



ENGAGE THE UNENGAGED:

HOW TO CREATE MORE ENGAGING eLEARNING COURSES

Learn easy techniques and tips to engage your learners

Another eBook by **SHIFT**
DISRUPTIVE LEARNING

AUTHOR PAGE

Engage the Unengaged: How to Create More Engaging eLearning Courses

By: Karla Gutiérrez

Karla Gutiérrez is the Head of Inbound Marketing and Online Management at Aura Interactiva, creators of **SHIFT** eLearning. She's focused on blogging and social media communications in the eLearning industry.



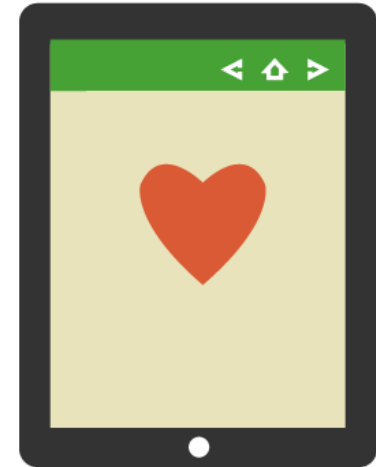
Connect with her in LinkedIn [here](#).

INDEX

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Understanding Engagement and Disengagement	6
Chapter 2: The Simple Science of Creating Engaging eLearning Courses	11
Chapter 3: Get the Course Design Right	18
Chapter 4: Guidelines to Engage Students in the Learning Process	27
Chapter 5: 3 Keys to Successful Engagement	38

INTRODUCTION

Engaging learners has always been an intangible goal among learning professionals. While there are challenges related to student engagement in other (physical) learning environments, online curriculum may include added obstacles. Problems revolve around the lack of personal interaction between the instructor and student, as well as the student-to-student contact. The eLearning environment can be isolating and prone to distraction.



Truth is it takes more than just great content and powerful technology to ensure engaged learners. All this “hard stuff” is necessary, but it’s not enough. eLearning professionals don’t need to spend too much time thinking about what students should know, they ought to recognize that getting their learners motivated, engaged, and energized is the right key to successful learner engagement.

In the age of information overload, too often, learning objectives get lost and courses become eBooks, focused on sending out messages while forgetting about the importance of real, true engagement.

Long story short, engagement matters now more than ever. Engagement is and has always been a crucial component of learning—if not the first step to learning. Focusing on building interactive and good looking courses may be an important and effective initiative to make this happen. But it's time you go beyond that, to think outside of the box and to build courses that function in a way that allows you to engage your learners like never before.

The proverbial questions are: What makes a learner engaged or unengaged? How do we make sure learners stay engaged, especially when something more exciting than their course is only a click away? Are you doing what it takes, as an eLearning developer, to involve students? Do you use proven methods or are you throwing things out hoping something catches on? Find out the answer to these and other questions in this eBook.

Chapter I:

UNDERSTANDING ENGAGEMENT AND DISENGAGEMENT

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is generally defined as the level of participation and intrinsic motivation a student displays in a learning environment. It's also referred as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience.”

When it comes to learner engagement, it involves both behaviors (such as persistence, effort, attention) and attitudes (such as motivation, enthusiasm and interest).

The more engaged a student, researchers agree, the more they retain and the better they learn.

DISENGAGEMENT

It's no secret trainers and educators consider disengaged students as one of the most challenging issues in their profession. As many as 25 percent to more than half of students are now disengaged. They're quickly bored with lectures and materials. Their "immersion in technology" is one of the known culprits.

Expecting learners to sit still at their desks and be attentive for two hours a day, listening to content they deem unimportant is a recipe for failure. If students in your eLearning programs find it difficult to pay attention or participate in an activity, if they can see no purpose, relevance or connection to the learning material, then they're likely to become disengaged.

ENGAGED LEARNERS

Active and collaborative. Show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities.

They display a more positive emotional tone and are thus enthusiastic, passionate and optimistic about their learning endeavor.

They seek out help, whether inside or outside the course, to achieve learning goals.

They're naturally more curious and interested than unengaged students.

They exert their best effort and concentrate effectively when completing tasks.

On-task behavior, are focused on learning with minimum distractions.

They enjoy and respond well to challenges. They persist despite challenges and figure out a way to overcome them.

They display a 'can do' mentality and thus take pride on completing the course.

