

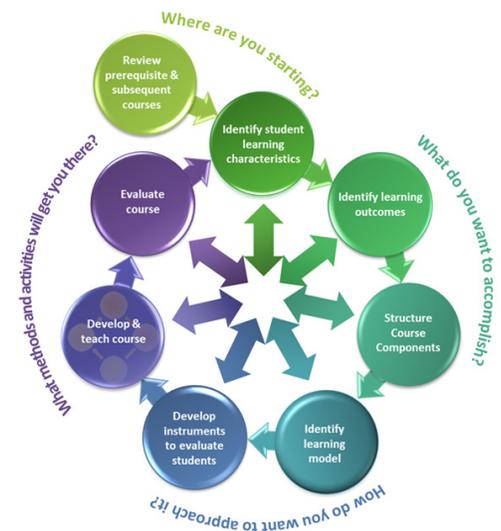
Creating an eLearning Curriculum

One thing that lifelong learners can agree upon would be the desire to find interesting and engaging material that enriches the senses. This desire is what carries instructional designers through the creative process. Once the topic is chosen, it is up to the instructional designer to ensure all vested parties are on the same page for delivery. We'll get to the notion of vested parties shortly.

Many assimilate into the field of instructional design much by accident. Some start as teachers or instructors. Some start out as human resource professionals. Some start as long-time employees who are solicited to train new employees. There are numerous scenarios that could come into play. Regardless, our mission is the same: put the information out there so that the receiver feels knowledgeable and capable of putting a new skill set into motion.

So, where do we begin? There are typically five major questions and/or stages to the curriculum design process, and much of it centers around the basic components of problem solving: who, what, when, where, and why. These components are outlined in varying strategies, with varying names or titles depending on the model employed.

- **Who?** Who is your intended audience? What population are you targeting? What learning styles should you address?
- **What?** What does the content entail? What are the learning objectives?
- **When?** When is the course implementation date? How often will the course be delivered?
- **Where?** Where will the course be delivered? What is the method of delivery—online or hybrid (a mixture of online and classroom)? Has a learning management system been chosen?
- **Why?** Why are you implementing this course? How did you determine the need?



Who would be considered a vested party in this process? Well, that depends on the assignment and the starting point. For the sake of this overview, we will assume that we need to start at the beginning. That being said, our standard list would include the solicitor of the project, the instructional designer, the subject matter expert, the graphic designer or artist, the IT department, the facilitator, the beta group, and lastly, the learners.

- **The solicitor of the project:** The person who requests the course, training, module, etc. He/she would most likely set the tone for the project initially and should be open to the instructional/curriculum designer's suggestions. This person will inform on the need as well as project details. Expect the timeline for the project to come from this person during the early stages of development.
- **The instructional designer:** The person designated to put the thoughts and ideas of the solicitor into some logical context for the team, the vested party as a whole. The instructional/



curriculum designer does the heavy lifting in terms of research and development. Expect this person to present a storyboard for the course from which the team will work.

- **The subject matter expert:** The person you go to for content-specific information and assistance. This person's availability does not negate the need for the instructional/curriculum designer to do his/her background research on the topic at hand. The subject matter expert can check your work for accuracy and relevance.
- **The graphic designer or artist:** This person would contribute to the visual appeal of your course, adding depth to the content at hand for deeper understanding.
- **The IT department:** The IT department is a must for any aspect of an online course. You want to ensure learners can register, access, and navigate your course with ease. Conversely, you want them on hand to troubleshoot through the duration of the program.
- **The facilitator:** This person is the face of your course (or the person on the other side of the computer screen) and your guide to learner participation and understanding. The facilitator doesn't always have to be an expert in the field. The design of the course should be strong enough that anyone could take your lesson plan and facilitate the course. What is important is that your facilitator show interest in the subject matter as well as learner success.
- **The beta group:** The beta group consists of individuals who are taking your course on a test run. The beta group should be heterogeneous. You want to ensure that a varied group of learners can comprehend the given content and make expected gains in the recommended timeframe for this class. This will help you adjust the learning objectives so that your course maintains its intended integrity and the outcomes are accepted as valid.
- **The learners:** The learners represent the mission of your course. You present your objectives and hope that the learners respond in kind by actively engaging in and completing your course. The learners are key players because they have the opportunity to learn from one another through peer sharing and discussion. The learners' experiences drive the pace of the course. You will see this in how they interact with one another and how well they interpret and subsequently complete the deliverables.

