Blended Learning
Moving the Traditional Classroom Online

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A guide for converting portions of traditional classroom learning into an online format

Blended learning is a combination of learning in a traditional classroom with is face to face and online learning which can be both synchronous and asynchronous. Blended learning design allows for many different possible combinations. Combinations included in both traditional and online are between instructor to student, student to student, and student to content (Anderson, 2003). This guide will help with questions and ideas for the designer to consider when converting the traditional classroom into the online format. Taking a traditional class and simply moving it into an online environment is highly discouraged (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015). This guide will help identify the elements that are needed to be analyzed before redesign.

Overview

Using the ADDIE Model as an outline, this guide will walk through elements to consider in redesigning the traditional, in-person classrooms to a blended learning format. ADDIE stands for Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate – each of these elements will help with considerations in the redesign.

Analyze

Prior to making redesign decisions, analyze the following components to determine what can stay, needs to be redesigned, and where it needs to be placed to capitalized on the best features of both in-classroom and online learning.

Learners

☐ Where are they located and how often will they be able to attend the in-person classroom? This will significantly inform the design by looking at how to determine the frequency of in-person versus online. If there are pieces of information that learners can absorb in their own time, like read articles, watch videos, and conduct personal experiments, they can often be best learned in the online environment which will allow learners to come to the in-person course ready to practice these skills.

☐ How many learners will be attending one course or program? The more learners there are will inform how to structure the online learning portion – whether to break the class into smaller groups or put more of the course into an asynchronous format is something to consider depending on size. Larger groups of learners can interact more effectively in smaller discussion or project groups.
How tech-savvy are the learners? If they are not tech-savvy, build in a few, more comprehensive learning components to help learners assimilate to the online environment. If they are tech-savvy, conduct a quick tutorial. If the first online session is a synchronous learning session, incorporate that portion into the first online session.

**Content**

- What are the learning objectives and how will they align with both online and in-person classrooms? What do the learners need to know and demonstrate? In some cases the learners can practice in the online environment and demonstrate mastery in the in-person classroom. In other cases, design learning objects for online learning that reinforces what was learned in the classroom. The learning objectives will help determine the order and the learning objects that can be designed in each environment.

- Do the learners need to know key pieces of information before the in-person class? This is a great opportunity have the learners come prepared with key concepts before meeting in-person. This has elements of a flipped classroom design where students learn the concepts online and then conduct experiments or practice in-person.

- What should the learners demonstrate or master? Testing could be conducted online or demonstrations could take place in-person in a final project or vice-versa. Using the learning objectives as a guide will help inform how the flow and structure the class.

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**Design**

This section focuses on specific learning objectives and content pieces like exercises, demonstrations and projects, assessments, and media selection. The focus of all of these elements should be to align with the learning objectives for the course.

**Learners**

- How much time do learners need for reflective learning? This will inform the amount and type of content that is transitioned to online learning. Reflection time is a strong benefit of the blended learning format.

- How much time do learners need to spend in each environment? Using the learning objectives as a guide determine how much time is needed and the frequency of transitions between learning objects. Moving between each learning object and environment can keep the learner engaged.
Content

☐ Will assessments be conducted? Assessments are an important part of both in-person and online learning. In blended learning, assessments can be completed in both. In-person assessments can help instructors see reactions and discover learner's strengths and opportunities. Online assessments can allow learners to explore their individual perceptions prior to completing the assessment.

☐ What type of learning objects are needed and in what quantity? Would the course benefit from multimedia presentations, quizzes, videos, podcasts, and animations? Careful matching with the learning objectives is key. Choosing the right learning object allows the perfect marriage between content and learner.

☐ How will the material be organized for the learner? Having a more predictable flow is beneficial for learners in online learning environments. Understanding clearly what is due and when is essential in both traditional and online classrooms. Dates, assignments, discussion participation, and schedule of activities are all elements to clarify and communicate to the learner. Designing the course with these in mind will help create a more cohesive course.

Develop

This section focuses on developing the pieces you will need to place into the online environment as well as alter the online classroom to complement the synchronous or asynchronous components of the design.