They try hard to learn what the course offers. They are not simply interested in getting good grades, but in understanding the material and including this knowledge in their daily work.



DISENGAGED LEARNERS

Are often off task, delay completion of tasks or they don't complete tasks at all.

They don't participate or only observe things passively.

They only do minimum work and are satisfied with average results.

They avoid challenges.

They, openly or quietly, resist learning.

They're in a state of aversiveness (e.g., "this task is boring," "there is nothing to do").

Unsure of the expectations for learning.

Lack the ambition to authentically care about the content.

Are apathetic towards individual development and goal attainment. Believe the course is unimportant and does not relate to their jobs or personal interests.

IMPORTANT !!!

Engagement in learning doesn't happen immediately or spontaneously. It might take time before students realize that their learning environments provide a rich source of opportunities to be explored. Remember, you can't really force them to pay attention. But you can actually inspire them take steps toward achieving their personal learning goals.

“The most profound words will remain unread unless you can keep the learner engaged. You can't see their eyes to know if they got it so ... say it, show it, write it, demo it and link it to an activity. ”

James Bates

Chapter 2:

THE SIMPLE SCIENCE OF CREATING ENGAGING eLEARNING COURSES

As eLearning professionals, we are constantly trying to figure out different ways to engage learners and challenge their understanding. We create attractive images, include games, quizzes, and develop different types of interactive activities in the hopes that most learners become interested in the material, but our job doesn't stop there.

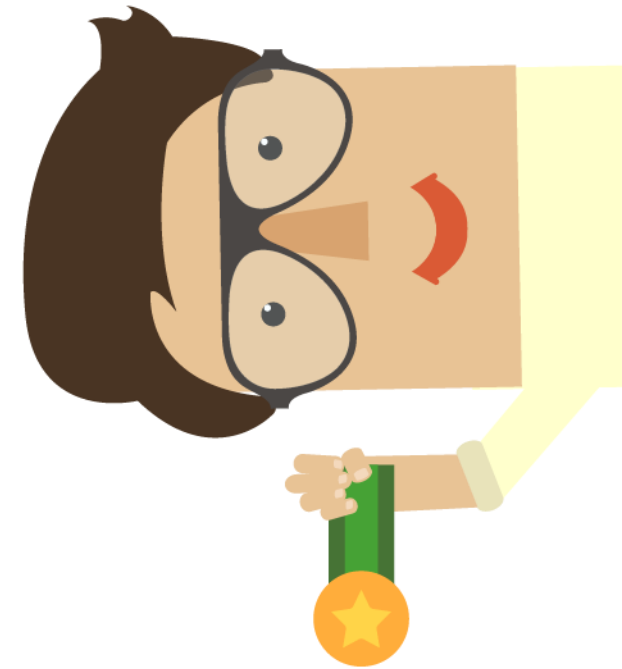
Engaging learners goes beyond presenting interactive content; it is about designing truly motivating learning experiences. It's about giving people a reason to want to take the course. Engagement requires an emotional connection between the content and the learner. And the only way we can do that is by knowing what drives people to spend time, effort, and energy learning your content?

True engagement is the door for successful learning and these keys are designed to unlock that door for course designers.

THE ENGAGEMENT FORMULA

EXPERIENCE + EXPECTATION

Findings show learning proceeds primarily from prior knowledge. Acknowledge this from the outset of designing a course in order to achieve goals. Instead of focusing only on the information you'd like to deliver, focus on what learners already know. Consider what you would like learners to do with or as a result of having this information. This is the first portion to the above equation.



Clearly define the course objectives (this is like setting a map before learners so they know where they intend to land). Create interest and set expectations up front by starting your courses with what's in it for them, what they can expect to learn, and how they will benefit. This is helping to set up the second portion of the equation in the hopes of achieving learner engagement.

Engagement is shaped by previous experience and their expectation from that. Utilize this in your design.

