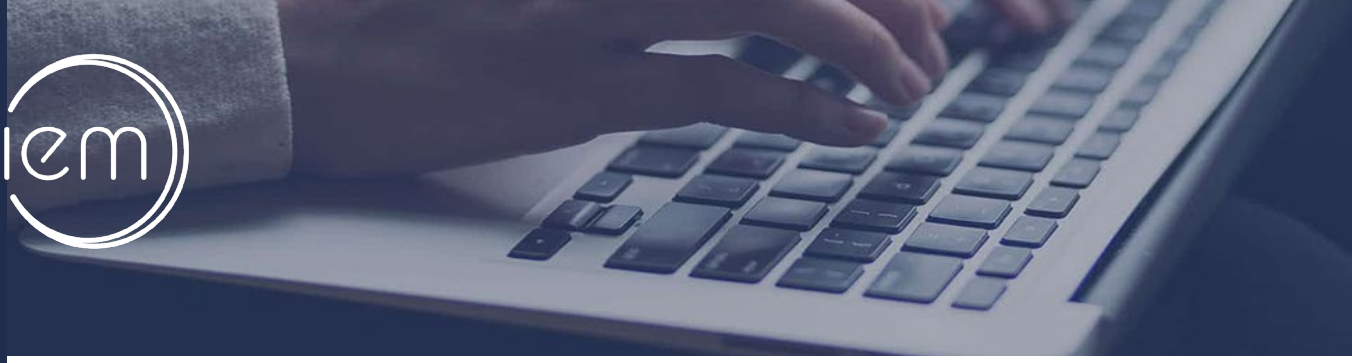


# Selecting the Right Approach: Training Solutions that Deliver Results

Selecting the right training approach is one of many key factors that influence how well audiences can successfully retain and apply learned knowledge.

*With the right training approach, companies can engage learners to promote behavior that increases productivity, improves performance, and delivers valuable return on investment.*

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to selecting the right training solution. Fortunately, there are many options that can be used to successfully facilitate measurable learning that can have a positive impact on an organization's bottom line. The challenge is to understand what methods work best in each specific situation.

Think about your business goals, performance objectives, subject matter, training environment, and the characteristics of your target audience. These are all critical inputs to the process of selecting the right training methods. Constraints, such as budget and availability of skilled resources, also have a significant impact in making the decision about how to handle training development, production, and distribution.

This white paper outlines several common training methods, highlighting advantages and challenges of each. It also walks through considerations to think about when selecting the right training approach for your organization.



## Instructor-Led Training (ILT)

The most traditional type of training involves class instruction led by an instructor or facilitator. Participants gather in a single space and learn together using a synchronous (real-time) learning environment.

Legacy applications of ILT were often limited to lecture and tests to measure competency. Today, the most effective ILT incorporates technology, discussions, problem-solving exercises, case studies, labs, and hands-on practice to fully immerse participants in applying what they learn.

This approach makes sense if the scope of the training involves learning how to perform tasks using specialized equipment that is only

*Instructor-led Training (ILT) offers high levels of social interaction, hands-on practice, and personalized feedback in a real-time setting.*

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available in certain locations. It is also useful for topics that depend on face-to-face interaction for practice.

The main benefit of ILT lies in its ability to provide rich learning experiences that promote collaboration and provide personalized feedback — which is important when learning concepts that are difficult to measure in an objective way. Its social setting encourages high levels of personal interaction and can lead to valuable relationship-building among peers and mentors.



## eLearning

eLearning provides on-demand, asynchronous training using an electronic interface. With the right planning, an engaging design, and a robust technology platform, it can be just as effective as instructor-led training in situations where content must be consistent across large audiences who may be in different locations.

Successful eLearning can range from simple, linear courses, to interactive and animated solutions, to application simulations, to augmented and virtual reality experiences. eLearning is typically delivered using an electronic Learning Management System (LMS), which provides self-service access to course content and online assessments for learners. An LMS can also provide key metrics and reporting data to administrators so they can gain insight into who has access to training, who has completed training, and how well they scored on assessments.

Recently, innovations in technology have led to advances in eLearning that have changed both the learner experience and the training development process. Mobile learning leverages the portability of handheld devices like smartphones and tablets to deliver eLearning using responsive designs that automatically adjust to accommodate screen sizes and touch/click interactions.

