succeeding the next time around.

There are plenty of ways to carry out assessments in a face-to-face setting, from written and oral exams through to group activities. When it comes to distance learning, however, things can be more complicated. We're all familiar with **end-of-module quizzes**, of course, which focus on reviewing newly attained knowledge. Fortunately, blended learning allows us to take advantage of a much broader set of assessment options, **more closely matching what's possible face-to-face**. In particular, **virtual classrooms** are helping to make group exercises and spoken communication possible remotely.

Quiz

1. In which year did the first radio learning courses appear?

☐ 1948
☐ 1995
☐ 2010

2. What percentage of online UK adults said their internet use had increased during lockdown?

☐ 40%
☐ 52%
☐ 65%

3. Who created social learning theory?

☐ Alfred Bandura
☐ Albert Bandura
☐ Albert Einstein

4. Why do we use assessments?

☐ To assess newly gained skills
☐ To motivate learners
☐ To traumatise learners

Answers: 1948 / 40% / Albert Bandura / To assess newly gained skills; To motivate learners

02 Analysis

Analysis is about finding out what learners already know, what they need to be able to do as part of their job, and the gap between the two. Through this, you can determine which skills learners need to gain in order to do their job well.

This step enables you to identify **problems, shortcomings and needs** within your business that training can help to address.

1) Analyse your needs

The first step is to assess your training needs. One way to start is by putting together a **plan for your business** over the next year or two. This will help you to determine which skills will be needed to help you reach your goals. Organisations or individuals that are members of professional bodies, meanwhile, will need to take any Continuing Professional Development requirements into account. Additionally, you can gauge the needs of your employees via **annual or quarterly reviews.**

Be aware that training needs may originate **outside** your business—for example, if new regulations are coming into force—or **inside**, such as through internal restructuring.

Once you've identified your needs, you can rank them from most to least urgent and prioritise them accordingly. This will allow you to clearly list your needs and to plan your next steps more easily.
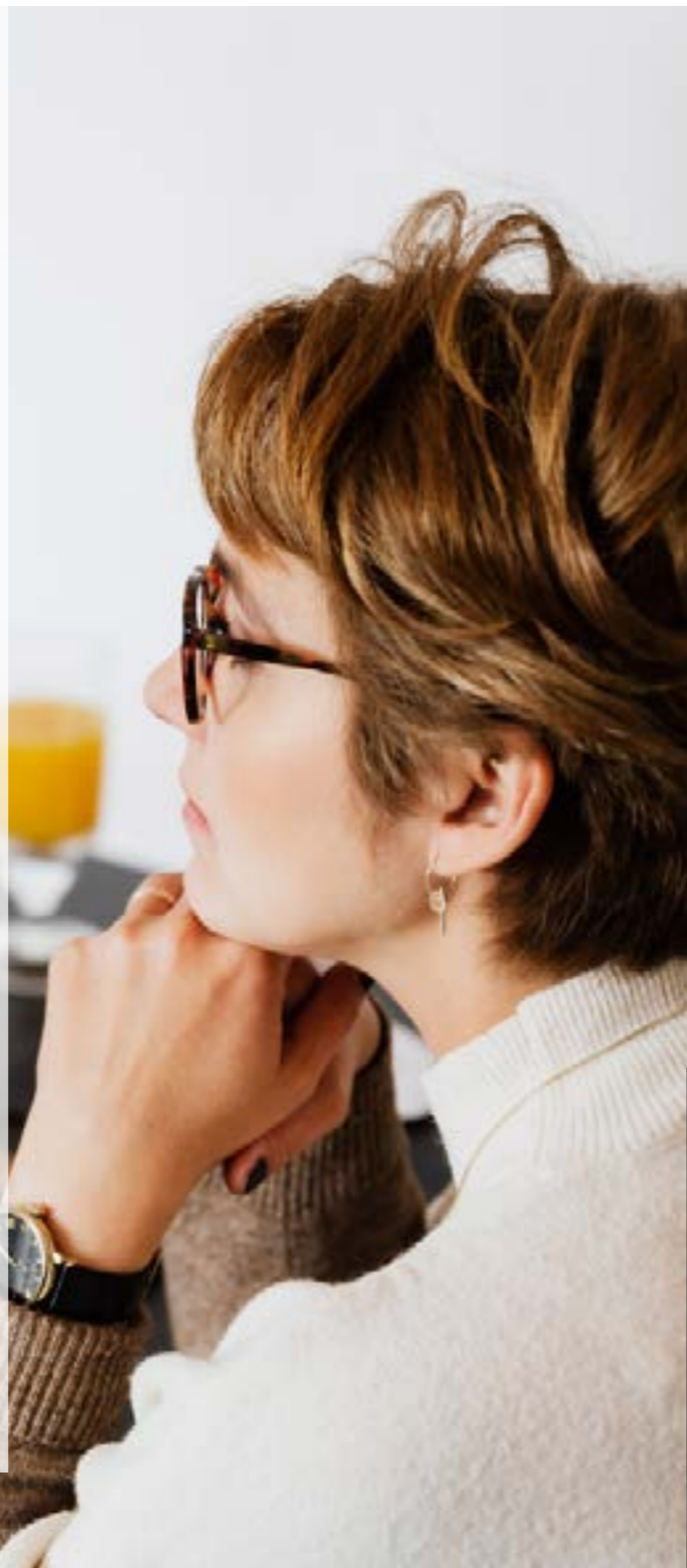
2) Establish your learning objectives

