



onTrain

Online Training, the treasure within

A. Online Training
6. Course Material

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Let's start



Once a course concept has been created, it is time to create well-prepared and motivating learning materials. Only the combination of all three components (consideration of the learning theories, development of a course concept and production of the learning contents/materials) leads to the fact that an online learning can be accomplished successfully. Below the addressed topics will be examined in more detail.

What am I learning here and why?

In this learning unit you will learn which aspects have to be considered when creating online learning materials. In order to create high quality online learning materials that fit your own training concept and the needs of your target group, it is always important to decide how and by what means I can best present certain content.

What content will I find here?

Within the framework of this learning unit, text and image presentation will be dealt with in particular. You will learn more about preparing and structuring texts and images in online learning materials and know about the different features and effects.

How to develop online-learning material

When designing an online learning environment, it is not only important to think about how the training itself should be structured and run in the online learning environment, but also to know how the content in online learning environments must be prepared to support the learner on the way to his learning success. For this reason, the following lists a few important criteria for the creation of online teaching/learning material and explains their function¹.

Using Texts in Online-Courses

Text is one of the main ways to share information and communicate with each other. Text can carry a lot of information while not taking up a lot of space. When the correct language is used, text and writing can be exact in what they want to convey while also easy to understand. Look at these examples and think about which text is better and why.

a) Screen & text

Reading texts on a screen is surprisingly harder & more tiring for your eyes than on a piece of paper. This might be due to the bright screen or to the fact that we have to look horizontally at it.

¹ cf. Rey, G.D. (2009): E-Learning: Theorien, Gestaltungsempfehlungen und Forschung. Bern: Verlag Hans Huber Hogrefe AG; pp.81.

Fact: one needs to accommodate the reader and help him/her to understand the text just as easily as if they were reading a book.

Therefore, you need to...

- A) Keep the text **nice and short!** Getting to the point is not being too direct.
- B) **Split up** longer texts. Sometimes you can't shorten a text beyond a certain point or it would lose its coherence.
- C) **Be sensible** when splitting up texts. Try to make the cut at a paragraph for example so the reader won't get confused.
- D) Try to find the **right wording!** Don't use too many complicated words and keep the sentences short and simple but never boring.

b) When to use text

Take a few minutes to think about where you come across text in your daily life. When do you deem text useful? What makes a text memorable? Maybe write your answers down in the forum and share your thoughts with the others.

These are some possible answers we came up with:

- A) When the **content is complicated** and the right wording might help the reader understand.
- B) When text can **to explain** a picture or shift the viewer's focus to another part of the picture.
- C) When text is the **subject** of your post (e.g. a poem, a short story).
- D) Whenever text can serve as a **structure** (headlines, paragraphs etc.).

c) Text and structure

When writing for online courses, it helps to concentrate on a **basic structure** that you can follow. The structure helps you **organize** what you want to tell and teach, and it helps the reader understand and learn. The basic structure of an online course text is made up of the following points:

What's the point of learning/reading this?

Explain to reader why the information you want to teach them is necessary. Giving the learner **a goal they can work towards** helps them to focus. Try to be **precise** and choose achievable and realistic goals. Keep in mind that the goal should be in line with the content of the online course: Readers who have a goal in mind read texts differently than those who don't and **might filter out information** you still deem necessary.

Structure, structure, structure

In order to learn and understand, most people need a certain amount of **structure**. Maybe start with an example the reader can relate too and then present the information step by step, or rather unit by unit - or build up the information from easy to difficult. But most importantly **the structure should make sense**. It is also helpful to explain the structure to the reader. Explain the steps they have to take to reach the goal, so that the amount of information does not suffocate them and they will be involved.

- As you can see, the author **starts** with the basics. You can do that in any text, be it a short story or an instruction. Some authors like to start with a description of the character or the scene where the story takes place. All in all, a beginning paragraph gives the reader an overview of what you are writing.
- In this case, the author now **proceeds** to get into the tutorial and takes the reader through the mechanism of braiding hair step by step. Towards the end of the tutorial, the author slowly reduces the instructions since the steps are repetitive and should now be clearer to the reader.
- At the **end**, the author concludes the tutorial and addresses the reader directly. It can be useful to address the reader to make them feel included. At the end of the text, and – in this case – in combination with a motivational message, it might encourage the reader to come back for more.

A) **Text and familiarity:** Try to **relate** the contents of your text **to knowledge the reader already has**. Since you don't know the reader personally try to use common knowledge or information you have already taught in previous texts. That way, the reader will feel more included in the whole learning process.

B) **Summarize:** Try to give a quick **overview** from time to time. Looking at condensed information can help the recipient process information, refresh knowledge and even connect facts.

d) Writing in general

Writing is something we do in our everyday lives. But explaining and teaching something is a lot harder!

