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An Instructor's Guide to Live E-Learning

By [Christine L. Duckworth](#)

Before you move from the traditional classroom to e-learning, you may want to double-check your stand-up trainer's

toolkit. You'll find that much of your traditional training expertise is transferable to the online classroom. If you still need help on figuring out how to extend the online learning experience, try these tips.

Links

- [ISD for Live E-Learning](#)
- [24 Hours in the Life of a Synchronous Trainer](#)
- [Ten Tips to Optimize Your E-Learning](#)

Begin and end on time. During the initial stages of an e-learning program, it may be helpful to let learners meet 15 minutes early. This is a good opportunity for the instructor to ease the anxieties new e-learners may have and build rapport with the group. However, be sure to have class begin at the stated time; don't dally with chit-chat. Likewise, if the instructor is late to a traditional classroom learning session, someone can wander around the building to track them down. But if an instructor is late to live e-learning, scheduled participants are more likely to log off and abandon the class.

Similarly, keep a commitment to end on time. It's disrespectful to keep people in class past the stated time. Participants have arranged their day around the online class and will exit the session and resume prescheduled activities.

Ask for support. Several scenarios can derail a live e-learning session: one participant calls because he can't load the plug-in; another sends a message to say she's

having trouble with the audio; and someone else has a meeting conflict and needs to reschedule. To avoid having to manage these potential problems during class time, arrange to have a co-presenter or technical assistant who can help learners get logged into class and handle other administrative concerns. As the instructor, you need to kick off the class and focus on delivering content.

Establish a group identity. Although it's convenient and exciting to bring geographically dispersed groups together, people still need to feel connected. Instructors should introduce themselves as they would in the traditional classroom, and allow participants the same opportunity. If facilitating a large group, try polling learners or building profiles for electronic posting.

Review the virtual classroom's features. In the traditional learning environment, participants are familiar with raising their hands to ask questions and make comments. In addition, learners need little guidance on how to form small groups, use a flipchart, and so forth. Features that support group interaction are built into most virtual classrooms, but learners may require instruction on how to use such features.

Review interactive classroom features by using rapport-building questions. For example, demonstrate how to use the polling feature by asking learners about the weather or use an anonymous survey to get a quick feel for the experience level of the group.

Establish ground rules. Because the virtual classroom is often a new learning environment, it's helpful to provide ground rules regarding class conduct. In the beginning of class, introduce specific rules that can be referred to later.

For example, the text chat feature should be used to enhance rather than distract from learning. If used constructively, text chat allows participants to get clarity on something the instructor said or ask for more details without interrupting the flow of the lesson. If used improperly, text chat is equivalent to passing notes in class. Inform students ahead of time that the class will be recorded, including text chat and live commentary. This word of caution often keeps conversation focused.

State objectives. Whether in the traditional or virtual classroom, objectives provide structure, bring participants together with common goals, and create parameters in a classroom without walls. Refer back to the stated objectives throughout the class to confirm that learners are on the same track.

Suspend spelling and grammar accuracy. Encourage participation by overlooking spelling and grammar rules. Emphasize the value of sharing experiences and feedback. This allows the instructor (who is juggling several tasks behind-the-scenes) to make errors, too.

Promote interaction. Participant contributions are a critical success factor to any learning experience. Encourage interactivity by reminding participants to share their experiences by using the e-tools at their fingertips. Unlike the traditional classroom, instructors can't read participants' confused expressions when a new concept is perplexing. To involve participants from their desktops, ask open-ended questions and conduct class polls and surveys. Stop often to query learners for additional questions.

Keep the class on track. The virtual classroom makes it easier for participants to tune out conversation that seems irrelevant and work on other tasks. Be sure to ask questions that check whether learners are still actively participating. Occasionally make comments that refer to the objectives and emphasize what needs to be accomplished in the remaining class time. Another option is to send a private message to someone who continues to talk off the topic. In extreme situations, learners can be removed from class.

Communicate effectively. During face-to-face training, people communicate through speech, eye contact, facial gestures, and body language. But in the online classroom, participants rely on text or, if fortunate, voice-over IP to communicate. If using text only, remember to write clearly and avoid jokes or comments that can be misinterpreted. If using VoIP, remember to speak at an appropriate speed, enunciate clearly, and convey enthusiasm and confidence.

Stepping into the e-learning zone can be an exciting experience. To be successful, remember to pack your trainer's toolkit and take along these 10 tips.

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