After making a list of your needs, you can turn them into learning objectives. These training goals reflect what the organiser of the course wants learners to achieve. The issue, then, is evaluating **the gap between what learners can already do and what they need to be able to do in order to do their jobs more efficiently.**

This task should not be taken lightly, as, if your goals don't match up with your needs, your training won't have the impact you're looking to achieve. To help, you'll need to ask yourself certain questions.

Let's use an example to make things clearer. Imagine that you're a marketing manager. Your firm is expanding internationally and is looking to start operations in Germany. You decide to translate your site into German and optimise it so that you can start ranking for important keywords. You talk to your company's training manager about your project and a few questions naturally arise:
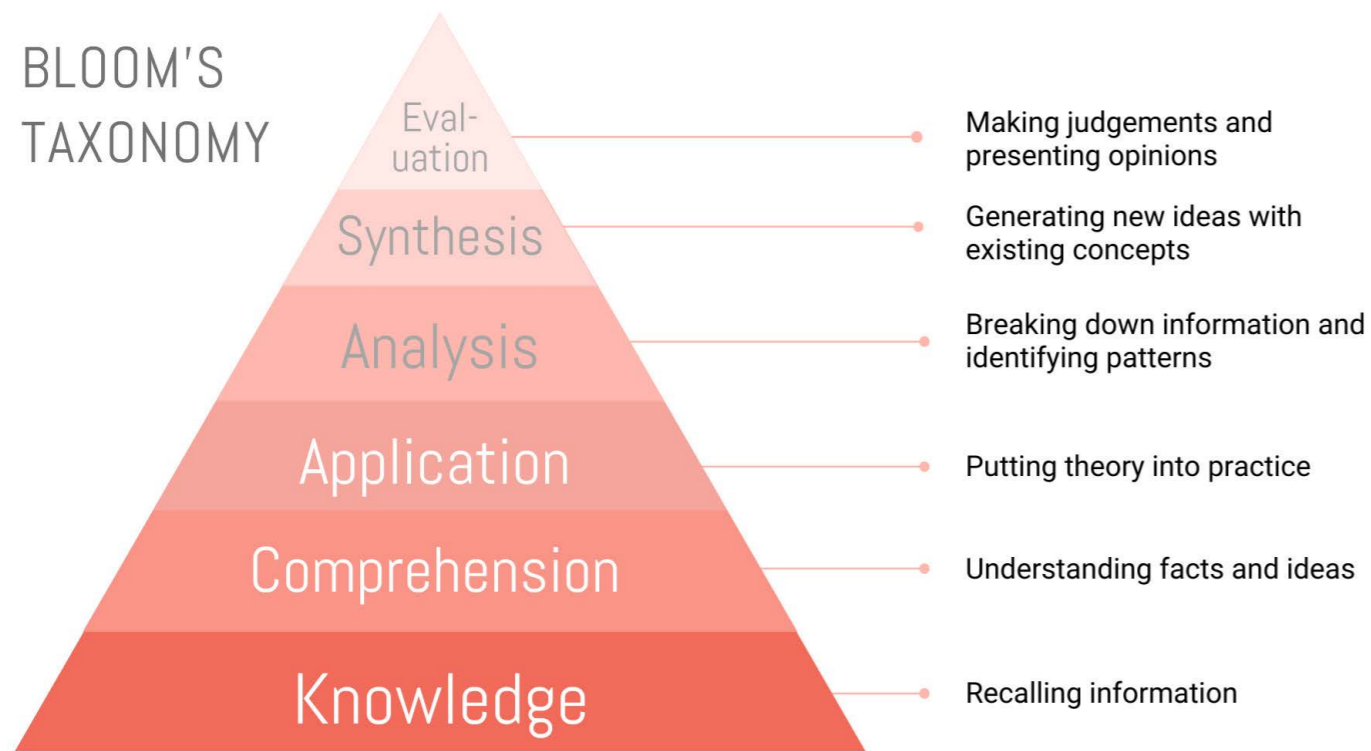
• Why is a training programme necessary?
• What problems need to be solved?
• What obstacles are preventing us from reaching our goal? Is training an effective way to overcome them?
• Do we need to explore other options?

