

Designing Training Content

How do you start when you are given a new assignment to write training content? Do you talk to the learners, the management, read documents, or just start writing? Training content is supposed to move a learner from their current understanding to a desired level of knowledge, right?

How many clients agree to a needs assessment before the development process is started? Balancing time, scope, and cost against trying to develop a product that will best meet the desired outcomes is always challenging.



In the real world

In the real world, I find that we rarely have access to the learner's point of view (point A), and sometimes the goal of training (point B) is not very clear. Here is an example. You are hired to write training content for new software which you have never seen or used before. You get access to instruction manuals and a sandbox version of the software, a busy subject matter expert, but not to learners who have used or will be using the software. Where do you start? If you start with the subject matter expert, you are likely to ask questions that you could have figured out on your own if you played in the software sandbox for a while. The subject matter expert may feel you are wasting his/her time or asking them to do your job for you.

On the other hand, if you start with the instruction manual or the sandbox, you may need to spend a lot of time learning how to do something, a subject matter expert could have more quickly helped you understand. Time is money.

Who is the best source of information for training content?

Is the subject matter expert the best source of information for software training? After teaching for many years, I would venture to guess that many of us would say no. When you are an expert at a topic, you forget the little details that trip new learners up. I don't know how many times I explained the same concept to high-achieving students, and they did not get it. Why? Because I did not remember which steps confused me when I first started learning. (If you are interested in this topic, look at *Peer Instruction a User's Guide* by Eric Mazur).

Should we initially work in the software sandbox and wade through documentation or seek the help of the subject matter expert? You could probably catch the details that way, and your directions may be more logical, but time is money. Even better, get access to someone who just recently mastered the software. They could verify the instructions were factually correct, but would still remember the confusing details.

Storyboard or develop?



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Let's say you have a general idea of the content you are to write for the software example, do you storyboard on paper (physical or online) or in a rapid authoring software such as Articulate Storyline. I have talked to people who have good reasons to support either choice. Those in favor of the paper method say that it is quicker, easier to review, and subject matter experts are not distracted by design. They get more feedback focused on the content instead of color choice and placement of buttons. Those who advocate for storyboarding in a rapid authoring software say that they can't see the flow well when it is on paper. When you move through the module as a "learner" and see the pictures, watch the videos, try the assessment questions and listen to the voiceover, you can get a sense of whether the learning material has a good flow.

What are your preferences for developing training content?

Articulate Storyline 360 has an online review platform where you can share the link with any constituent, allowing them to navigate through the module as a learner. They can make comments on individual slides. True, you may get comments on the design, and that may lead to more discussion about design than you would want, but doesn't design matter?

What do you think? Do you go to the SME first, later or not at all? How do you storyboard? I was taught to talk to the SME first, storyboard second, and then develop the content. I am starting to prefer reading content and using the sandbox first, then developing content in a rapid authoring software, and then finally bringing in the SME. The SME can see the actual module and pinpoint errors or any missing content. If I can find some new learners to test the training module, that is truly a win!