THE ENGAGEMENT FORMULA

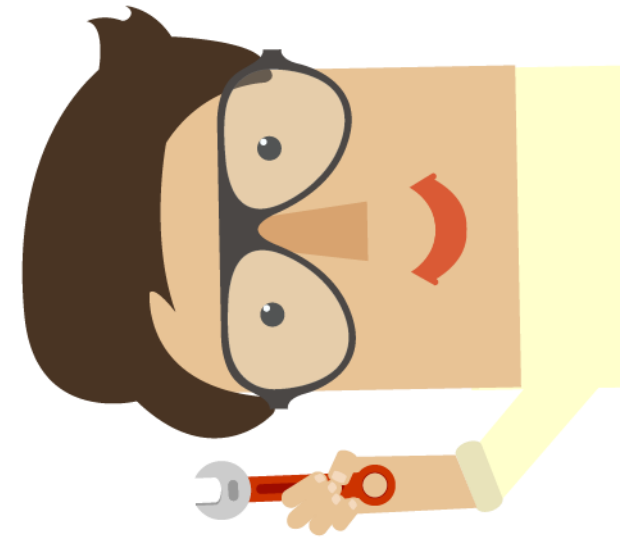
CAPTIVATE + BUILD

Capture (captivate) interest by initiating: visuals, an appeal to learners natural curiosity and hooks. Combining novel ways to capture attention with audience resonance builds engagement.

Afterwards, find the story in your content and let it follow a natural flow. Help learners see why this information matters and how it's relevant to them.

Who cares? Why care? Engagement and comprehension are apprehended when learners emotionally, viscerally, understand why this learning experience is important to them. Give them at least one compelling reason to care about the subject. Make them forge an emotional attachment to it. Will it make them more successful? Perhaps happier? More productive? Answering this maintains interest throughout learning process .

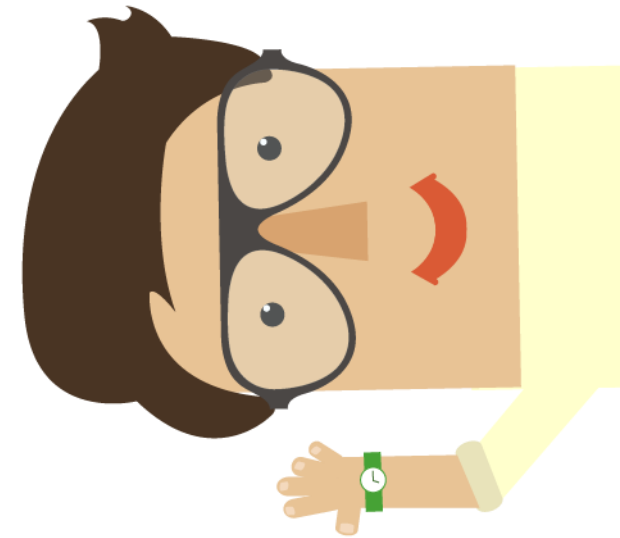
The bottom line is if people care, they learn better.



THE ENGAGEMENT FORMULA

IMMEDIACY

Our brains have evolved to make snap decisions based on the anticipation of immediate reward. Note that the majority of the time, this is an unconscious process. Often, rewards can be basic things like affirmation and encouragement. Simply defining the reward as being able to work more efficiently (read: easily) will be reward enough.



Clearly illustrate the immediate rewards to obtain the highest engagement. If learners see the real benefit or immediate reward upfront they'll probably engaged with the course and complete it.

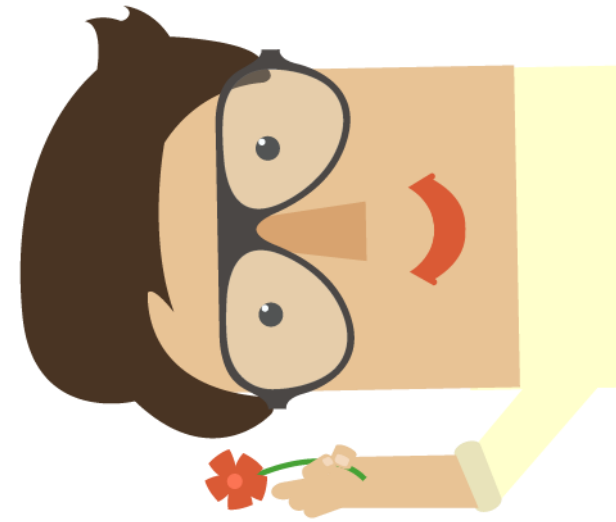
Reward ideas: timed challenges, acknowledged achievement (certificate), affirmation and encouragement, testing out of a course. Answer this for your learners: What will they win? If you can't answer that for them, your likely to have unengaged learners or drop-outs.

THE ENGAGEMENT FORMULA

DETAILS

The way to successful eLearning is by resonating with learners' own experiences and evoking emotion. Certain words, situations and contexts will resonate more with your target audience. The more something echoes with their experiences, the more it resonates.