In this specific case, training in international SEO could indeed be a good solution, and could be complemented by hiring a fluent German speaker.

You may already have heard of **Bloom's taxonomy.**

In 1956, a committee led by Benjamin Bloom published the first volume of the **Taxonomy of Educational Objectives**. This aimed to classify learning outcomes and goals by breaking them down into **six levels of complexity**.

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

- Evaluation — Making judgements and presenting opinions
- Synthesis — Generating new ideas with existing concepts
- Analysis — Breaking down information and identifying patterns
- Application — Putting theory into practice
- Comprehension — Understanding facts and ideas
- Knowledge — Recalling information

The SAMR model is a well known framework amongst learning leaders. It allows you to **create an effective e-learning strategy** and is essential knowledge for anyone just starting to use digital learning tools. It consists of the following 4 tiers:

· **Substitution:** Here, technology is used as a direct replacement for an older technique used in training. For example, instead of handing out paper copies of an exam, you could present the same questions in the form of an online quiz.

· **Augmentation:** At this level, technology still functions as a replacement for existing tools, but also allows for improvements to be made. Returning to our quiz example, you could enhance the existing questions by adding in video or audio clips.

· **Modification:** This is where the use of technology moves beyond a one-to-one substitution and starts becoming transformative. At this step, tasks can be significantly redesigned. For example, thanks to learning management systems, learners can now collaborate with each other virtually on an assignment.

· **Redefinition:** Going another step further, redefinition concerns the use of technology to plan learning activities that would previously have been impossible. Learners could, for example, create a blog that is open to public comments, or chat in real time with people in other parts of the UK, or even different countries.

By keeping the SAMR model in mind, you can **easily create a roadmap for your own digital learning strategy**.

3) Define your target audience

Needs, check. Objectives, check. But **who is your training actually for**?

By keeping your target audience in mind, you can ensure that the right training is delivered to the right people. The advantage of e-learning is that you can easily divide your team into similar groups—e.g., by sector, skill set or role.

4) Develop your learning strategy

After identifying your needs, objectives and target audience, it's time to start designing the learning strategy underpinning your training course. In essence, this strategy consists of **the steps you need to put in place to best meet your training objectives**.

QCM

1. In what year was Bloom's taxonomy first published?

☐ 1946
☐ 1952
☐ 1956

2. What is the SAMR model?

☐ A framework allowing you to create an effective e-learning strategy
☐ A way of defining your learning objectives
☐ A way to discern who your target audience is

