

T + D O N L I N E

Community

Studies from Forrester Research and, more recently, NYUonline are providing much-needed research on e-learning. But data supporting claims of high dropout rates has left a smudge on e-learning's sterling potential.

Here's a sampling of what ASTD Website visitors had to say when asked why e-learning dropout rates are typically higher than for instructor-led training, and what should be done to remedy the disparity.

I've only been developing Web-based materials for six months, but I've learned a couple of things along the way. First, the workshop or class has to provide immediate value to learners: It needs to be a message reinforced by

their managers and has to be information that is presented in simple terms.

Second, the problem with many e-universities is that they're trying to dazzle us with things that people don't care about. When something blinks or sparkles, we think, "Wow that's cool!" But after a while we lose interest. Learning isn't like a video game. It needs to hit the heart and the mind, not just the adrenal gland.

Go back to the basics. Present materials that your employees really need to know. Keep the workshops short and focused on people's daily routines. They will remember only the things they use on a regular basis.

Peter Klay

Dropout rates for e-learning are more measurable. But all along, students' minds have been dropping out while sitting in instructor-led courses.

Students' minds drop out when they get distracted, bored, or tired. Yes, their bodies are in the room, but that's all. They stay in the class half listening because they don't know if they'll get another chance to hear [the information].

The blessing, and the curse, of e-learning is that students know they can start and stop when they want. If they get distracted, they can log out

to take care of the distraction. They may actually plan to come back.

But the real problem is just the same as with instructor-led training: How do you get them engaged and keep them engaged?

Suzanne Eberle

My company is less interested in the question "Did you complete the entire CBT?" and more interested in "Did you learn what you needed to?" As we chunk content into smaller pieces, the percentage completed will become more meaningful.

A metaphor we use is that you don't have to read the entire dictionary from A to Z to learn the meaning of just one word.

I heartily ditto Eberle's comment that participants do "drop out" of lectures all the time. You just can't track it (although a good instructor can tell). One advantage of instructor-led training is that it lets you limit bad training to 25 to 50 people at a time. With e-learning, bad training is accessible to all employees whenever they want it.

Daniel Birch

T+D Online is compiled by associate editor **William Powell**; wpowell@astd.org. Join the discussion by visiting ASTD's Learning Communities at www.astd.org.

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