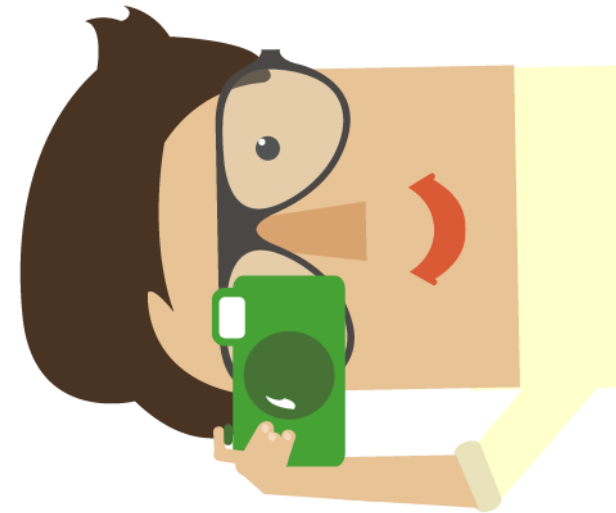
Encourage students through moments of thoughtful reflection in your program. Make them pause for a while and ask them how the content they have just consumed relates to their work. The content has to reach them intellectually and emotionally as well. Asking what matters most to your learners beforehand offers answers to effectively engagement.



THE ENGAGEMENT FORMULA

VISUAL APPEAL

Aesthetics differentiate brands and initiate engagement. Products deemed highly attractive engage both visual and emotional systems of the brain instantly.



If two eLearning courses offer similar functionality, but one of them lacks visual beauty, users would prefer to take the beautiful one. It is much easier to study in attractive environment than in an unattractive one.

Average quality images and design in the eyes of common users will make the whole course look average as well, but good, attractive design will make the eLearning course exceptional.

Chapter 3:

GET THE COURSE DESIGN RIGHT

Solid course design is the foundation on which engaging eLearning experiences can be built. "Good design must necessarily have an impact on people's lives, no matter how seemingly small. Good design changes things" says Garr Reynolds.

In eLearning, good design can make the difference between an engaged learner and one just going through the motions. Without doubt, it affects the way a learner interacts with the course.

Great design not only helps you communicate, inform or persuade those interacting with the information, but also connects emotionally with them by showing you invested time and effort into creating the best learning experience. eLearning professionals who understand that they need to present content in aesthetically pleasing way, will be able to better share that content and engage learners.

You know great eLearning design when you see it because it helps people. Well-designed courses help your learners to understand what they are seeing. When every element on screen has a deliberate function, and is in the right place, everything seems more clear.

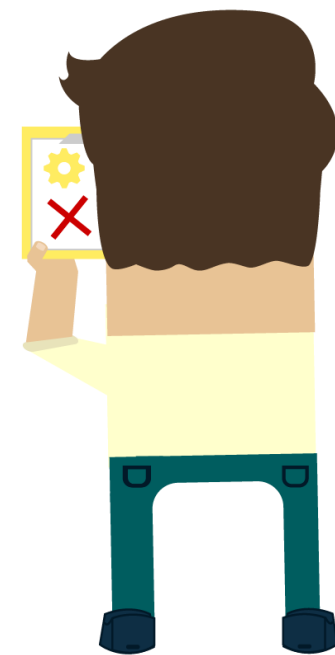
Apply these six principles and watch your courses take off:

I. DON'T REINVENT THE DESIGN WHEEL

The graphic designer Jason Santa Maria was once quoted saying: “Design is not about innovation. Design is about communication. Innovation in design is usually a wonderful direct result of a particular need. Design that seeks to foremost be innovative will commonly fall apart under its own stylistic girth.”

The idea is to avoid the temptation of innovating for the sake of innovation or reinvention. Learners simply want what works and they want you to make it easy for them to find what they want and accomplish what they want to do.

So don't complicate things. Simplify your course and organize it around the expectations of your students. Care for usable navigation, readable fonts, and extremely useful and engaging interface. Your design should be user-friendly and user-focused.



