

Best Practices Guide to Converting Face to Face Courses to a Distance Learning Format

Manual

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Introduction

Prior to converting learning materials to a distance learning format it is important to understand the background of online education and the details of what it is and what it is comprised of. Distance education has many different definitions. One definition concludes that distance education is “formal education where the learning group is separated and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors” (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p.32). The main idea behind distance education, especially an online course, is the separation between the teacher and student. This could be separation that is physical, cultural, intellectual, emotional, or psychological.

There are different types of online formats. The three main types are online, blended or hybrid, and web-facilitated. An online course is a course where at least 80% of the content will be delivered online (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012). A blended or hybrid course is typically between 30%-79% of the content being facilitated online. More information on blended courses will be available in this manual. Lastly, a web-facilitated course is when web-based technology is used, but only about 29% of the course content is delivered online (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012).

One thing to point out regarding online course formats is the asynchronous format. Asynchronous distance education “means that instruction is offered and students access it at separate time, or anytime that is convenient to them” (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p.34). This allows for flexible schedules for the learner, but also means the learner must be responsible and manage their time wisely.

Note: all previous training materials need to be housed on a server for all trainees to access, so it is suggested that a course management system be used to create an online course for which these resources can be accessed anytime the trainees need them.

Blended/Hybrid Courses

How much content is delivered online?

1. A blended/hybrid course is a mixture of face-to-face and online learning/delivery. “30% to 79% of the course’s content is delivered online” (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p.5).
2. “Blended/Hybrid-Course that blends online and face-to-face deliver. Substantial proportion (30 to 79%) of the content is delivered online” (Picciano, A., & Seaman, J., 2007, p.4).

How much separation is there between the learner and the facilitator?

1. A blended/hybrid course would be considered to use the approach to distance education of different-time, same-place (DT, SP) (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p.9).

In what ways is technology used?

1. Online video lecture that is only available for certain times (McQuarrie, 2012).
2. Weekly discussions which require student to post responses by the last day of the week. Responses need to be in-depth and meaningful. (McQuarrie, 2012).
3. Online journaling regarding what the learner has retained over a certain period of time. Assists in not going off course and connect with other students and to learn from one another (McQuarrie, 2012).
4. Personally built wiki sites for group work, team projects, and to collaborate. (McQuarrie, 2012).
5. “Blended learning incorporates a wide array of learning environments and approaches to teaching and learning such as, asynchronous learning networks, web-enhanced teaching platforms, and digital online learning tools. Three main technological components required for a hybrid courses include: Technology infrastructure, Instructional technology, and Technology in learning” (Keengwe, J., & Kidd, T., 2010).
6. Blended/Hybrid courses are courses that blend “online and face-to-face delivery. Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online, typically uses online discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings” (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p.9).

Pros:

1. Levels the playing field for students who are shy (McQuarrie, 2012).
2. Provides opportunities for students to interact with the entire class and develop lasting relationships (McQuarrie, 2012).
3. Hybrid classes also provide opportunities for people who have stalled out in their careers (McQuarrie, 2012).
4. Hybrid/blended courses have “unique attributes such as flexibility-anytime, anyplace-along with time for reflection and learners’ anonymity” (Keengwe, J., & Kidd, T., 2010).

Cons:

1. The students’ tendency to cram information in the last day prior to meeting face-to-face. Cramming at the last minute leads to poor retention of information (McQuarrie, 2012).
2. Students who criticize hybrid courses because of the lack of face to face time. Instructor needs to remember the important of cohort camaraderie (McQuarrie, 2012).
3. A con that is attributed to hybrid/blended learning is staff involvement and approval due to “faculty time, rewards, workload, lack of administrative support, cost, course quality, student contact, and equipment concerns as barriers to online teaching practices” (Keengwe, J., & Kidd, T., 2010).
4. Hybrid/blended courses can be less effective when there are these components: “inadequate hardware and software, slow internet connections, learners’ procrastination, lack of technical expertise among the instructors, insufficient orientation for learners, and a lack of release time for instructors to develop and design their online courses” (Keengwe, J., & Kidd, T., 2010).

Pre-Planning Strategies

The planning process of converting materials to a distance education format is equally as important as the planning process of a traditional course and “knowing the basic principles of instructional design can help to ensure that what is produced serves a necessary purpose, meets the needs of students, is attractive and well organized, is delivered in an appropriate mode, and is continually evaluated and improved (Morrison, Ross, Kalman, & Kemp, 2011, p.5).

Traditional courses cannot just be copied and pasted into an online learning format because the “focus of the instruction shifts to visual presentations, engaged learners, and careful timing of presentations of information” (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright& Zvacek, 2012, p.153).

