

Turn Knowledge into Results with the Right Training Method

Providing training for your company's products or internal processes allows your organization to develop a highly knowledgeable workforce, decrease errors and employee ramp-up time, or save on customer assistance expenses by reducing service requests. The key to making your company's training a success is selecting the training methodology that is most appropriate given your target audience, the knowledge to be transferred, the learning environment, and your other resources.

This white paper is intended to provide an overview of the major training methodologies in use today for adult learning, highlighting the key benefits and challenges of each.

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Training is a great way to educate employees, customers, and partners about your company's products or processes. The subject matter, the training environment, and the learning styles of your target audience must all be taken into consideration, along with other resources and constraints, such as budget and availability of live trainers.

Fortunately, there are many training methods and course formats, each offering different advantages and limitations. The challenge is to understand what methods work best in your specific training situation.

Making the Choice

You know you need training, but what method will you use? Classroom training? eLearning? On-the-job training (OJT)? Selecting the training method best suited for your audience, your content, and your organization is key to ensuring that your investment in training delivers the desired results — learners engaging in the training, absorbing the information, and applying it to their activities. Assessing the benefits, barriers, and development process for each training method will help you find the right training method for your team and your budget.

As you consider what training method to pursue, keep in mind that a mix of training media, i.e. “blended learning,” typically yields the best outcomes. Imagine a training experience that involves a pre-classroom eLearning tutorial, activity-based classroom training that builds on the tutorial, follow-up OJT that reinforces classroom topics and tests mastery, and online collaborative tools (wikis, blogs, etc.) that allow learners to share their ideas and challenges.

The possibilities are endless — and the results? Engaged learners, significant behavior change, increased productivity — in a nutshell, improved performance.

*For the most effective training,
the trick is selecting the right methods for
your environment,
your learners, and your content.*

Instructor-Led Training

The most traditional type of instruction is in-person, face-to-face classroom training, led by a trainer who relies on lecture followed by test questions to ensure competency. However, in recent years, training professionals have used technology to integrate more opportunities for interaction, including discussions, problem solving tasks, case studies, and hands-on practice. Learners are immersed in the training experience as they are asked not only to absorb, but also to perform, along with trainers who may or may not be experts in the subject matter. As a result, this type of training is typically referred to as “Instructor-Led” or even “Facilitator-Led Training.”

Face-to-face, synchronous training is recommended for training engagements that require a high amount of trainer/trainee interaction. Examples are complex procedures that require on-site demonstration and practice, abstract skills that benefit from immediate feedback and discussion, or new hire training designed to build a team.

With Instructor-Led Training, learners have opportunities to practice hands-on skills and receive immediate, customized feedback.

Key Benefits	Potential Challenges	Development Notes
<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor-led training feels personal—learners meet team members and other learners. • Learners and facilitators can communicate nonverbally—with speech, gestures and body language to illustrate points. • The class can participate in discussion to dive deeper into complex or abstract topics. • Learners have opportunities to practice hands-on skills and receive immediate, customized feedback. <p>Post-Training Reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant handouts or workbooks provide high-level reference material and space to take notes for learners to refer to later. <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The classroom works well for training both soft skills and complex skills that the facilitator can demonstrate live. • Subjective skills, e.g., asking learners to find the best solution to a problem with multiple correct solutions, are best taught synchronously. 	<p>Facilitator/Instructor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitators can make or break the training, so you need effective facilitators. • A Train-the-Trainer session helps facilitators be effective—but takes facilitators away from their normal tasks for longer. <p>Learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No-shows can create scheduling challenges. • Learners can fail to engage if the facilitator doesn't keep them interested, they're worried about being away from work, or otherwise distracted. <p>Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing everyone to one location can be costly and time-consuming. • Updates affect multiple documents, so changes need to be made carefully. • Learner notes vary greatly, so the reference materials may be stronger for some than others. 	<p>Cost Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level of detail • Reuse of existing materials • Complexity of content • Level of interactivity <p>Typical Materials/Deliverables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator/Instructor guide • Participant workbook • Handouts • Presentations • Pre- and post-work assignments • Evaluations

eLearning

eLearning provides on-demand training to any location using an electronic interface. With the right planning and an interactive, engaging design, it can be just as effective as face-to-face training. eLearning is a great option for learners in multiple locations with busy schedules, content that learners will need to access frequently, and information that does not need frequent updating.