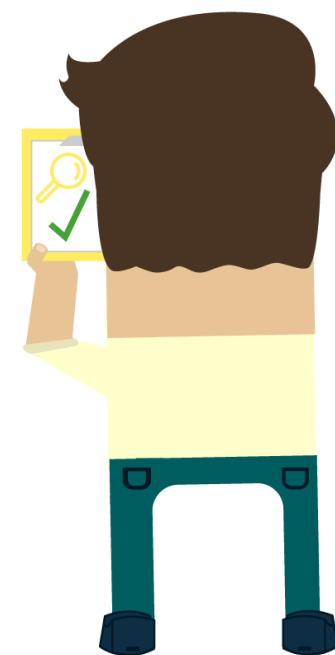
2. LET USERS EXPLORE

Exploration creates engaging learning experiences. Letting users to discover information instead of simply stating it as blocks of text will allow learners to break new ground and get the most out of the 'do' aspect that is essential to effective learning.

Find ways to incorporate explorative elements as they move through the course to keep them excited and interested to see what is coming on the next page. It's all about allowing learners to explore content on their own.

Rather than feed learners content, design courses that allow them to explore concepts and ideas, try them out in different scenarios, and engage in inquiry based learning.

Guided learning where the course uses prompts, cues and questions will yield more surprises and longer lasting learning outcomes than spoon fed content.

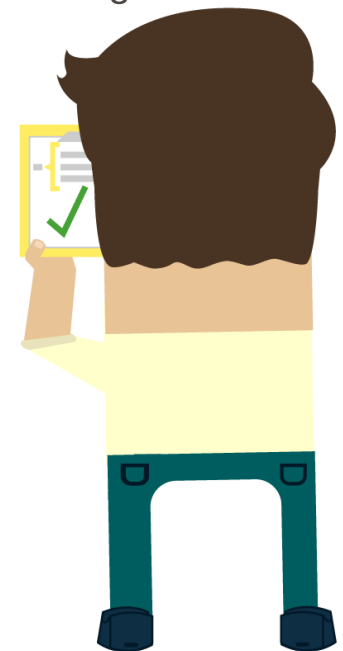


3. STICK TO THE MINIMUM INFORMATION PRINCIPLE

Simplicity is essential due to the way the brain works. Simple is beautiful, easy to understand, and is optimal for the learner whose main goal is to learn. Simple eLearning courses are easier to skim and scan for information. They are easier to navigate. And, they load faster.

An important aspect of eLearning design is the Cognitive Load Theory, which states that the amount of information presented to the brain must be at a minimum during the learning process. Since it is presumed that you are presenting new information to your learners, you can't bombard them with information. Giving learners more than they need just clutters up the learning experience.

Our brain is designed to focus on or process a limited amount of information. So, provide your learners with bits of information. Tell them what they need to know and let them go. Otherwise, they are likely to ignore it or not finish it.

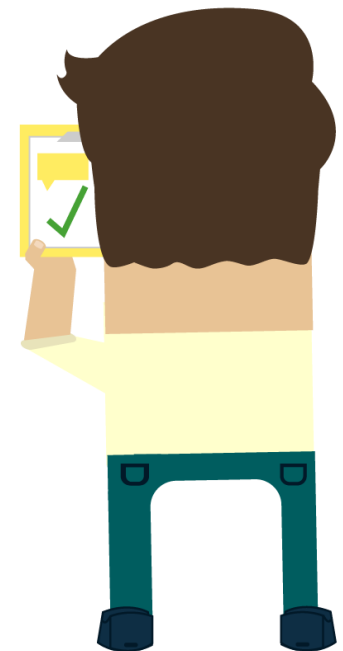


4. COMMUNICATE WITH A VISIBLE LANGUAGE

Communication experts consistently reinforce the fact that our non-verbal communication speaks louder most times than our words do. In web design, the visual elements of a website act as the non-verbal language. In eLearning, getting this visible message right is just as important, if not more, than the instructional design and learning theory. Leaving it to chance isn't wise.

The elements of visible language in eLearning design include:

- Typography, including font styles and sizes
- The color and texture of various elements
- Signs, icons, symbols and pictures in the course
- Animations or video



Keep in mind three basic principles for a visible language that helps the learner:

1. Organization
2. Economy
3. Communication

In practice, this means organizing all the elements consistently and clearly to move the learner through the course.

Economize on features by only using as many elements as you need and eliminate extras, which distract learners.

