

**NOTE:** The following article will appear in the June 2008 edition of the magazine *Training Treasures*, “the visual idea-magazine for creative trainers and presenters.” This article is part of the featured event “One-Hundred Hot Tips” from ten of the best interactive “tipsters” in the business. Log onto [www.trainingtreasures.com](http://www.trainingtreasures.com) to find out more about this excellent training resource. This article is a longer version of the one by the same name located on Sharon’s website. It also contains some of the content from Sharon’s workshop by the same name.

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## **Wake 'Em Up! Ten Tips for Interactive E-Learning**

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E-learning means many things to many people. Here, we’ll define e-learning as any information that is electronically delivered. Included are: teleconferences (audio only), webinars (audio and visual, with computer and internet components), synchronous or distance learning (live, real-time, virtual classrooms in different locations, linked by means of satellite or computers), and asynchronous learning (computer-based, self-study programs and courses, attended by individuals at times of their own choosing).

As with classroom instruction, boring and non-interactive e-learning programs are design and delivery issues, not content or learner issues. Even the most complex, technical material can be made interactive in quick, easy ways. And even passive e-learning participants can become active, motivated learners.

### **1. Send Out Warm-Ups With Built-In Accountability**

Warm-Ups are pre-training activities that spark learners’ interest in the training topic and that get them ready to learn. Warm-Ups also help learners focus on what they already know about the topic. A few days before the training, email the activity instructions to participants, as options for them to choose from.

Some examples are:

- 1. Make a written list of as many topic-related facts as you can that you already know. Be ready to state some of these facts during the webinar.*
- 2. Interview an “expert” (someone who knows more than you do about the topic), and be ready to tell the teleconference group what you learned.*

3. *Do an internet search about the training topic, and be ready to use the chat room feature to share what you learned from your search.*
4. *Ask co-workers what they know or have heard about the topic and make a list of facts and opinions. Email a summary of this information to the other class members.*
5. *Make up a short, pre-training quiz with some questions you want answered during the training. Email these questions to the instructor before the e-learning class begins.*

Give learners choices: They can do one or two to do, or do all but one, or make up one of their own.

Build in accountability with each option - learners must show that they did one or more of the Warm-Ups. In the examples above, learners must be ready to report their findings to the class, or send something to other learners or to the instructor. During the e-learning program, begin with some of the Warm-Up reports. Or pause for a few minutes at different times during the training to have volunteers share their reports. For a computer-based self-study program, learners can email their findings to their supervisor, instructor, or to another person designated in the course.

## **2. Create an Interesting Graphic Organizer**

Graphic organizers are note-taking worksheets that help learners remember important content because *they* do the writing. The note-taking page should be visually interesting, with plenty of space for writing and doodling. It should *not* be a copy of the Powerpoint® slides. Use these as resources only. Do an internet search for “graphic organizers” and experiment with many of the free note-taking tools you’ll find. Graphic organizers work for learners in *any* type of class or training: schools, colleges, businesses, and e-learning programs, of course.

Email a basic graphic organizer (PDF format works best) to participants before the e-learning class begins. Also, email learners a reminder to print the note-taking page and have it, and a pen/pencil, ready when the training starts. During the program, be sure to stop and direct learners to write important words, phrases, or concepts. *Don’t* assume they are writing just because they have the page in front of them. Instead, say “This is profound, so write it down!” and then *stop speaking* to give them time to do so.

If the e-learning is self-study, include a graphic organizer in the computerized materials, and suggest that the learner download, print, and use it as he or she works through the material.

### **3. Begin with a Fast Pass**

Create immediate interest and involvement with a one-minute opening activity called a Fast Pass. This activity connects learners to the topic and to each other. Because it is topic-related, and takes up little training time, it is the perfect way to begin any e-learning experience.

For teleconferences, verbally state what you want learners to do. For distance learning, each location's participants can report to their respective site group. For computer-based self-study, include the printed Fast Pass instructions in the material.

Fast Pass examples are:

- *(For a webinar) - Using the chat room feature, print a topic-related question that you want answered.*
- *(For a teleconference) - When I call your name, please state one thing you want to learn from this program.*
- *(For a webinar) - On the whiteboard, print a word or phrase that you associate with this topic.*
- *(For distance learning) - With the other participants at your learning site, brainstorm what you already know about the topic, and be ready to report back some facts from this list.*
- *(For self-study) - On blank paper, make a list of five facts you know or have heard about this topic. Come back to your list after you finish the course, and check your facts for accuracy. Correct any that are incorrect.*

### **4. Follow the 10-Minute Rule**

Regardless of the type of e-learning training you are facilitating, *always* use the ten-minute rule: Break up your slide presentation, lecture, or printed material into segments of about ten minutes in length. Close enough is okay. Ten minutes is a guideline. Sometimes 15 - 20 minutes will work as well, but lecture longer than 20 minutes and you will definitely be losing participants' interest.

Why ten minutes? Because most prime-time television programs (news, sitcoms, movies, documentaries, sports, and the like) run about ten minutes in length, between commercial breaks.

In between each ten-minute segment, insert a short, one-minute activity that gives learners the opportunity to review the information you just presented.