Multiple development tools and digital teaching devices are available for use with eLearning, such as animations, audio voiceover explanations, activities that require the user to make decisions and receive feedback, and embedded videos. Even though it can be a larger upfront investment than other types of training (like classroom training), eLearning pays off over time as you can train learners anytime, anyplace.

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Key Benefits	Potential Challenges	Notes
<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners go through materials at their own pace, examining content without scrambling to keep up or waiting for the rest of the class. The course can be adapted to the learner—learners can skip screens if they answer questions correctly, select from different methods to practice skills, and review material that they don't understand. All learners receive consistent feedback when they answer questions and complete activities. <p>Post-Training Reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The entire course can serve as a readily available reference for learners. <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eLearning works well for straightforward hard skills, such as technical and administrative procedures and processes that can be defined and measured. <p>Access and Timing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> eLearning eliminates the need for travel. Learners have 24/7 access to content. eLearning typically is faster than instructor-led training. A learning management system (LMS) can automatically track activities and completion. 	<p>Learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners must have access to and understanding of the technology required. Budgets can limit development of interactivity and engaging content. Learners can get distracted during the course without dedicated time to complete it. eLearning lacks the personal interaction of classroom training. <p>Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates generally require several types of resources (programmer, instructional designer, product engineer). Even when using an LMS, a team member is needed to manage the LMS. Several members may need to learn various LMS tasks. 	<p>Cost Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of interactivity Level of detail Development tool Reuse of existing materials Audio, graphics, video, and animation <p>Typical Materials/Deliverables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course files of several possible types that run through an online host or internal system Videos Animations with audio narration

Distance Learning

Learners and facilitators in different locations connect over the Internet in live sessions—this is distance learning. Distance learning combines the personal interaction of classroom training with the convenience of eLearning, making it an excellent option when learners are in different locations, but need immediate feedback and live explanations.

Although it does not provide the same level of personal interaction as classroom training, distance learning does allow for discussion, group work, and synchronous feedback, combining many of the benefits of classroom training and eLearning.

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Key Benefits	Potential Challenges	Notes
<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitators and learners can interact live over a conference line or through video or web meeting. Participants can ask the Instructor questions, and the class can hold discussions via conference calls, message forums, and chat applications. <p>Post-Training Reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing a participant workbook, handouts, or presentation slides gives learners reference materials. <p>Access and Timing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While still offered only at scheduled times, distance learning does not require travel. Instructors can offer classes more frequently because of the savings in travel time. 	<p>Facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A strong instructor is critical, with a deep understanding of the technology and how to facilitate the class in a distance learning environment. <p>Learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners need to be somewhat tech savvy to log in and use online features. Learners can get distracted by what is in their immediate environment and might not totally engage in the training <p>Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges that apply to online meetings and conference calls also apply to distance learning— disconnected phone lines or other tech issues and less motivation for individuals to speak up. 	<p>Cost Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of interactivity Presentation tool Number and types of materials <p>Typical Materials/Deliverables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructor guide Instructions for learners (logging in, what to expect, computer requirements) Participant workbook Presentations Pre- and post-work assignments

Self-Paced Training

With self-paced training, learners receive a training manual that they read and work through on their own to learn about a specific topic. Learners answer questions throughout each topic to help them consider and apply the concepts, and then complete a series of questions at the end of each section to validate knowledge.