3. Which of these is not one of the tiers of the SAMR model?

☐ Substitution
☐ Modification
☐ Regeneration

Answers: 1956 / A framework allowing you to create an effective e-learning strategy / Regeneration
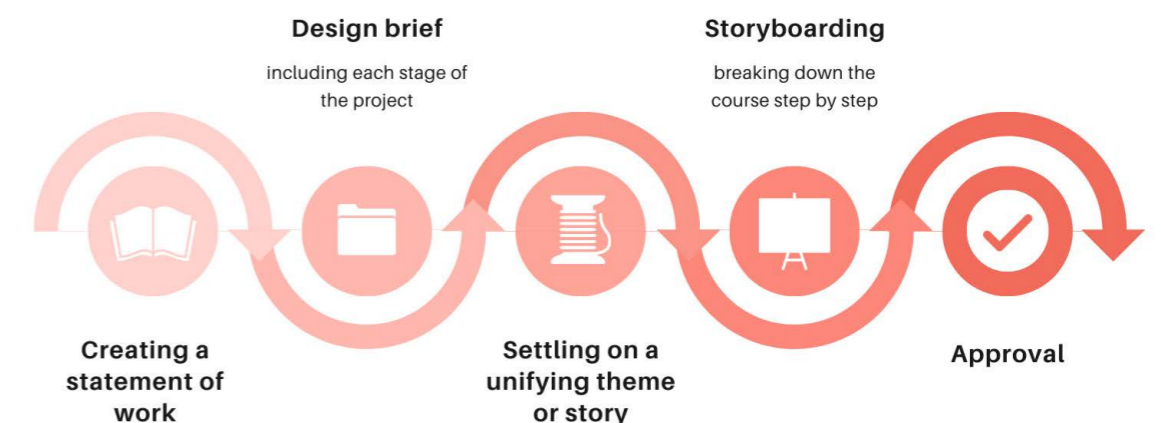
03 Design

You can only begin to start the design phase once you've conducted your analysis. After all, you can't create a proper blended learning course without taking your needs, audience and objectives into account.

Be careful not to confuse the design phase with the one that comes directly afterwards: delivery. Design is all about **developing your training strategy**. It's not about creating the content for your training course. Instead, it's about mapping out how the course will run, using your analysis as a guide.

This step is where you will go about defining which **learning methods** and **formats** you will use, alongside the **overarching theme or story** of your course.

THE STAGES OF DESIGN

Design brief
including each stage of the project

Storyboarding
breaking down the course step by step

Creating a statement of work

Settling on a unifying theme or story

Approval

The **statement of work** lists all the information you have gathered during the previous steps. As well as clarifying the objectives, topic, contents and methods of the training course, the statement of work allows all training facilitators to be consistent throughout the creation of the course.

The **design brief** covers all of the steps linked to the planning of your blended learning-based course.

The **unifying theme or story** for the course helps you to keep things consistent throughout the course and to keep learners engaged. For example, for a fire safety course, the story could be that a fire has broken out at an office, and the learners need to envisage what they would do in this situation.

Next up is the **storyboard**. This document, created by an instructional designer, breaks down the module screen by screen, ready for use as a reference by trainers. It consists of detailed instructions and designs replicating what the learner will see on their screen.

All stakeholders need to be involved in the **approval** stage. Only after everyone gives their support can the planned training course become reality.

6 principles of instructional design

Multimedia

A training module combining text, images, audio and video will get our brains to create links much more effectively than a simple PDF can.

Adjacency

Make sure to keep similar content together, rather than separating it. For example, when you use an image, put any text related to that image on the same screen.

Relevance

All of the methods you employ during your course must be relevant. If a certain method doesn't add to the effectiveness of your course, don't use it.

Duplication

This should be avoided at all costs. You don't want to bore your learners! So, if you're deciding between text on screen or a voiceover, choose one—not both.
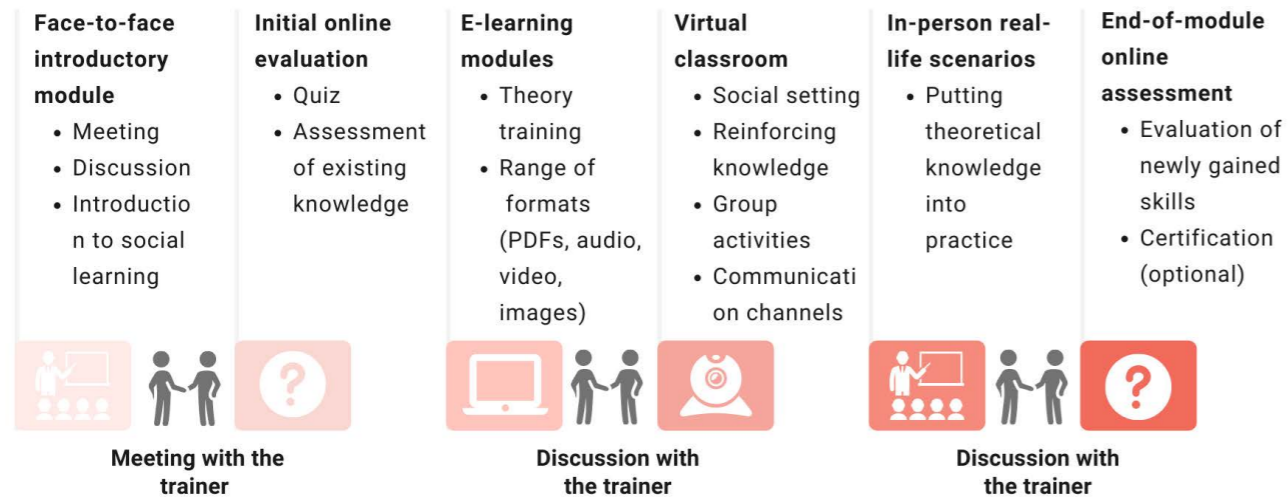
Personalisation