*eLearning provides flexible, on-demand training, offering a scalable option for widespread distribution to audiences all over the world.*

Development for eLearning courses can require more significant up-front investment when compared to costs to develop other kinds of training. For this reason, eLearning courses are better suited for content that does not need frequent updating. However, over time, the return on investment can be significant in terms of reduced personnel and travel costs required to deliver the same training in a classroom.



## Remote (Virtual) Learning

The remote learning of today has its roots in the distance learning of yesterday. In a remote learning environment, learners and facilitators in different locations connect over

*Remote or virtual learning connects learners and instructors in synchronous and asynchronous lessons, discussions, collaboration, and mentoring to facilitate learning over the Internet.*



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the Internet in training sessions using a variety of online web conferencing, social media, collaboration, and LMS tools.

In the past, this training approach was focused mainly on instructor-led classes with the convenience of remote participation for learners who could not be present in the classroom. Advances in web conferencing technology have allowed forward-thinking companies to modernize ILT for virtual class settings, making it easier for a distributed workforce to experience the benefits of real-time interactions without the burden of travel.

The most successful applications of remote or virtual training combine multiple synchronous and asynchronous approaches, including options that embrace emerging trends. Virtual training can include live or pre-recorded instructor-led lessons, videos, discussion boards, collaborative group interactions, eLearning courses, homework assignments, coaching meetings, assessments, and more.

For this method of training to work, leaders should be focused on encouraging engagement and supporting the use of technology tools to facilitate learning. Although it does not provide the same level of personal interaction as classroom ILT, remote or virtual learning leverages the benefits of formal training and feedback with the flexibility of accessibility across devices and locations.



## Self-Paced Training

Self-paced training involves learning in a completely learner-driven environment. Using this approach, learners receive all the materials they need to be able to achieve learning outcomes. Then they decide when, where, and how they complete their training assignments.

The learning materials themselves can vary, depending on the constraints of the learning environment. Learners might receive a training manual that they read and work through on their own to learn about a specific topic, or the training may be delivered as eLearning accessed from a computer or mobile handheld device. Completion requirements can also vary depending on the scope, but often involve a minimum passing score on an exam or a completed project that meets minimum criteria for acceptance.
A self-paced training approach can be effective for simple concepts that will provide baseline knowledge, for straightforward procedural information, or for content that could be used as reference material. This method is particularly effective when combined with other types of training for practical application, collaboration with peers, and more advanced learning growth.

*Self-paced training allows learners to have control over the learning experience, completing training on their own with little to no guidance from an instructor.*



## On-the-Job Training (OJT)

On-the-job training (OJT) happens when learners are matched with high-performing leaders or mentors who teach them what they need to know and help them apply learned knowledge and skills in their normal work environment.

The best OJT approaches are structured to actively promote valuable learning experiences in the context of work that must be completed.



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*Structured on-the-job training (OJT) provides job-specific learning opportunities and mentoring within learners' normal work settings.*

In contrast to simple job shadowing, implementing structured OJT with training guides, job aids, simulations, labs, assessments, performance evaluations, coaching, and personalized feedback can produce more consistent results and better-trained learners who are prepared to successfully perform quality work.

OJT can be attractive in situations where tribal knowledge is held by a select few who have consistently produced quality work. This approach is especially effective for companies that need to ramp up new team members quickly and have strong trainers to teach them.

OJT can also be useful when deployed as special projects to address specific challenges within the organization. Often, in these situations, current employees and teams need to obtain new knowledge or learn new skills and then apply them to solve the problem they have been assembled to handle.

## Trends in Learning Design

As organizations learn more and more about the physical, emotional, psychological, and sociological factors that influence behavior, trends in learning have emerged to address these considerations. Trends can influence how and why companies invest in training and they also have a significant impact on how learning is designed. Prominent trends that have gained traction are microlearning and game-based learning.

### Microlearning

With microlearning, the concept is simple—break training into smaller chunks of learning content that can be completed in short bursts of time. Microlearning reduces the amount of time learners must be pulled away from their work and provides more flexibility for scheduling.

Because of its smaller scope, individual microlearning modules can be less resource-intensive to develop than larger, more-comprehensive courses. On the flip side, a small scope means microlearning is not appropriate for complex topics or concepts that require more elaborate instruction.

