Lexicon Update

By Learning Circuits

Upgrade your comfort level with the latest in e-learning lingo.

Everyone has something to say about e-learning, but are we communicating in the same language? Here's a collection of new terms entering the lexicon, plus their definitions, to help you speak *e-learning*.

Accessibility: A characteristic of technology that enables people with disabilities to use it. For example, accessible websites can be navigated by people with visual, hearing, motor, or cognitive impairments.

Animation: The rapid sequential presentation of slightly differing graphics to create the illusion of motion. Animation can have greater purpose in illustrating a process than a static visual, but it requires more information to be processed by the computer and thus higher bandwidth.

Artificial Intelligence: The range of technologies that allow computer systems to perform complex functions mirroring the workings of the human mind. Gathering and structuring knowledge, problem solving, and processing a natural language are activities possible by an artificially intelligent system.

Avatar: In online environments, a virtual digital image representing a person. In e-learning, avatars usually represent the learners. The term comes from a Sanskrit word meaning an incarnation in human form.

Blog (weblog): An extension of the personal website consisting of regular journal-like entries posted on a webpage for public viewing. Blogs usually contain links to other websites along with the thoughts, comments, and personality of the blog's creator.

CoD (content on demand): Delivery of an offering, packaged in a media format, anywhere, anytime via a network. Variants include audio on demand (AOD) and video on demand (VOD).

Collaboration technology: Software, platforms, or services that enable people at different locations to communicate and work with each other in a secure, self-contained environment. May include capabilities for document management, application sharing, presentation development and delivery, whiteboarding, chat, and more.

Compliant (standards-compliant): E-learning that meets established standards of, and has received official approval from, an accrediting organization.

Conformant (standards-conformant): E-learning that meets the standards of an accrediting organization but that has

not gone through the formal application process to be deemed compliant.

E-learning 2.0: Refer to new ways of thinking about e-learning inspired by the emergence of Web 2.0.

Extensibility: The ability to expand and adapt an e-learning application or infrastructure by adding features, components, or services to a core set of capabilities.

Formal/informal learning: Formal learning is a class, a seminar, or a self-study course. Informal learning is not formally defined learning at home, work, and throughout society, such as over the water cooler, at the poker game, asking the guy in the next cube to help out, collaborative problem solving, watching an expert, or sharing a terminal for e-learning.

Freeware: computer software that is available for use at no cost or for an optional fee. Freeware is often made available in a binary-only, proprietary form.

Granularity: The degree of detail something can be broken down into, or the number of discrete components making up any type of system. In e-learning, granularity is defined by the number of content chunks.

Information architecture: A description or design specification for how information should be treated and organized. In web design, the term describes the organization of online content into categories and the creation of an interface for displaying those categories.

Infrastructure: The underlying mechanism or framework of a system. In e-learning, the infrastructure includes the means by which voice, video, and data can be transferred from one site to another and be processed.

Integration: Combining hardware, software (and, in e-learning, content) components together to work as an interoperable system. The process of integration may also include front-end planning and strategy.

Interoperability: The ability of hardware or software components to work together effectively.

LCMS (learning content management system): A software application (or set of applications) that manages the creation, storage, use, and reuse of learning content. LCMSs often store content in granular forms such as learning objects.

Learning object: A reusable, media-independent collection of information used as a modular building block for e-learning content. Learning objects are most effective when organized by a metadata classification system and stored in a data repository such as an LCMS.

LETSI: An international not-for-profit federation dedicated to stewarding new developments to SCORM.

LMS (learning management system): Software that automates the administration of training. The LMS registers users, tracks courses in a catalog, records data from learners, and provides reports to management.

Localization: The tailoring of an offering to meet the specific needs of a geographic area, product, or target audience.

M-learning (mobile learning): Learning that takes place via such wireless devices as cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), or laptop computers.

Metadata: Information about content that enables it to be stored in and retrieved from a database.

Metaverse: A fictional virtual world where humans, as avatars, interact with each other and software agents, in a three-dimensional space that uses the metaphor of the real world. The word metaverse is a compound of the words "meta" and "universe."

Mindmap: A diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to and arranged radially around a central key word or idea. It is used to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas, and as an aid in study, organization, problem solving, decision making, and writing.

Modular: E-learning that's made up of standardized units that can be separated from each other and rearranged or reused.

MUD (multiuser dimension or multiuser domain): A simulated virtual world in which users interact with each other, often by taking on character identities called avatars. Originally created for game-playing, MUDs are growing in popularity for online learning and virtual community-building.

Open Source software: Software for which the original program instructions, the source code, is made available so that users can access, modify, and redistribute it. The Linux operating system is an example of Open Source software.