The more personalised your training course is, the more involved and valued your learners will feel. Throw in a few targeted references to grab their interest!

Control

Learners who set their own objectives and goals achieve better results. This is because their motivation comes from their own wants and needs.
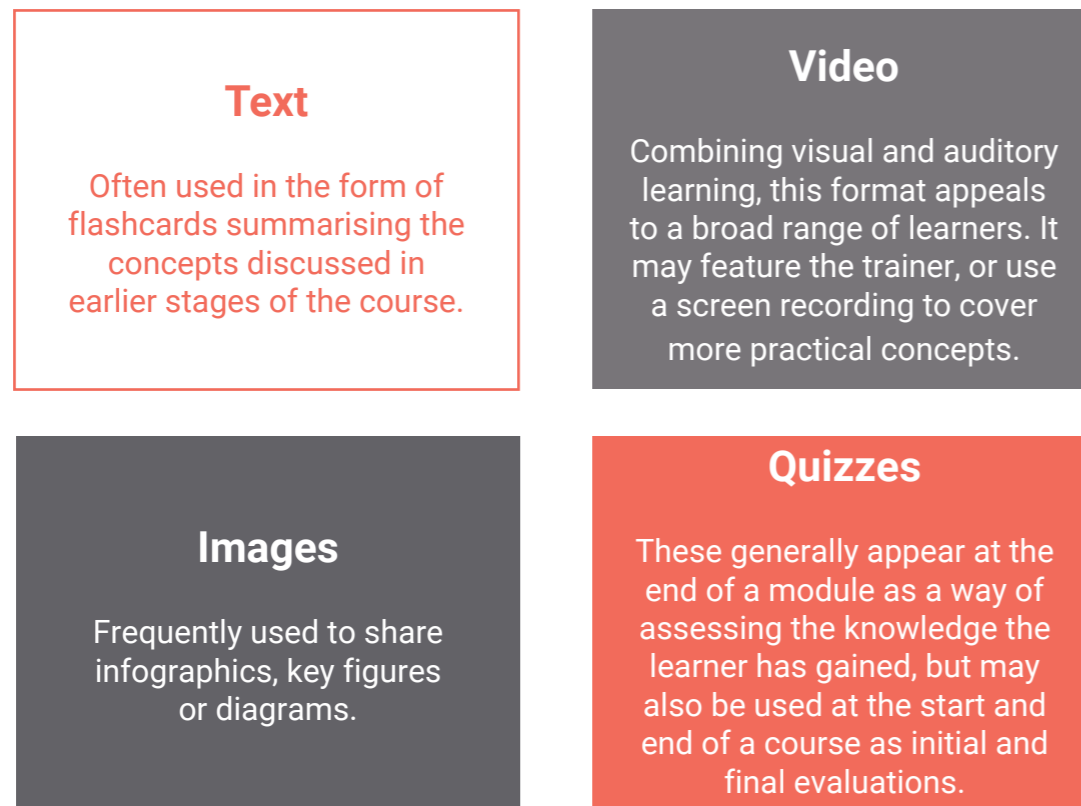
Example of a blended learning course pathway

EXAMPLE OF A BLENDED TRAINING COURSE

Face-to-face introductory module
- Meeting
- Discussion
- Introduction to social learning

Initial online evaluation
- Quiz
- Assessment of existing knowledge

E-learning modules
- Theory training
- Range of formats (PDFs, audio, video, images)

Virtual classroom
- Social setting
- Reinforcing knowledge
- Group activities
- Communication channels

In-person real-life scenarios
- Putting theoretical knowledge into practice

End-of-module online assessment
- Evaluation of newly gained skills
- Certification (optional)

Meeting with the trainer

Discussion with the trainer

Discussion with the trainer

During this stage, the trainer or instructional designer will need to design the course so that a **mix of learning methods** are used at different stages. If the training primarily uses e-learning modules, **a variety of formats should be employed so as to keep learners engaged**.