Although microlearning can be used in many different training approaches, companies have gravitated toward using microlearning as part of their eLearning portfolio, delivering training with the convenience of access any time, any place.

It can be a challenge to incorporate microlearning into synchronous training approaches without an organizational culture that supports quick interactions among team members.

### Game-Based Learning

Game-based learning involves designing learning experiences within the context of a game. In contrast to edutainment games that focus on recall, serious learning games promote learning of important workplace topics, processes, and skills. Common learning games involve players competing against each other (or themselves) to learn concepts, apply lessons learned, and earn achievements along the way.

These games can be more resource-intensive to develop, but advocates insist that games help to engage learners and promote better retention because they motivate people to keep playing (and learning) to win.



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Gamification can be incorporated into many different training methods but is not suited for OJT involving high-risk tasks that could cause harm if performed incorrectly.

## Making the Choice

After you have established the need for training, conduct a series of analyses to identify gaps, define learning objectives, outline learning topics, and assess topic dependencies. This analysis will reduce ambiguity and lay the groundwork for defining the learning solution that promotes positive behavior changes, increases productivity, improves performance, and delivers valuable return on investment.

*Without analysis of all the inputs to training, selecting the right approach is, at best, like trying to guess what is in front of you while wearing a blindfold.*

**Audience Analysis** – Learn more about the target audience and audience segments, including their roles, responsibilities, demographics, work environment, preferences, and how they fit within the culture of the organization.

**Gap Analysis** – Assess current knowledge, skills, and performance levels, then compare the current state to the desired state.

**Knowledge Assessment** – Learn what information exists, what knowledge is required for each audience, and how knowledge is currently delivered and maintained.

**Content Analysis** – Evaluate and define performance objectives, dependencies among concepts, course outline(s), best solutions for achieving learning outcomes, and development priorities.

Keep in mind that a thorough analysis is just the first step toward achieving training goals. The next steps are to implement good project planning, assemble a strong team, actively manage the design and development effort to ensure the project stays on track, and evaluate how well the training meets the desired learning and performance objectives.

While you may need to make slight modifications to adapt to emerging external factors, a thorough analysis up front will help the team avoid common pitfalls like rework and costly mid-stream changes that can undermine the success of development efforts.

*Selecting the training method best suited for your environment, your audience, and your content, is key to ensuring that your investment in training leads to measurable results.*

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## Characteristics of Common Training Methods

Different training methods yield different learner experiences. Analyze situational needs to determine the right solutions that will help learners achieve results.

**Key:** ● = High ◐ = Medium ○ = Low

| | ILT | eLearning | Virtual | Self-Paced | OJT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Synchronous (real-time) | ● | ○ | ◐ | ○ | ● |
| Asynchronous (different times) | ○ | ● | ◐ | ● | ○ |
| Location flexibility | ○ | ● | ● | ● | ○ |
| Interaction with others | ● | ○ | ◐ | ○ | ● |
| Consistent content and experience | ○ | ● | ◐ | ● | ○ |
| Personalized feedback | ● | ◐ | ◐ | ○ | ● |
| Use of technology for instruction | ◐ | ● | ● | ◐ | ○ |
| Learning while doing the work | ○ | ○ | ○ | ◐ | ● |
| Learner control over the experience | ○ | ◐ | ○ | ● | ○ |
| Development cost | ◐ | ● | ◐ | ◐ | ○ |
| Distribution cost | ● | ◐ | ◐ | ◐ | ◐ |
| Maintenance cost | ◐ | ● | ◐ | ◐ | ○ |

## Conclusion

Your environment, your audience, your content, and your resources weigh into the decision to use one training method over another. Selecting the most effective training approach involves careful consideration of these factors, with input from multiple stakeholders, and an experienced training development team.

As you think about your approach to training, keep in mind that a mix of training methods (i.e., blended learning) can make the difference between "checking the box" and implementing training that provides real value to the organization.

Imagine leveraging the dynamics of collaboration in a classroom, the flexibility of on-demand eLearning, the personalized experience of on-the-job instruction, the content-rich challenges of serious learning games and simulations, the portability of mobile learning, and the agility of virtual training to connect learners across multiple locations. The possibilities are endless.

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