Personalization: Tailoring web content to an individual user. This can be accomplished by a user entering preferences or by a computer guessing about the user's preferences.

Plug-and-play: The ability of a personal computer's operating system to recognize and install—with little to no intervention by the user—new peripheral devices that are added to the computer.

Podcast: A series of digital-media files distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds for playback on portable media players and computers. The term podcast, like broadcast, can refer either to the series of content itself or to the method by which it is syndicated; the latter is also called podcasting. The term derives from the words "iPod" and "broadcast"; the Apple iPod being the brand of portable media player for which the first podcasting scripts were developed.

RSS: A family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content such as blog entries, news headlines, and podcasts in a standardized format.

An RSS document contains either a summary of content from an associated website or the full text. RSS makes it possible for people to keep up with websites in an automated manner that can be piped into special programs or filtered displays.

SaaS (software-as-a-service): A model of software deployment where an application is hosted as a service provided to customers across the Internet. By eliminating the need to install and run the application on the customer's own computer, SaaS alleviates the customer's burden of software maintenance, ongoing operation, and support.

Scalability: The degree to which a computer application or component can be expanded in size, volume, or number of users served and continue to function properly.

Schema: One of several new entities that define the structure and content parameters for XML documents.

SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model): A set of specifications that, when applied to course content, produces small, reusable learning objects. A result of the Department of Defense's Advance Distributed Learning (ADL) initiative, SCORM-compliant courseware elements can be easily merged with other compliant elements to produce a highly modular repository of training materials.

Section 508: The section of the 1998 Rehabilitation Act that states that all electronic and information technology procured, used, or developed by the federal government after June 25, 2001, must be accessible to people with disabilities.

Semantic web: A concept proposed by World Wide Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee stating that the web can be made more useful by using methods such as content tags to enable computers to understand what they're displaying and to communicate effectively with each other. That, says Berners-Lee, will increase users' ability to find the information they see.

Serious games: A software application developed with game technology and game design principles for a primary purpose of learning.

Shareware: a marketing method for computer software in which the software can be obtained by a user, often by downloading from the Internet free of charge to try out a program before buying the full version of that program.

Simulations: Highly interactive applications that allow the learner to model or role-play in a scenario. Simulations enable the learner to practice skills or behaviors in a risk-free environment.

Social media: An umbrella term that defines the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of words, pictures, videos, and audio. Technologies include blogs, picture sharing, vlogs, wall postings, email, instant messaging, music sharing, and voice over IP, to name a few. LinkedIn and MySpace are examples of social media tools.

Specification: A plan, instruction, or protocol for e-learning that's established or agreed upon. *Specification* is often used interchangeably with *standard,* but the two terms are not truly synonymous. Specifications become standards only after they've been approved by an accrediting agency.

Standard: An e-learning specification established as a model by a governing authority.

Usability: The measure of how effectively, efficiently, and easily a person can navigate an interface, find information on it, and achieve his or her goals.

Virtual world: A computer-based simulated environment intended for its users to inhabit and interact via avatars. These avatars are usually depicted as textual, two-dimensional, or three-dimensional graphical representations, although other forms are possible (auditory and touch sensations for example). Some, but not all, virtual worlds allow for multiple users.

VoIP (voice over IP): Voice transmitted digitally using the Internet Protocol. Avoids fees charged by telephone companies.

Vlog (video blog): A form of blog for which the medium is video.

W3C (World Wide Web Consortium): an organization developing interoperable specifications, software, and tools for the WWW.

Web 2.0: The use of Internet technology and web design to enhance information sharing and, most notably, collaboration among users. These concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities and hosted services, such as social-networking sites, wikis, and blogs.

Wiki: A collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites.

WML (wireless markup language): XML-based language that allows a reduced version of webpage text to be displayed on cellular phones and personal digital assistants.

XML (extensible markup language): The next-generation webpage coding language that allows site designers to program their own markup commands, which can then be used as if they were standard HTML commands.

Learning Circuits is ASTD's online magazine covering e-learning; www.learningcurcuits.org.

Definition Sources: Barron's Dictionary of Computer and Internet Terms; Brandon-hall.com; Cnet; The Computer Glossary: The Complete Illustrated Dictionary; Corporate University Xchange; EdWeb; Tech Encyclopedia; The Trainer's Dictionary; Wikipedia; and whatis.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
T+D welcomes your comments. If you would like to respond to this article, or any article that appears in *T+D*, please send your feedback to **mailbox@astd.org**. Responses sent to the mailbox are considered available for publication and may be edited for length and clarity.