

The 60-minute masters: Script for the introduction

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2.1 Getting started

Screen 2.1.1

Graphic/animation: Sarah, at her computer, pausing for thought.

Narration or text:

Here's Sarah. She's just been told there is an urgent requirement to prepare some e-learning materials to support an upgrade to her organisation's CRM software. She's wasting no time and is busy copying and pasting material from the technical manual into her e-learning authoring tool. As she fills up a third screen full of instructions, and with less than 10% of the content covered, She pauses for thought. Is this the right way to go about things?

Multi-choice question:

Well, is it? What is likely to be quicker in the long run?

Options and feedback:

Get straight on with it [Well, of course some people do get away with diving straight in, but chances are that Sarah is wasting more time than she's saving. It's quite possible she has no clear idea of what she's trying to achieve with these materials or what's going to work for her audience. It's a question of working smarter, not harder.]

Do some preparation [That's a sensible answer and it's the right answer too. Although some people do get away with diving straight in, the chances are that Sarah is wasting more time than she's saving. It's quite possible she has no clear idea of what she's trying to achieve with these materials or what's going to work for her audience. It's a question of working smarter, not harder.]

Screen 2.1.2

Graphic/animation: Sarah, leaning back with a notepad and pen.

Narration or text:

"More haste, less speed," used to be the saying, and whoever came up with that knew what they were talking about. If you are to avoid rapid e-learning becoming vapid e-learning, you're going to have to take advantage of that unique human ability - to contemplate, to reflect.

Chew over the options a little. Clarify what you're trying to achieve. Consider how best to communicate with your audience. Ten minutes later you may have more scribbles on a piece of paper than you do characters on the screen, but you'll be much better placed to do a good job.

2.2 Establishing direction

Screen 2.2.1

Graphic/animation: A person at a crossroads, consulting a map.

Narration or text:

Complete the well-known phrase or saying:

Multi-choice question:

"If you don't know where you're going ...

Options and feedback:

"... you'd better get a move on." [You know that's a stupid response. I bet you selected that just to see what I would say. Well now you know. Pick something else.]

".. any path will get you there." [Exactly. Until you are clear on your goal, it's impossible to make sensible decisions about anything. Your goal is your finishing point; the place where you want to end up. Without this, you could end up anywhere.]

"... you'll end up somewhere else." [That'll do. Until you are clear on your goal, it's impossible to make sensible decisions about anything. Your goal is your finishing point; the place where you want to end up. Without this, you could end up anywhere.]

Screen 2.2.2

Graphic/animation: A target.

Narration or text:

The first stage in just about any activity - and the design of learning materials is no exception - is to establish what it is you are trying to achieve. So start off by being absolutely clear of your business goals. Here are some examples.

Text:

To ensure call centre staff feel confident using the new call handling system.

To ensure new employees know exactly what to do in the event of a fire.

To ensure all employees understand and are committed to our new corporate strategy.

To ensure sales assistants are fully familiar with the features and benefits of our professional-level product range.

Screen 2.2.3

Graphic/animation: A number of arrows in the target (arriving with SFX?).

Narration or text:

With your goal in mind (and we're talking one goal here, not a list), your next step is to spell out in some detail what exactly it is that you want your audience to be able to do differently by the time they have completed using your materials.

We call these 'learning objectives'.

Screen 2.2.4

Graphic/animation: Weighing up two options.

Narration or text:

Which of these two examples of learning objectives do you think would be most helpful to someone designing an e-learning module?

Multi-choice question:

Select the most helpful learning objective:

Options and feedback:

The learner will understand the difference between a type A and a type B situation [Not really. Although it gives you the general idea of what has to be learned, it is not easily measurable. How do you know whether someone has 'understood' something, particularly online? The other example uses an action verb, 'identify', which is something you can measure through simple questioning. Learning objectives containing action verbs beat those using thinking verbs (like 'know' or 'understand') any day.]

The learner will be able to accurately identify whether any given situation is a type A or a type B [That's right. Although the first example gives you the general idea of what has to be learned, it is not easily measurable. How do you know whether someone has 'understood' something, particularly online? The other example uses an action verb, 'identify', which is something you can measure through simple questioning. Learning objectives containing action verbs beat those using thinking verbs (like 'know' or 'understand') any day.]

Screen 2.2.5

Graphic/animation: As target (as in 2.2.3), thus time stuffed full of arrows, many missing the mark.

Narration or text:

How many objectives do you think it's realistic to cover with a single e-learning module?

Multi-choice question:

How many learning objectives is it realistic to cover?

Options and feedback:

1 [In many cases, yes. It depends a lot on how complex the topic is and how thoroughly you need the material to be learned. You may be able to cover more objectives if the subject is less difficult to learn.]

<5 [This is a good target to aim for. Much depends on how complex the topic is and how thoroughly you need the material to be learned.]