Learning formats in focus

Text

Often used in the form of flashcards summarising the concepts discussed in earlier stages of the course.

Video

Combining visual and auditory learning, this format appeals to a broad range of learners. It may feature the trainer, or use a screen recording to cover more practical concepts.

Images

Frequently used to share infographics, key figures or diagrams.

Quizzes

These generally appear at the end of a module as a way of assessing the knowledge the learner has gained, but may also be used at the start and end of a course as initial and final evaluations.

A breakdown of different learning methods

- **E-learning:** All training takes place via online modules.
- **In person:** Learners meet with trainers face-to-face, typically in a classroom setting.
- **Virtual classroom:** Aims to replicate in-person training by bringing together learners and trainers at the same time, but remotely.
- **Mobile learning:** Training takes place via a smartphone or tablet, usually via relatively short modules known as microlearning.
- **Social learning:** Learners help each other to gain new skills by exchanging ideas and knowledge through discussions, virtual chats, forums or online communities.
- **Fast learning:** Dividing training into multiple, very short modules (generally under 3 minutes long) which get straight to the point and cover a specific concept or objective.
- **Gamification:** Keeping learners as engaged as possible by making the training process fun to participate in. Common ways to gamify a course include offering badges or rewards for completing modules.

Quiz

1. What is the first step of designing a training course?

☐ Dividing it into different stages
☐ Finding a unifying theme
☐ Creating a statement of work

2. What is a storyboard?

☐ A reference document
☐ A comic strip
☐ A design brief

3. Content should be duplicated so that learners take it on board.

☐ True
☐ False

4. Which of these formats is deemed to be most appealing to learners?

☐ Quizzes
☐ Videos
☐ Text

Answers: Creating a statement of work / A reference document / False / Videos

04 Delivery

Moving onto the delivery stage is impossible without completing the previous steps. Whereas the design phase was all about mapping out how the training course would run, this stage is about turning those plans into actual modules. In other words, it's about taking the strategy you have devised and putting it into practice.

To successfully deliver your training course, **good organisation** is key. This needn't be too taxing—simply **creating a folder** containing all the relevant documents will help you when creating, archiving, maintaining and distributing your training content.

This folder should contain several subfolders to make organisation even simpler.

- A **design folder** including all the documents you created in the previous step, such as the statement of work, design brief and storyboard.

- A **project management folder**, including the project scope, budget tracking spreadsheets, etc.

- A **delivery folder** for any modules still being developed.

- A **media folder** containing resources (e.g., images, videos, audio) to be included in your training modules.

- Finally, a folder for all **completed modules**.

Don't forget to save your work regularly! We know it may sound obvious, but we've all been in a situation where hours of work have gone down the drain when we've forgotten to hit the save button. It's also a good idea to keep an archive of any completed modules so that you can easily modify or update them.

How can I create e-learning modules?

Creating any kind of multimedia content, particularly in the world of training, means using a variety of **different tools and resources.**

Here are just a few of the things you'll need to have to hand when creating your training materials:

- Computer
- Webcam
- Camera
- Microphone
- Software and apps

Imagine you're creating a video for use in a module, for example. You would need to…

- **record yourself** with your camera, or using a webcam

- prepare any necessary **visuals** that will appear on screen (such as infographics, charts, motion design elements or images)

- carry out any necessary **post-production** to combine the different elements to create one cohesive video.

Which tools should I use?

Choosing the right apps is the first step to creating great e-learning content. We've put together a list of just a few of our personal favourites that'll help to save you time and make the process of creating your training modules much simpler.

Screencast-O-Matic gives you the ability to record yourself with your webcam at the same time as capturing what's on your screen. It's a great choice if you're looking to offer tutorials on how to use a certain piece of software.

Powtoon allows you to create compelling animated videos—even if you have no prior experience.

Canva helps you to create your own unique designs quickly and easily, and comes with a whole host of premade templates. Perfect if you want to make infographics, visuals, posters or any kind of animation.

Genially makes it possible to create interactive visuals incorporating any media of your choice.