This training style can be effective for material that learners need to reference frequently and for fairly straightforward procedures. This method is particularly effective when combined with other types of training. Learners can read through the material and practice the procedures directly in their work environments at their own pace.

Self-paced training manuals provide learners with complete post-training reference material.

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Key Benefits	Potential Challenges	Notes
<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners go through materials at their own pace, examining content without scrambling to keep up or waiting for the rest of the class. Learners answer questions throughout topics and at the end of topics to assess understanding and apply what they have learned. <p>Post-Training Reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The manual serves as a complete post-training reference for learners. <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-paced training manuals work well for straightforward content that doesn't have a lot of deeper-level thinking or hands-on practice. <p>Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The manual is always available to learners. This method does not require travel time or significant time away from work. 	<p>Learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners take a lot of personal responsibility for their learning, so they must be motivated to succeed. Distractions can take learners away from the manual, causing them to work through the training in small chunks. <p>Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking and defining completion can be challenging. Updates are simple, as they usually involve only one document. 	<p>Cost Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reuse of existing materials Complexity of content Level of detail <p>Typical Materials/Deliverables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training manual

Structured On-the-Job Training

In general, most on-the-job training (OJT) is unstructured and can produce inconsistent results. Learners receive different levels of training based on the trainer, the questions the learner asks, the number of distractions, and the current company environment. However, by implementing structured OJT with training guides, job aids, assessments, and other concrete materials, you can achieve more consistent results and better-trained employees.

OJT is especially effective for companies that need to ramp up new team members quickly and have strong trainers to teach new employees. OJT gives learners an opportunity to observe their trainers in their regular work environment, which yields powerful training results.

Key Benefits	Potential Challenges	Notes
<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OJT provides an opportunity to learn in the real-world environment. • Learners can try tasks using the actual systems they will use for their jobs. • Learners observe a successful employee and his or her methods in the actual environment. <p>Post-Training Reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With structured OJT, learners have job aids and training guides to refer to after training. <p>Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OJT works well for rapid training on systems that require direct practice. 	<p>Learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners can end up waiting when the trainer gets busy. <p>Trainers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learners need engaged and available trainers to be successful. <p>Logistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating materials is usually fairly simple, since OJT tools are generally separate documents. 	<p>Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hours vary based on page count. <p>Cost Variables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reuse of existing materials • Document length <p>Typical Materials/Deliverables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job aids • Trainer guide • Trainee guide • Quick reference guides • Assessments

Conclusion

Successful training depends on a number of factors. For classroom training and distance learning, you need a strong instructor who is well prepared; for eLearning, you need to invest enough to ensure that your training is interactive and engaging; for distance learning and eLearning, you need the right technology so that your learners are not held up by technical issues; for self-paced training and OJT, learners need support from a mentor to validate learning.

Whenever possible, choose a customized, blended approach to training for the best results. Blended learning creates a training continuum that allows learners to gain information in stages, with each piece of content taught in a method that works well for that content. If you're just getting started with blended training, start small—blended learning doesn't have to be a robust experience that mixes many different training methods. For example, you could provide a self-paced manual before an instructor-led training session to teach core concepts so learners come to class ready to learn and practice.

Your content, your audience, your company environment and your resources weigh into the decision to use one training method over another. The key to choosing the most effective training is careful consideration of these factors, with input from multiple stakeholders, and an experienced training development partner to incorporate your ideas into polished training deliverables.

About InfoPros

Since 1994, InfoPros has proven its documentation and training expertise with a commitment to best-in-class services and client-centered solutions. Experienced in a host of authoring software and with a wide variety of industries, we specialize in delivering a blend of services for documenting products and processes, training development, and translation and localization.

Whether you need a complete training program to augment a new product or service, or you require job aids for internal learning, InfoPros has the experience and skills to deliver the results you are looking for. By combining a client-centric focus with our structured needs analysis and development process, we are able to design a training solution that is optimal for achieving your organizational goals.

To learn more about how InfoPros can customize a solution for you, contact us at:

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