The first thing people will tell you when converting a face to face course into a distance learning format, is do not just simply copy and paste your content into an online environment. We have to remember that they are two separate learning environments that require different instructional strategies and formats.

Prior to converting your face to face course into an online course, a few things should occur (Pappas, 2011):

Considerations	Completed
eLearning Course Format	
Instructional Design Models	
Use of Interaction	
Educational Technology	

The considerations above will be discussed in further detail in this manual.

These are not the only suggestions available. Here is a list of stages that may also be used if needed (Developing Online Courses, n.d):

Stages	Completed
Create a storyboard of course and learning materials	
Create a sitemap of the course	
Determine course assets	
Create course shell	
Populate the course with the learning materials	
Testing room	
Beta test phase	

eLearning Course Format

1. Identify the eLearning Course Format (Pappas, 2011):

Make sure to consider the needs of your learner. In this scenario, it is best, as previously understood, to use the eLearning course format of a blended/hybrid classroom. It is wise to still understand the other options available and what they include.

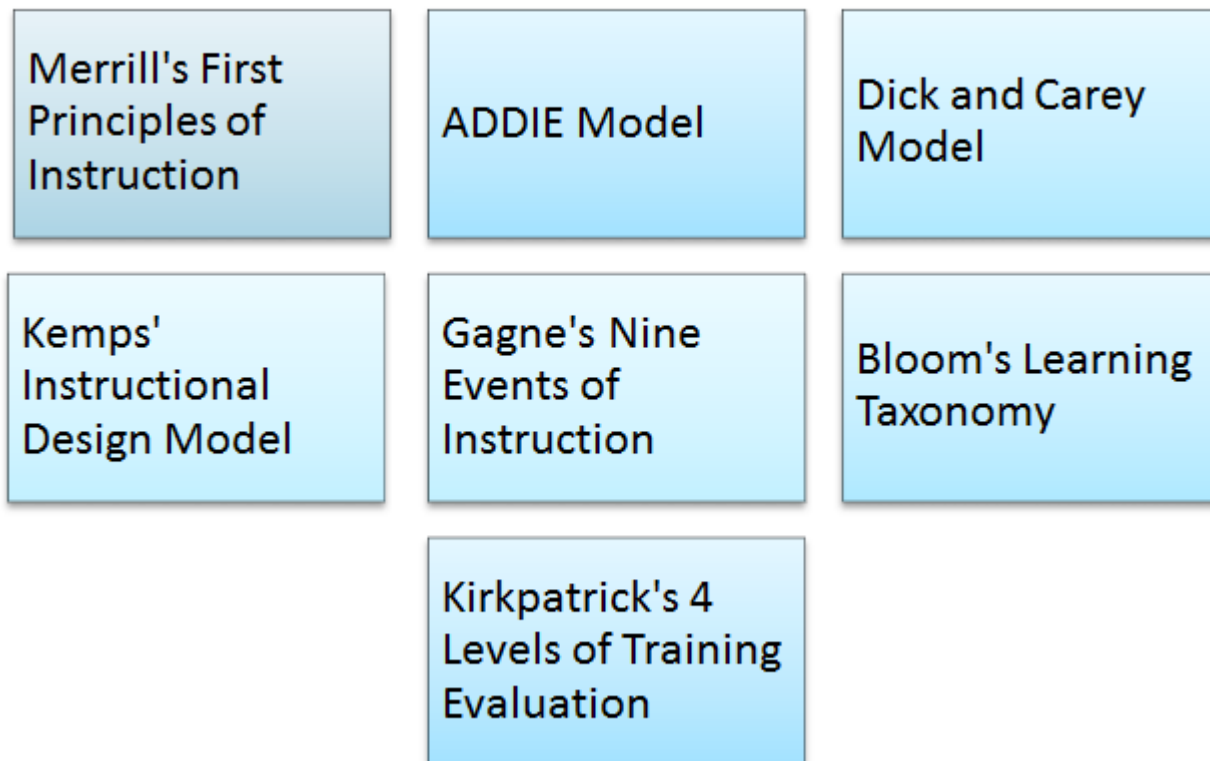


Instructional Design Models

2. Research the Instructional Design Models (IDM) (Pappas, 2011):

Which instructional design model is best for your scenario at hand. There are many different IDM's available.