Tiki Toki is a free online tool that allows you to make your own interactive timelines.

Photopea is an image editor that offers a similar range of tools to Photoshop. It's available online and is completely free.

Why you need to test out your training course

You've created all the modules for your training course. It's ready to go now, right? Not before you test it out!

Get a group of learners that fit the profile of your target group to give your modules a test run. Make sure that they go through the course in the same way as a learner would in real life, then ask them to share their thoughts and feelings. This will allow you to gain **initial feedback** on whether your blended learning course is **relevant to their needs.** They can also help you to work out whether a module is difficult to understand or needs reworking. You can then **edit your content** as required to make sure it's perfect by the time it goes live!

Testing is also a great way of **identifying any bugs** that may have popped up. You can then carry out any last-minute fixes and avoid major problems further down the line.

Quiz

1. What should your media folder contain?
☐ The statement of work
☐ The budget spreadsheet
☐ Resources for your modules

2. Which of these is necessary for creating training content?
☐ The right colour palette
☐ A computer
☐ Good lighting

3. What can you use Powtoon for?
☐ Creating animated videos
☐ Creating infographics
☐ Screen capture

4. Why do you need to test out your training course?
☐ To fix bugs
☐ To save time
☐ To get user feedback

Answers: Resources for your modules / A computer / Creating animated videos / To fix bugs; To get user feedback

05 Publication and promotion

Getting the distribution of your training course right is just as important a step as all the others we've been through in this guide. Fortunately, with a learning management system (LMS), it couldn't be simpler.

Congratulations—your course is ready to go! You might think that that's the end of the story and that you can safely move on to something else. However, to do so would be a mistake.

No matter how fantastic your training content is, it won't make an impact without having a plan in place to **publish** and **promote** it. After all, how can learners get the most out of your course if they don't know it exists?

If you're using Rise Up, there are two possible scenarios.

- If you created your content using the **built-in authoring tool**s available through the Rise Up platform, making your course available is super easy. As soon as you publish it, learners can access it. There's nothing else to it!

- If your content was made with an **external app or content creation platform**, you need to think about technical standards. The SCORM (Shareable Content Object Reference Model) standard allows you to import externally created content into your LMS in just a few clicks. All you need to do is export your existing module as a ZIP file, then upload it to your LMS.
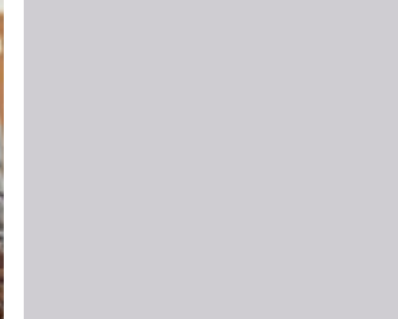
Once you've published or imported your e-learning content, you need to **let learners know that it's available**. If the training is compulsory, you can simply **email the target group** to let them know that they need to take the course. If it's optional, however, a better option might be to post on the **intranet**, in the LMS platform's **news feed**, or just by sending a message via the company's **social networks.**
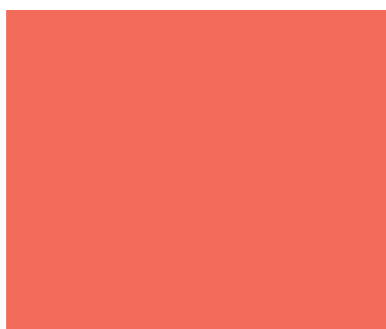
Quiz

1. What is SCORM?

☐ A technical standard
☐ An e-learning platform
☐ A video creation tool

2. You don't need to let learners know about a course if it is optional.

☐ True
☐ False

*Answers: A technical standard / False*

06 Evaluation

The final step to creating a blended learning course is to evaluate its performance and measure its effectiveness.

Why is evaluation so important?

- It allows you to **conduct a budgetary review** of your course which you can then show to company managers as proof that any funds invested in training have been put to good use.

- It also enables you to **make improvements** and **fix any problems** that may have arisen.

