

# Formal and Informal Learning at a Glance



Learning consists of two large categories: formal and informal learning. Use this guide as a reference for understanding each approach and its advantages.

Formal Learning	Informal Learning
<p><b>Formal learning is planned and derives from activities within a structured learning setting.</b></p> <p>There is a curriculum, agenda, and objectives that occur within a pre-established timeframe.</p>	<p><b>Informal learning occurs outside a structured program, plan, or class.</b></p> <p>Informal learning occurs naturally in everyday life and on the job through observing others, trial and error, and talking and collaborating with others.</p>
<p><b>Examples of formal learning include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor-led classroom</li> <li>• Instructor-led online training</li> <li>• Certification programs</li> <li>• Workshops, webinars, and college courses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Examples of informal learning include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multidevice learning</li> <li>• Coaching and mentoring</li> <li>• Stretch assignments or rotational assignments</li> <li>• Reading books and blogs</li> <li>• Watching online videos</li> <li>• Listening to podcasts</li> <li>• Searching for digital content through search engines</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advantages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent delivery of content to large groups in a synchronous format.</li> <li>• If properly designed, the content will be accurate and up to date.</li> <li>• Employees can quickly learn skills for a new job.</li> <li>• A variety of methods will appeal to all learning preferences and conform to adult learning principles.</li> <li>• They can be less costly to design.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Advantages:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They can occur in the workplace at the time of need.</li> <li>• They can be more effective in building proficiency than formal learning.</li> <li>• They offer a natural way to learn.</li> <li>• They are highly relevant and occur in small steps.</li> <li>• They can be less costly to deliver and more efficient given the ubiquity of social media and mobile devices.</li> <li>• They can incur less resistance than with formal training.</li> </ul>