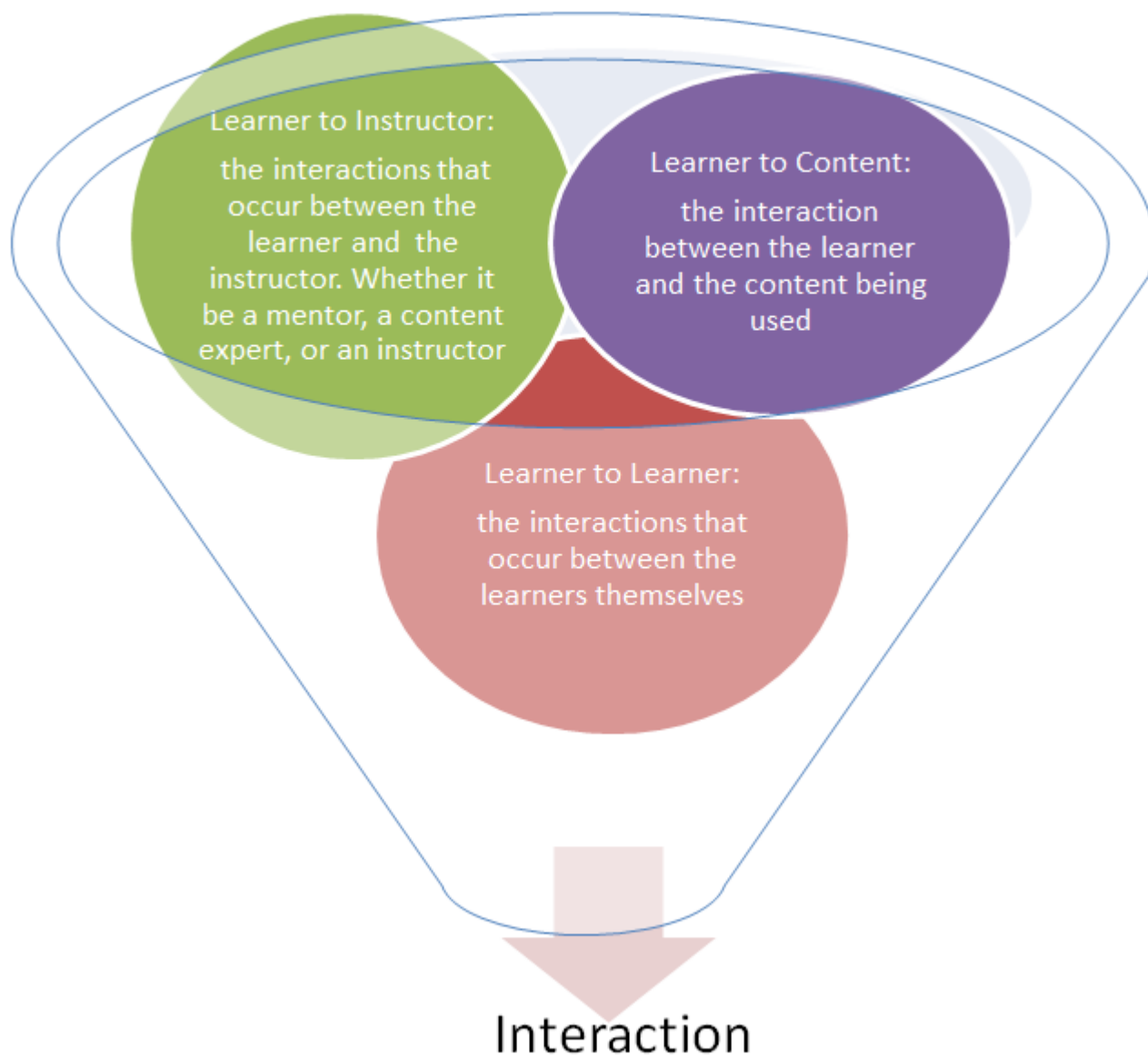
Instructional Design Models and Methods



Use of Interaction

3. Use of Interaction (Pappas, 2011):

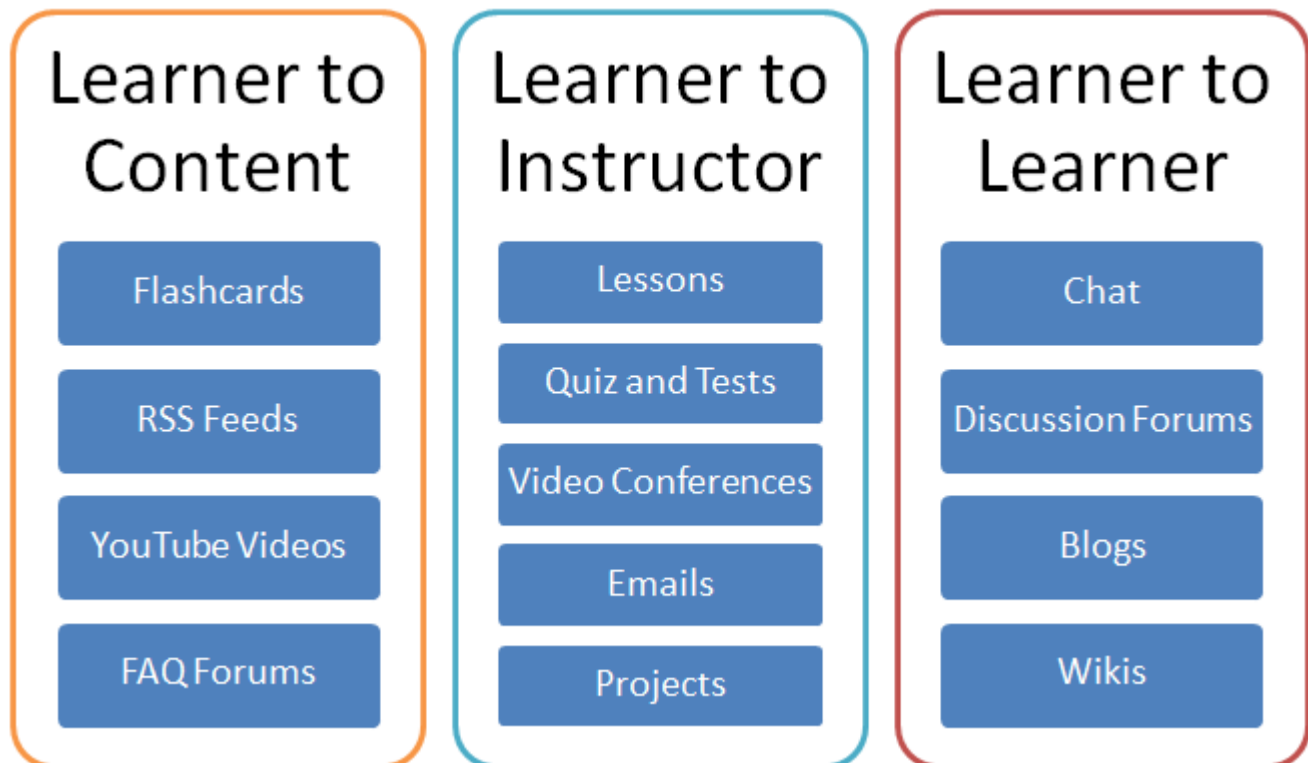
Make sure there is an instructional objective as to why interaction is occurring. It is tempting to add 'extra' to an online course because you can, however, does it really help the learner?



Educational Technology