One of the most popular methods in circulation is the ADDIE model. ADDIE hits on all these components in one form or another in its explanation. ADDIE stands for: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation.

- **Analysis:** What is at the core of this topic? Analysis involves the breakdown of a concept into smaller parts for better understanding. The entirety of a concept is often too overwhelming to explain in one sitting. Therefore, it is better to take smaller chunks of the material to see the relationship or the connections to the concept as a whole. Think of a course broken into weeks or lessons. The subject of the course remains the same; the weekly lessons hit on different topics to explain the subject better.
- **Design:** Design would detail the delivery model in which you choose to present the material. This will guide your development. An instructor-led, hybrid course would be developed differently than an instructor-led or even self-paced online course. The design phase lends itself to detailed questioning on such things as time expectations/deadlines, materials, technology, and financial requirements.
- **Development:** During the development phase, you put some structure to the course content. You fine-tune the details and ensure the package is appealing for delivery. Using the storyboard or template agreed upon after the initial project consultation, the instructional/curriculum designer constructs lesson plans, facilitator guides, participant guides, assessments, assignments, etc. that coincide with the content and objectives.



- **Implementation:** During the implementation phase, the course is presented to the learners for a shared experience. It is important that the instructional designer and facilitator monitor the first course closely for learner challenges that may arise due to outdated content or confusing objectives. Examples of this could be poor assignment submissions based on a misinterpretation of the instructions or changes in content due to recent occurrences in the world at large (natural disaster or election results).
- **Evaluation:** During evaluation, feedback regarding rigor and expectations must be addressed. You want to ensure that feedback is solicited and reviewed with an open mind for reasonable adjustments moving forward.

Of course, ADDIE is just one of the models in place that instructional designers utilize when developing curriculum. There are many more, and designers often will use a mix based on the requirements and goals of the project. What is important to remember is that the dynamics of research, development, and evaluation are present regardless if your audience is at an elementary school level or at the level of professional corporate training.

Let's look at each of these dynamics independently of one another.

- **Research:** The research for your course must come with a confirmed agreement that the course is needed. The solicitor may want to offer a course simply for the sake of offering. As an instructional or curriculum designer, it is your responsibility to ensure that the course you design is not a mirror image of what is already in the marketplace. It **MUST** offer something different.
- **Development:** The appropriate investment must be made in the development of your course. This involves more than sitting down with your computer or even hashing out with a few colleagues what sounds "good." The development is the meat and potatoes of this process. It comes **AFTER** the research phase because it means that you have done your homework and outlined your deliverables based on what is already out there, what could be added to the marketplace, and what the population would find of interest.
- **Evaluation:** Does the curriculum you designed meet expectations for rigor? Are the learners getting what they expect and/or deserve from the time and work dedicated to the course? Are the outcomes valid? Was your beta group chosen without bias and with honest prerequisites articulated?

The process of curriculum design cannot be completed without taking a hard look at the financial aspects involved, from conception to delivery. All vested parties must be paid. The materials must be created and/or purchased. Technology must be considered. Facility space must be acquired. Often, financial aspects drive the timeline and delivery method. Fortunately, there are many options available for making a course available to a given population. Whether you are in a standard classroom or obtaining a license for a learning management system, it is important to analyze the goals of your project to ensure successful outcomes. The project/course should be viewed as valuable to the organization leading it, **AND** the learners should walk away better than when they walked in.

