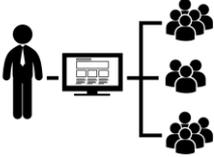


# Types of e-learning: a guide

There is no satisfactory definition of e-learning. It is more useful to describe the varieties of online formats actually being used in different settings or sectors.

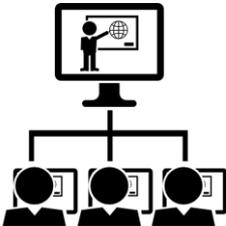
- Each variety tends to be used more in some particular settings than others (e.g. higher education, vocational education and training, corporate training or community education)
- Each type embodies some characteristic assumptions about what learning is and how to do it best
- Each uses different sets of the available web-based delivery tools, and each has quite different contributions to make to achieving organisational and business goals.

e-learning Format	Description
<p><b>e-learning Modules</b></p> 	<p>Traditional self-paced e-learning courseware for individual learning with in-built assessment. Accessed through a learning management system (LMS) which also tracks and reports results.</p> <p>Modules mostly used stand-alone for compliance training, but also mixed with other resources for instructor-led delivery.</p> <p>e-learning modules are developed with specialised e-learning authoring tools, including new-generation rapid authoring tools (e.g. Articulate Storyline).</p>
<p><b>Online systems training</b></p> 	<p>Similar to e-learning modules, but with specialised online tutorials for training staff in using online systems and computer applications.</p> <p>The authoring tools for creating online tutorials are also called screen recorders (e.g. Adobe Captivate, Camtasia).</p>

e-learning Format	Description
<p><b>Blended learning</b></p> 	<p>Training programs which include access to self-paced e-learning modules for individual study, in conjunction with conventional instructor-led face-to-face sessions.</p> <p>Often used for the knowledge component of practical skills, such as manual handling, which include underpinning knowledge but require competence to be assessed face-to-face.</p> <p>Modules accessed through an LMS which can also be used to record the face-to-face assessment results for easy reporting.</p>
<p><b>Facilitated online learning</b></p> 	<p>Instructor-led courses where trainers deliver content and provide support through a managed course website for the duration of the course. This can supplement face-to-face delivery (the model familiar in higher education) or replace it (distance education, or fully online learning).</p> <p>Requires an LMS designed for facilitated delivery, often called a VLE, or Virtual Learning Environment. Moodle, developed in Australia, is a popular VLE: Blackboard is another. These tools are very different from traditional corporate LMSs designed to manage employee self-paced learning.</p>
<p><b>Virtual classrooms</b></p> 	<p>Similar to webinars in technology, but designed for instructor-led courses i.e. for the same learner group over a number of sessions. Learners require microphone headsets.</p> <p>Involves interactive workshops to deliver learning outcomes, with learner activities and a range of interactions, including voice (always) and webcam (sometimes). Increasingly used in facilitated online courses in tertiary education. In corporate world now often called “virtual training”.</p> <p>Requires a hosted web conferencing service with the necessary interactive features (e.g. Adobe Connect, Blackboard Collaborate, or the open source Big Blue Button).</p>

e-learning Format	Description
<p><b>Webinars</b></p> 	<p>Scheduled “live” online lecture-style presentations which participants attend in real time from their computers using headphones, or on tablets and smartphones. Can cater for large numbers. Usually one-off sessions, recorded for playback.</p> <p>Typically use PowerPoint-style content, with participant interaction by text and polling, and sometimes voice. Video (talking head) is available, but rarely used. Mostly used for corporate news (products, processes, policies), expert updates (national/overseas research), and marketing. Requires a hosted web conferencing service (e.g. Citrix, WebEx)</p>
<p><b>Web in class</b></p> 	<p>Enhanced face-to-face group delivery using online and computer-based tools in an individual course or classroom.</p> <p>This is the common model in many primary, secondary and community education settings. There are variations specifically developed for literacy and second-language learning.</p>
<p><b>Web conferencing</b></p> 	<p>Using web conferencing for just that – conducting meetings at a distance over the Internet.</p> <p>Organisations who first use web conferencing effectively to save travel and other costs are then well placed to extend the use to learning and training.</p> <p>Some vendors such as Citrix have distinct products for running meetings (e.g. GoToMeeting), but most web conferencing tools can serve the purpose.</p>

e-learning Format	Description
<p><b>Knowledge sharing</b></p> 	<p>A cover-all term for making job-relevant information easily accessible to staff online at any time to support informal, social and just-in time learning.</p> <p>Can include materials from courses, guides, data sheets, policy summaries, links, job aids and performance support tools, often as audio (podcasts) or videos (vids). Increasingly include Facebook-style collaborative features such as user forums, messaging and file sharing uploads. Also increasingly catering for audiences beyond staff, as a market positioning through client engagement.</p> <p>Requires a tool (or tools) which provide content management, collaboration, and access, typically in the form of a portal site. Mobile technologies (smart phones, tablets) are playing an increasing role.</p>
<p><b>Virtual worlds and simulations</b></p> 	<p>Online systems which provide individual and group profiles for staff for planning and monitoring training and performance.</p> <p>Typically provide job profiling and competency features which integrate with course management data (scheduling, assessment results), to schedule and monitor compliance and support individual learning plans.</p> <p>Can be integrated with an e-portfolio, a personal online repository of professional “artefacts” available for evidence in accredited training or employment settings (e.g. Mahara, an open source e-portfolio which plugs into the Moodle LMS).</p>
<p><b>Performance support</b></p> 	<p>Online tools (guides, templates, job aids) which provide just-in-time information and guidance on work or learning tasks, such as procedures, products or key decisions.</p> <p>A GPS is a good example of a performance support tool – it helps you complete a task (finding your way to a destination). Wifi, smartphones and tablets are all rapidly increasing the options available.</p> <p>Some commentators say this will be the most important application of mobile devices in education and training.</p>

e-learning Format	Description
<p><b>Virtual worlds and simulations</b></p> 	<p>“Immersive” Web environments, with or without a trainer/teacher.</p> <p>Still considered leading edge and requiring big budgets, but some important uses developing, especially in high risk and high impact fields, such as mental health. Also the idea of using gaming features in learning design is having considerable impact, from complex adventure-style branching scenarios to the use of digital badges to acknowledge progress.</p>
<p><b>MOOCs (massive open online courses)</b></p> 	<p>Free, open entry online short courses for an unlimited number of learners from anywhere.</p> <p>MOOCs have taken the education world by storm since 2012. They typically run for 4–10 weeks and feature short video lectures from leading educators, mostly from universities. There is no traditional “tuition” provided – participants are mostly expected to use online forums to share ideas and opinions. Assessment and sometimes credit is available as a paid extra.</p> <p>MOOCs are starting to be used in learning and development. Teams can enrol in the MOOC, and then operate as a study group to discuss the content, apply to their context, and achieve richer learning outcomes – at no direct cost.</p> <p>MOOC providers use a customised form of LMS which can cope with large numbers, provide a very simple cut-down user interface and track and report usage in fine detail.</p>