The Kirkpatrick model for training evaluation

One of the most commonly used means of assessing the effectiveness of a training course is the **Kirkpatrick model**. Though it first appeared in the 1950s, its principles still apply to modern e-learning courses. It consists of **four levels:**

- 4 — Results
- 3 — Behaviour
- 2 — Learning
- 1 — Reaction
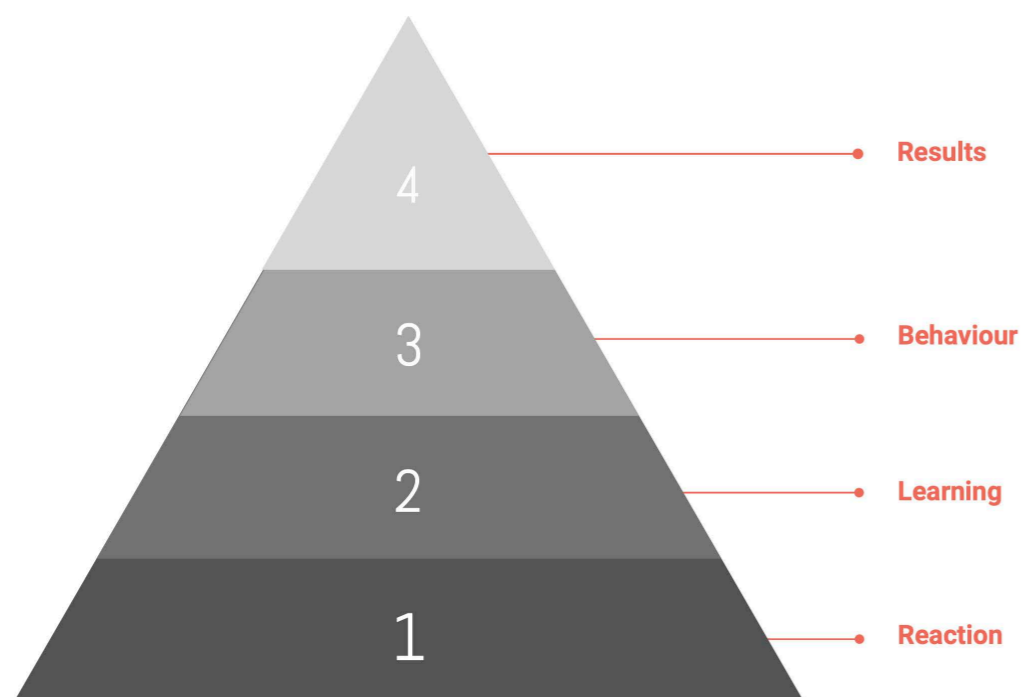
The first level is **reaction**. This consists of measuring how the learner felt about their training experience, and whether they enjoyed it.

Learning is the next step in evaluation, and concerns assessing the skills that the learner has gained from the course in comparison to their previous abilities.

Behaviour follows on from this. Here, we're looking to see how training has affected their overall job performance, and whether they have adopted new ways of working as a result,

The final level is evaluating **results**. While the first three steps focus on the individual, this one is about the company at large—particularly on the financial side of things. For example, if a group of learners took a course on sales techniques, you would measure the number of products sold or clients onboarded.

Performance indicators

Most LMS platforms help you to evaluate the effectiveness of your training by offering a number of tools that allow you to collect useful statistics.

Here are some examples of what to look out for:

- **Completion rate:** The percentage of learners who finish a course after having started it. A higher completion rate is likely to indicate that the training program has been successful in meeting its aims.

- **Pass rate:** How well the learners perform shows not only how much knowledge they have gained, but also how effective the training has been at imparting this information. The better the end-of-module results, the more learners found the content engaging and relevant. Conversely, poor results across the board should set alarm bells ringing—your content may not have been interesting enough, or it could have been difficult to understand.

- **Learner feedback:** Did they enjoy taking the course? Did they find it easy-to-follow or confusing? Don't shy away from asking these questions—they're a vital tool to help you improve your training in the long run. You can solicit anonymous feedback via your LMS platform simply by using an end-of-module survey.

- **Return on investment (ROI):** By measuring your return on investment, you can ensure that the money spent on training has helped the company to achieve its goals. In turn, you can show that the benefits of training are worth the amount invested by the business.

Quiz

1. What can you use to evaluate your training course?

☐ The Montessori method
☐ The Kirkpatrick model
☐ The Cauet framework

2. How many levels are there in the Kirkpatrick model?

☐ 4
☐ 5
☐ 6

3. Which of these is **not** an indicator of performance?

☐ Completion rate
☐ Return on investment
☐ Redundancy rates

Answers: The Kirkpatrick model / 4 / Redundancy rates

30

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