Here are some basic tips that might help you:

A) **Writing and rewriting**

Nobody is born a genius, and no text is perfect from the get-go. **Rewriting is one of the essentials of writing**. Every time you rewrite a paragraph or rephrase a sentence you will make the text better. Try to leave your text for a little while, then look at it again; with a fresh eye, you will find ways to improve your text. You could also ask someone you trust to look over the text (two pairs of eyes see a lot more than one) or also print the text (sometimes it helps to have something tangible). Always keep in mind what you want to say and who you want to say it to. Simplicity

- B) **Simple is not to boring.** Keeping a text simple does not mean you can't use your own writing style – it's about balance. Try to keep phrase simple and clear, but don't be repetitive. Also, try to use as little technical terms as possible, so that the reader doesn't shy away from an otherwise clever and enlightening text.
- C) **From expert to teacher**
Being an expert does not automatically mean that you can teach. Try to **put yourself in the readers' shoes** and build a logical structure or a step-to-step system. This is the best way to help the reader work through your field of expertise.
- C) **What is your target audience? Who are you writing for?** Ask yourself that question and consider the following: how old are they? What might they already know about this topic? Is the subject appropriate?

Use and usability of images

Ever since media became a way of mass communication, pictures have been of paramount importance. Why is that? Think back to history lessons in school. In revolutions, whether cultural or religious, pictures were one of the main carriers of information. Pictures made – and still make – complicated content easy to understand.

Think about it. Surely you have:

- A. Built a shelf or furniture of any kind (e.g. Ikea)
- B. Learned to knit something through an instruction
- C. Followed a hiking guide

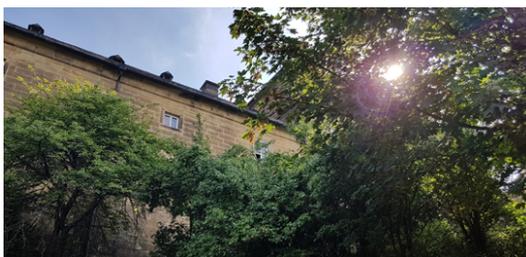
All of these use pictures to **illustrate** content and make it more accessible.



Now it is your turn! Think of some examples from your (daily) life. When do pictures come into play and how?

a) The use of photos and images

- A. Text and imagery: A picture can enhance a text visually. When you explain something to somebody it helps to have a visual so they can tag along, especially when you have a picture for every step you explain. **Pictures can simplify difficult content!**
- B. Pictures and feelings: Photos can show the unexplainable. **Nostalgia and feelings** are something that we attribute to pictures and we can therefore try to show others. Colors can have an effect on us, too.



Nostalgia/Feelings

- C. Pictures and decoration: A photo or a painting can also be used as **decoration**.

b) How to use pictures

When you use pictures, there are certain rules you should follow to get the best result.

- When you use pictures to go along with a text, **try to describe the picture**. Make the reader aware of how the photograph is related to the text. If the photograph is part of a tutorial, use phrases like “as you can see on the picture” or “compare the finished result with the picture”.
- Use pictures that fit into the **context!** Don’t use pictures just because ²they are nice or even beautiful, since that might distract from the content of the text. If the connection is not apparent to an outsider, explain it.
- **Don’t overuse pictures** (as pretty as they might be) so as to avoid distraction from the actual content.



c) Taking and editing pictures

The easiest and safest way to illustrate content through images is by using your own photos. If you use your own pictures, you don’t have to think about copyright and legal issues of any kind (unless you are depicting something illegal... but that is probably not the case). There is another advantage to using our own pictures: the entire picture can focus on what you want to convey to your audience. There are many ways you can take pictures, and even if you don’t think they are good enough, technology makes it easy to correct them with the help editing software. By the end of this unit, you will probably be confident in your photo-editing skills.



Always note that the arrangement of image and text always corresponds to the reading flow! This means that the image is on the left and you write the text on the right. Similarly, labels of a graphic should always be in the immediate vicinity, so that a visual search for related elements is avoided. If the image is very large or complex, it is advisable to place the image before or after the text³.

Example

Developing interactive learning material



Magda is a lecturer in biology at an adult education institution and has received a collection of various teaching materials from her now retired predecessor. She wants to use the valuable materials for her own lessons, but the partly very old, handwritten and repeatedly copied documents are difficult to read. She decides to digitalise the materials and interactively enrich them for teaching on a digital blackboard. With what means and tools can Magda's project be implemented?

² Cf. GrandExpertS Learning Unit 3 Presentation of content, Author: Elena Coroian/Anne-Marie Lipphardt: using texts and editing pictures.

³ cf. Rey, G.D. (2009): E-Learning: Theorien, Gestaltungsempfehlungen und Forschung. Bern: Verlag Hans Huber Hogrefe AG; pp.93.