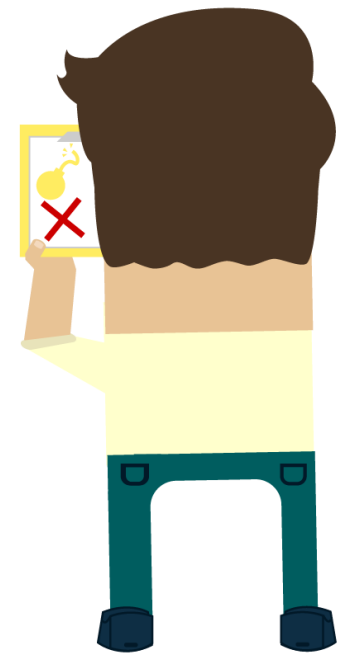
And ensure the message is communicated clearly by making it visually readable.

5. DON'T TRY USERS' PATIENCE

Ever been to a bad website? Of course and you probably left it as soon as you got there. Today's online users want websites that load elements quickly and have user friendly elements. They do not want to jump through hoop after hoop to get to the content they want or need, such as filling out lengthy forms or questionnaires.

When it comes to learning, it is better achieved without distractions. The less is required from the learner to actually use the course, the more time they have to learn and the more appreciation they have for the content.

In eLearning, make sure your content is optimized for quick loading. And check all your processes. How many steps do learners need to take to access the content? Can you reduce the number of steps?

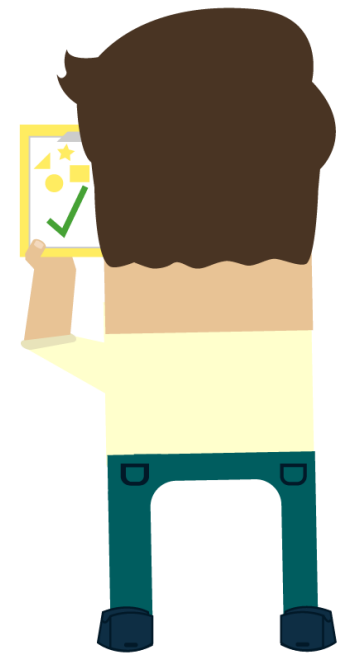


6. PROVIDE VARIETY

Including different types of content stops learners from getting bored and tired. Variety serves as a useful motivator by changing up patterns of thinking and behavior that limit innovation. A variety of tasks and ways of thinking actually builds new neural pathways that help the brain solve problems, remain engaged and stay motivated to learn even more.

Add variety through hands-on experiences, model making or even activities that occur outside of the eLearning environment. Knowing the eLearning course won't follow the same boring model, can motivate learners to engage deeper with the content.

Create content that challenges the learner to think. Experimenting with other content formats like case studies, examples, scenarios, games, animations, video, and simulations are just some ways of structuring things in a different way throughout a course.



Chapter 4:

GUIDELINES TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

A lot of people think that new technology will cure all problems related to engagement. But there's no such thing as a technological silver bullet. Your constant search for the next best thing in eLearning may even distract you from the real job. No authoring software or collaboration tool can replace the skills and insights of an effective instructor.

eLearning is about learning, period. It isn't about technology. The tools you are using are only as good as how you use them. So drop the e from eLearning and focus on things that truly matters to you and your learners.

What we really needed to engage the learner is a big idea, a unifying principle, a strategy based on sound learning principles that could bring about the desired change. If learners don't detect a plan that made sense to them, they would soon feel they were wasting their time and lose interest. The presence of a sound learning strategy is key.

1. OFFER VALUABLE, IMMEDIATELY USABLE, AND PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Get that wrong, and they'll disconnect.

Adult learners invest time learning because they're looking forward to get something useful out of it. They want something valuable not only in theory but also in practice. Offer them something practical and you'll get their attention. They'll appreciate it if they can apply what they learn at work or in their personal lives. They're naturally attracted to valuable content.



The question is how to enable learners see a connection between what they're hearing and what they want to achieve outside the (virtual) classroom. Your role as an educator is to allow them to see such connection. Define goals and course objectives clearly from the very beginning. Show them how they can apply new knowledge or skills.