<10 [You should aim towards the lower end of this range. Much depends on how complex the topic is and how thoroughly you need the material to be learned.]

<50 [Less than 50, that's right - much less, say less than 5! Of course a lot depends on how complex the topic is and how thoroughly you need the material to be learned.]

Screen 2.2.6

Graphic/animation: Four graphical blocks linked by plus signs: one representing a first e-learning module, one representing a second, one representing individual practice, one representing support/coaching.

Narration or text:

Be realistic about what can be achieved with your materials, in terms of both the amount of information that learners are likely to retain and also the depth of what they can learn. Don't forget that you can always break your content up into a number of shorter modules or supplement the e-learning with other activities, such as practice on-the-job, coaching and the use of discussion forums.

2.3 Knowing your audience

Screen 2.3.1

Graphic/animation: A diverse group of people.

Narration or text:

It's important that you understand your audience well if you are to design materials that will help you achieve your goal. Which of the following characteristics would you say will have the greatest influence on your design?

Multi-choice question:

Which of these characteristics will have the greatest influence on your design? Pick three from the list.

Options and feedback:

Age and gender [These factors may make a difference in some situations. For example, you might want to include examples which will be relevant to a particular age group. Other characteristics are going to have more impact - I'd pick another option.]

Prior knowledge of the subject [This is probably the most critical factor. Those with prior knowledge of the subject will probably already be familiar with key concepts, principles and terminology; they'll be better able to recognise what's important and what is not; and they'll need less support in terms of visuals, examples and practical activities.]

Preferred ways of learning [Well you can only be so responsive to individual preferences. You're already committed to using e-learning materials to communicate your message and if you follow the guidelines in this course, you should appeal to just about any learner who's interested in the topic. Other characteristics are going to have more impact - I'd pick another option.]

The ability to learn independently [This may make a difference. More independent learners will need less structure and less hand-holding. Once they know why the topic is relevant, they'll really just need pointing to the right information.]

Interest and motivation [This is obviously a key issue, because it's almost impossible to force someone to learn something. If your materials really are important to your learners, but they don't see it yet, you'll have to devote more effort to attracting their attention and explaining just what's in it for them.]

Screen 2.3.2

Graphic/animation: Same visual as for 2.3.1. Also bullets in time with narration:

- prior knowledge
- interest
- independence

Narration or text:

As a subject expert it can be hard for you to empathise with learners who are completely new to the subject, so take some time to think about the people who will be using your materials. What prior knowledge are they likely to have of the subject? How interested are they likely to be in the subject? How much structure and hand-holding are they going to require?

If possible, make sure you're on the right track by checking your ideas out early on with one or two people who are typical of your target audience.

Screen 2.3.3

Graphic/animation: Weighing up options (as 2.2.4?).

Narration or text:

You have a lot to keep in mind when you design your materials. From what you've heard so far, which factors do you think are the most important?

Multi-choice question:

Which of these factors are the most important to consider when designing your materials? Pick three.

Options and feedback:

Your personal interests [Well, obviously these matter, but that's not the right basis on which to design materials for others to use. I'd pick another option.]

Your business goal and learning objectives [That's right, these are clearly important, probably more than any other factor. Your goal and objectives represent the end point towards which all your efforts should be directed.]

The characteristics of your audience [Absolutely, your audience is critical, because if you don't consider their needs and interests, there is absolutely no way you can reach your goal.]

The time and budget available, and other constraints you are working under [Yes, these are also critical. You not only have to be effective in reaching your objectives, you also have to be efficient, making the best use of the resources at your disposal.]

How good your materials look [Well, aesthetics are important, because first impressions do count, but don't go overboard. Your materials need to look professional, but not glitzy. Consider appearance, but don't let it dominate your decision-making.

Screen 2.3.4

Graphic/animation: Editing film with scissors? Lots of pieces in the bin. Or a person proof reading a paper document.

Narration or text:

When you have gathered all your content, review it piece by piece to make sure that it all directly contributes to the learning objectives that you set. Be ruthless in removing any content that won't directly help learners achieve these objectives. Be equally careful to make sure that you're providing enough support, in terms of explanations, visual aids, examples and practical exercises to ensure novice and less independent learners get the structure and support they require. More of that in the modules to follow.

Screen 2.3.5

Graphic/animation: Homework.

Narration or text:

That's all for now. You can move straight on to module 2, but you might be better off letting some of this sink in first.

Before we meet again, take some time to think ahead to a project you have coming up, considering the questions listed here.

Text:

Consider these questions in the context of an upcoming project:

- What is the business goal?
- What specifically do you need your learners to be able to do when they've completed your materials?
- Is it realistic to cover these objectives in a single module? Do you need to break the content into smaller chunks or supplement your materials with other activities and resources?
- What do you know about your audience: their prior knowledge of the subject, their interests and motivation, the extent to which they require hand-holding and structure?
- Does all the content that you're considering including directly support your objectives?