Approach: Magda needs several programs for the implementation of the worksheets and the interactive enrichment. An editor developed especially for the creation of worksheets provides support for the design and integration of media. With an online quiz, learning content from the worksheet can be playfully queried and discussed with the learners. This makes it easy to create digital, interactive materials from simple, analog learning materials⁴.

Exercises

Exercise 1: H5P - Tool for creating interactive and adaptive learning materials



The H5P platform enables us to present content in a didactically appealing way, to design our learning materials interactively and to integrate them into existing websites.

- **Availability:** web-based
- **appliances:** Laptop/PC
- **URL:** <https://h5p.org/>
- **WLAN:** is necessary
- **Log in:** Teachers must register on H5P or have Moodle or WordPress access.

Learners can use the content via Moodle and WordPress, or have to log in via the same account as the teachers to create content independently.

Possible uses for teaching:

- Creating interactive videos
- Creating quizzes
- Guided text markings for a common understanding of texts
- audio recordings
- adaptive learning materials

Using the link you will find examples of interactive videos as well as instructions for creating videos with H5P.

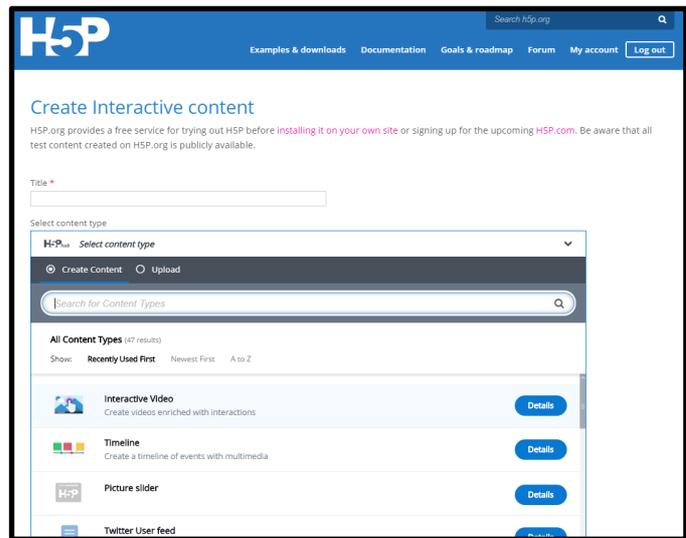
⁴ openLab \ openLab des Universitätskolleg DIGITAL der Universität Hamburg \ Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) \ <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> \ <https://openlab.blogs.uni-hamburg.de/interaktive-arbeitsblaetter-erstellen-und-anreichern/>

Digitale Tools in teaching – H5P

The H5P platform opens up the possibility of didactically presenting content in an appealing way, designing it interactively and incorporating it into existing websites. In addition, H5P can also be used via other platforms, such as WordPress or Moodle, with the help of plug-ins.

What is special about H5P is that by linking learning content, different facets of learning are promoted. In this way, different types of learning can be promoted in a targeted way, (extensive) knowledge can be explained and consolidated in an understandable way and learning materials can be designed adaptively.

H5P makes it possible to link different media, e.g. videos can be designed interactively by adding quiz questions, texts or additional pictures. In addition, not only teachers can create content, but learners can also use H5P to consolidate their knowledge and create content independently⁵.



Exercise 2: Using the Flashlight-Method



Test the different design possibilities with the participants in your online courses. What is well received? What should you do or change next time? Were the media suitable for communicating the content?

At the end of the training, you can easily request feedback on your online course by using a "short flashlight" (query method).

This works as follows:

Flashlight is a feedback method by which the mood, opinion, satisfaction with the content and relationships in a group can be determined. The participants express themselves briefly. In online courses, chat is suitable for synchronous learning arrangements or a forum for asynchronous learning arrangements. From the resulting picture of the flashlight round, insights can be drawn which help to adapt the materials to the target group and to constantly improve the entire online course offering⁶.

⁵ Cf. Charlott Rubach \ Uni Potsdam - Schulpädagogik m.d.S. Schul- und Unterrichtsentwicklung \ Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0) \ <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/> \ <https://www.uni-potsdam.de/goop/index.php/2018/04/>

⁶ Cf. Reich, K. (Hg.): Methodenpool. In: URL: <http://methodenpool.uni-koeln.de> 2007ff. online unter <http://methodenpool.uni-koeln.de/download/blitzlicht.pdf> (Stand: 20.08.2019).



At this point you can review **chapter 11** (Motivating the online learner) to relate the relationship between course development, content creation and the target audience.

Summary



In summary, the learner gets an overview of how he can organize his own online learning arrangements and materials - with focus of the most important components. After a good training concept has been developed, everything revolves around the creation of the content and learning materials and the question "How do I implement the aspects developed in the training concept in the online session? This unit prepares the trainer with useful tips for using texts, pictures and other medias for course material creation.

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Example

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Exercises

Exercise 1: Creating interactive learning material

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