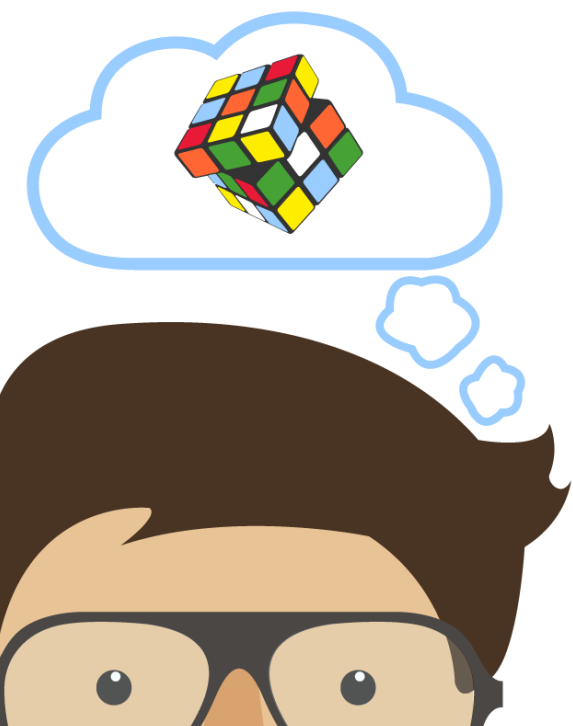
2. USE THE SAME SOCIAL CONVENTIONS THAT YOU WOULD USE WITH REAL PEOPLE

The easiest way to talk to people or get their attention is to use their language and, more importantly, to link new information to already existing information. Start by writing in a conversational tone. It's much more effective than a formal tone in terms of engagement. Also, this type of tone demands that you use common or recognizable words. Too much jargon or technical terms will only distract learners because they'll focus less on the message and more on the odd word.



3. CREATE CHALLENGES

Instead of static presentations, create challenges. Lack of challenge usually bore students and turn them into passive observers. Without any meaningful challenge or goal, learners won't see any reason to get involved with the course. They may be able to complete assignment imposed on them, but they won't likely be stimulated by the course. Animations are only as good as the goals they're trying to achieve. They have to be actually engaging or mentally stimulating.



It is important that the student feels stretched by the eLearning experience, but not to breaking point of course. Challenge provides motivation to the learner, and a feeling of having grasped some learning point will act to spur the student on to learn more. If there is no challenge, the student will undoubtedly soon get bored and lose interest. So the program must be challenging, but not so much so as to be exasperating. The eLearning developer's goal must be to achieve that delicate balance.

4. KEEP THE COURSES SHORT

Assuming that learners can take a 60-minute eLearning course at their desk and maintain their interest is a myth. People are more likely to start and complete a course if they think they can get it done. As a best practice, most courses should clock in around the 10-15 minute mark and avoid going beyond 30 minutes. That is all the time workers have today to do something uninterrupted at their desk.



To fit a course module into that time frame, strip the course content down to the essential elements. Select just what is needed to be learned and no more. If your content requires learners to spend more than 15 minutes in front of their screen, see if you can break it into a series of 10-minute sections learners can access one at a time.

Short eLearning courses will engage learners upfront and give them a sense of progress and achievement as they complete each section in the series.

TREAT AUTONOMOUS ADULTS LIKE AUTONOMOUS ADULTS

Who's in control? Self-directed learners want to feel that they are in control. They want eLearning professionals to respect their independence and capability in making crucial learning decisions. They want you to recognize their ability to take responsibility for themselves.

The challenge for instructors is to allow students to take an active role in their studies, to allow them to choose or consider several options. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Allow students to learn in a sequence that works for them. Make the course structure flexible, not linear. Include next, previous, course home, start lesson, and other important buttons.
- Allow students to control the pace of the course. Remember, adult learners play other roles too. Don't make them drop their priorities outside the class in order to accommodate your schedule.
- Trust that students are capable of choosing their own paths. Give them several ways to access content: menu, index, search, course map.



6. CREATE S.T.A.R MOMENTS

[Nancy Duarte](#), well-known graphic designer, author and speaker, coined the term [STAR moments](#) in her 2010 book "Resonate: Present Visual Stories that Transform Audiences." STAR stands for Something They'll Always Remember. It's that special moment in a presentation, speech or eLearning course where the material is brought into sharp focus and magnified for the audience. It's the "Ah Ha" or "WOW" moment.



These moments work best when they engage the learner at the emotional level. In eLearning, this is best achieved through engaging stories, funny or emotional anecdotes involving famous people in your industry, or powerful graphics that can help people see content in a different light. Where emotion is involved, the effect upon learning is drastically intensified.

You can activate learner's emotions through: Surprising content and facts, controversy and suspense; compelling stories, lessons that evoke memories; and media that evokes emotional responses.

7. FEED CURIOSITY

We are a naturally curious species, always looking behind the horizon for new adventures and experiences. Curiosity drives innovation and learning, pushing us to find new answers when confronted with challenging questions or complex problems. It makes our minds active instead of passive. The main attitude that can be created is that of desire to go on learning, to continue through the course with motivation.