Learners

☐ What do the learners already know? Each learner comes into the classroom with experiences and knowledge from their past. These experiences can be built into the design of the program through discussions, exercises, demonstrations, and writing exercises.

☐ What do the learners need to know? Developing a strong flow between lecture, reading, and practice is key to keeping the learner engaged. The development of each learning object should take this into consideration.

☐ Will the learners know what to do and how to do it? In the online environment, if a learner cannot easily navigate, they can easily become frustrated and lost. It is essential that the environment operates as a conduit for learning and not a handicap.
Content

☐ Storyboard and timings? Visually mapping out the flow, look and timings for each element are essential to ensuring the final product achieves the objectives. Storyboarding is a great way to be sure about flow and function.

☐ What technology will work best? Choosing the right technology and technical learning objects will keep the course engaging and enhance the learning experience. Check to be sure the technology will work in the environment in which it will be used. Do the learners have the right bandwidth? Is the organization’s fire wall going to be a problem?

☐ What material will be needed for the learner for both in-person and online? Including job aids, handouts, articles and books are an essential part of the development of a course. Will the learners take an online test in the end or will they need to do a live demonstration? How will learners access the materials they need?

Implement

This section focuses on the implementation preparation and classroom experience – both for the learner as well as the facilitator.

Learner

☐ What preparation does the learner need before, during and after the course? Will the learner need to take an orientation before the start of class? Will they need to conduct reading or research assignments before the course begins?

☐ Will there be a pilot before the official launch? Testing the flow, content and format is a great way to solicit feedback from the learners and make adjustments before the official launch. Learners who participate in pilots often do a much better job of giving in-depth feedback than do learners who think the course is finished.

☐ How will you plan for rewrites and adjustments based on the early learner feedback? Building in a plan for adjustments and rewrites will allow the course to be a much greater success. If glaring problems or technology issues are not addressed, learners can easily lose interest and will most likely tell other learners about those issues.
Content

☐ How will the facilitators be prepared to train the content? Preparing the facilitators to thoroughly understand and interpret the content is essential to creating a positive learning experience that aligns with the learning objectives.

☐ How will the facilitators be prepared to train in the online environment? Traditional classroom trainers can often struggle when they begin to facilitate online rather than in person. When a facilitator cannot see the students it is harder to determine what the student is experiencing and how engaged they are. Reactions are often slower or non-existent. This can easily throw the best facilitators off their “game” so to speak. Preparing for this can greatly enhance the learner’s experience.

Evaluation

The evaluation phase should be an on-going element throughout the design. Consistently testing the design against the stated learning objectives is essential. Determining the learner on-the-job performance behaviors in the ideal state is a key component to creating a viable measurement to benchmark those behaviors before and after the learning is complete.

Learner

☐ What is the learner’s responsibility in the learning process and how will they know? Engaging the learner before the course as well as during and after are ways to ensure the learner demonstrates the newly learned behaviors. Clearly articulating the desired state and learner’s role is the key.

☐ How will the learner know they are successful? In what ways will the learner be able to evaluate their success or continued opportunities? Will the facilitator give feedback at the moment? Will the learner take a test or an assessment to determine their score?

Content

☐ What type of technology will be used, if any, to allow for depth in evaluation and data collection? The easier it is to collect data and understand both the learner and the course effectiveness, the more likely data based decisions can be made to improve or change the program if need be. Communicating the data to stakeholders will ensure the programs continued support if the design works.
What process will be put in place to evaluate the online portions versus the in-class portions of the course? How will success be determined in each of these modalities? If objectives are not achieved, how will it be evaluations pinpoint the area for needed improvement whether online or in-person?

**Conclusion**

Converting sections of a traditional course to an online environment can greatly improve the learner’s experience if done well. Online learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous, allows for flexibility of design in ways the traditional classroom does not. By mindfully determining which elements can be converted and how to best convert them, a new, more exciting course can be born. Keeping the learning objectives top of mind allows the course to have a strong impact for the learner rather than conducting exercises or creating learning objects that are more for fun but don’t move the learning forward or even worse confuse the learner. Plan for adjustments as feedback is given by the learner to continue to iterate in the early stages of the course.

**References**