One-minute review activities can be:

- *Think and Write (for all e-learning) - On your note-taking page, write one sentence summarizing what you just learned.*
- *Pair Share (for webinars) - In the chat room (or at your distance learning site) pair up with another participant and share the two most important facts from the lecture.*
- *Shout Out (for teleconferences) - As a group, we need to state 8 new things we now know about the topic.*
- *Whiteboard Writing (for webinars) - We'll now take one minute for everyone to quickly write a word or phrase related to the information just covered.*

## **5. Build in Body Breaks**

Stop reading Training Treasures now and do this one-minute Body Break: *Stand, stretch, and take a couple of deep breaths. Walk one time around the room you are in, around your chair, or down the hall and back. Return to Training Treasures and continue reading.*

The paragraph above just instructed you to stand and move. Can you instruct your e-learning participants to do the same? Of course you can! There is no rule that says they have to be sitting while learning. However, there *is* one powerful reason for learners to stand and move, especially during a lengthy training: The human brain works better when the learner is standing and moving around. Movement makes the blood circulate better which, in turn, sends more oxygen to the brain. When training participants, even in e-learning classes, stand and stretch, they wake up their bodies *and* minds.

Will they do it? You have no way of knowing for sure, but they probably will. After all, you are the trainer, and they are used to doing what trainers tell them to do. Besides that, they'll *feel* better standing and stretching after sitting for awhile. So the suggestion benefits them on many levels.

Some examples are:

- *Stand, Stretch, and Speak - Stand up, stretch your body, and then state a topic-related fact you have learned that you didn't know before.*

- *Mini-Walkabout - Stand up, and walk one time around your chair, breathing deeply as you do so. While walking, think about what you've just learned.*
- *Micro-Macro Stretches - A micro stretch is a small muscle like fingers and toes. A macro stretch is a large muscle like arms and legs. Stand and do either a micro or a macro stretch.*

For teleconferences, webinars, and distance learning, ask for a volunteer to verbally lead a whole group stretch. For self-directed courses, print the Body Break instructions into the material, as I did at the beginning of this tip.

## **6. Use the Program's Interactive Features**

Many e-learning programs have a number of interactive features built into them now. Explore the ones that are available to you and become familiar enough with them that you don't have to learn them "on the fly," that is, while you are training. Such interactive features may include: whiteboards, chat rooms, hand icons, buttons, polling, applause, other visual signals, electronic pencils and highlighters, to name a few.

Some examples of interactive instructions using these features are:

- *Raise your hand if you agree with this statement ...*
- *Let's take a poll to see how many of us agree or disagree with the following ...*
- *Using the electronic pencil, circle the most important bulleted fact on the screen.*
- *Using the highlighter, mark the question that is most important to you.*
- *In the chat room, write a one-sentence opinion about the usefulness of what you've learned.*
- *On the whiteboard, draw a doodle representing one important concept.*
- *When you're ready to answer this question, signal with the button icon.*

## **7. Lengthen the Learning with Action Plans**

Action Plans are training participants' written or verbal commitments to use what they learned. Action Plans help learners review and evaluate the content, while deciding how they will put it to practical use back on the job. Personal accountability is also part of an Action Plan.

Here are a few Action Plan examples:

- *On your graphic organizer, write one or two sentences describing how you plan to use this information at work. Also write the name of one other employee (or your supervisor) with whom you will discuss your Action Plan.*
- *In the chat room, write your Action Plan for how you plan to apply what you've learned. Put your name beside your plan. We'll copy the Action Plans and email them out to everyone when the webinar is over.*
- *On an index card, write one thing you can do immediately with what you have learned. Tape this index card to your desk or bulletin board at work. Send an email to the instructor in a week letting her know how your Action Plan is going.*

## **8. Follow Up with Blogs or Wikis**

A blog is an online web log, where you post information and learners respond by commenting on the posted material. A wiki is an online encyclopedia, where you and the learners can both post and respond to posted material. If you know how to set up a quick blog or wiki site, these can be ways to lengthen the learning as well. If you're not sure how to begin using these post-training tools, do an internet search for "setting up a blog or wiki" and browse through the free instructions. Or skim the many books at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) that give how-to instructions for both electronic tools. Many internet blog and wiki hosting sites are free. One example of a popular, free blogging host is [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com).

Make sure that e-learning participants know how to access the blog or wiki, so that they can post their after-training insights, questions, best practices, responses, comments, and the like. For self-study, include an access instruction sheet at the end of the computerized materials.

## **9. Give Them Changes and Choices**

Brain scientists call it "habituation" - when the human brain begins to ignore anything routine, repetitive, or boring. Whether you are conducting a classroom or e-learning training, the trick is to keep habituation from kicking in. Any changes you make that help hold learners interest and curiosity will work: activities, graphics, sound, movement, stories, video segments, colors and images in printed material, to name a few. In addition, anytime you give participants choices during the training, you enhance their motivation to learn. Examples are: choosing from a list of quick review activities, choosing a way to report back to the group, choosing what to write, choosing a question to answer, choosing

someone to work/partner with, or choosing whether or not to participate in the interactive segments.

## **10. Go with the Flow.**

Nothing works all the time. Be okay with the fact that no e-learning experience runs perfectly. There will always be technical, program, participant, and content challenges (not unlike classroom-based training). Even the best plans - and interactive strategies - can occasionally crash, in more ways than one. So be patient with yourself and your e-learning participants, start with baby steps, and give yourself plenty of kudos for creating e-learning experiences that are interesting, participatory, and memorable. You'll wake 'em up every time!