When you insert the curiosity factor, you are activating every single light in your learner's brain. Use of questions is particularly effective here. Leading the student to a conclusion by the use of questions rather than simply imparting information must be the goal. This will make learners search for answers in their minds.

You can also wrap a story around the content, use supportive elements such as interesting graphics, or any kind of event that introduces conflict.

“ In eLearning, we often associate engagement with interactivity, quizzing, and games, but to be truly engaging, we must appeal to the learners’ natural curiosity first. ”

Amy Jokien

8. GAIN THEIR TRUST

Being perceived as trustworthy and believable is very important in the learning process. When learners trust and believe in you, they will likely invest time and other resources in completing the coursework. Otherwise, they'll easily walk away.

Here's how you can gain the trust and respect of your audience.

- Trust your learners. Don't treat them like idiots.
- Always place the interest of learners first. Are you actually doing it because it's easy? Or are you making it easier for them to accomplish tasks?
- Sweat the small stuff. Errors, even the smallest ones, can decrease your material's perceived credibility.
- Design clean and professional-looking interface. Your navigational buttons and fonts do affect learner's trust.



Chapter 5:

3 KEYS TO

SUCCESSFUL ENGAGEMENT

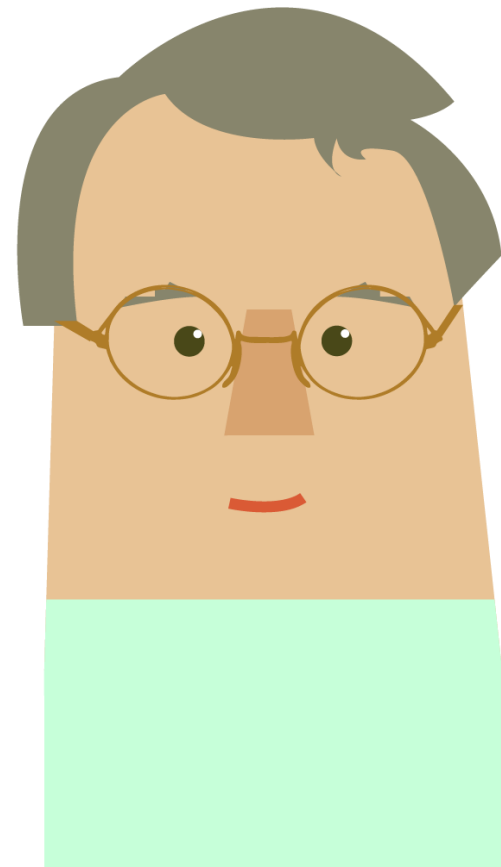
eLearning experts tell 3 things you need to remember always!

“AT CORE YOU WANT TO DESIGN EXPERIENCES, NOT JUST LEARNING”

— Clark Quinn

Clark Quinn, a renowned leader in learning technology strategy, embraces the powerful process of designing experiences. He dismisses the idea of merely creating a course or giving away content.

It's never just about content, after all. It's time for instructional designers to take their roles as “designers of learning experiences” seriously. If they can find ways to make the experience enjoyable or engaging, then learners are likely achieve their learning goals.



“YOU MAY BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE YOUR LEARNERS, BUT YOU CAN'T CONTROL THEM”

— Julie Dirksen

Adult learners want to take control of their lessons, to choose. While you can ask them to sign up, you can't actually force them to learn. Julie Dirksen, author of *Design for How People Learn*, shares this nugget of information.

She suggests professionals to respect adult learners by giving them “control over their learning environment.” Adults, you see, don't like learning when they feel information, ideas or actions are imposed on them from the outside.



“LOGIC + EMOTION ARE A WINNING COMBINATION. WHEN USEFUL AND USEABLE MEET DELIGHT, GREAT THINGS HAPPEN. IT’S ABOUT BALANCE.”

— David Armano

We value logic but tend to ignore emotion. Research, however, suggests that the most successful eLearning courses trigger the right emotions. They are proof that the learning process is an emotional one too. Emotion, in fact, is the brain’s secret language. When you evoke an emotion, the brain responds and decides, the body follows.



TRY SHIFT TODAY!



GET A 15-DAY FREE TRIAL [CLICKING HERE](#)

SHIFT

DISRUPTIVE E-LEARNING