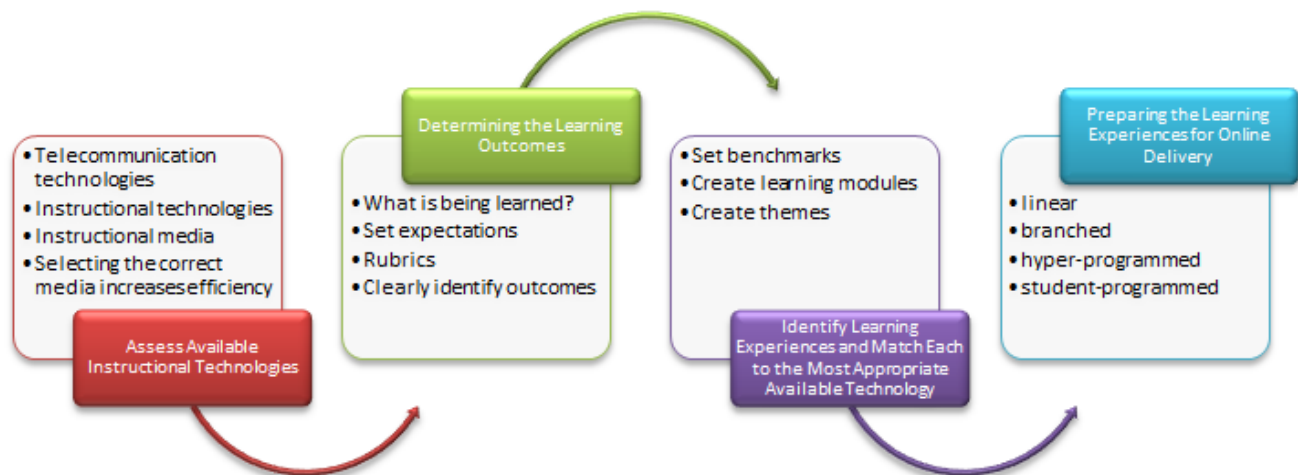
4. Selection of Educational Technology (Pappas, 2011):

Prior to converting your course from face to face instruction to a blended format, you should become aware of the different education technology tools that will be used. Below is a list of examples of educational technologies that can be used in accordance to the different types of interaction:



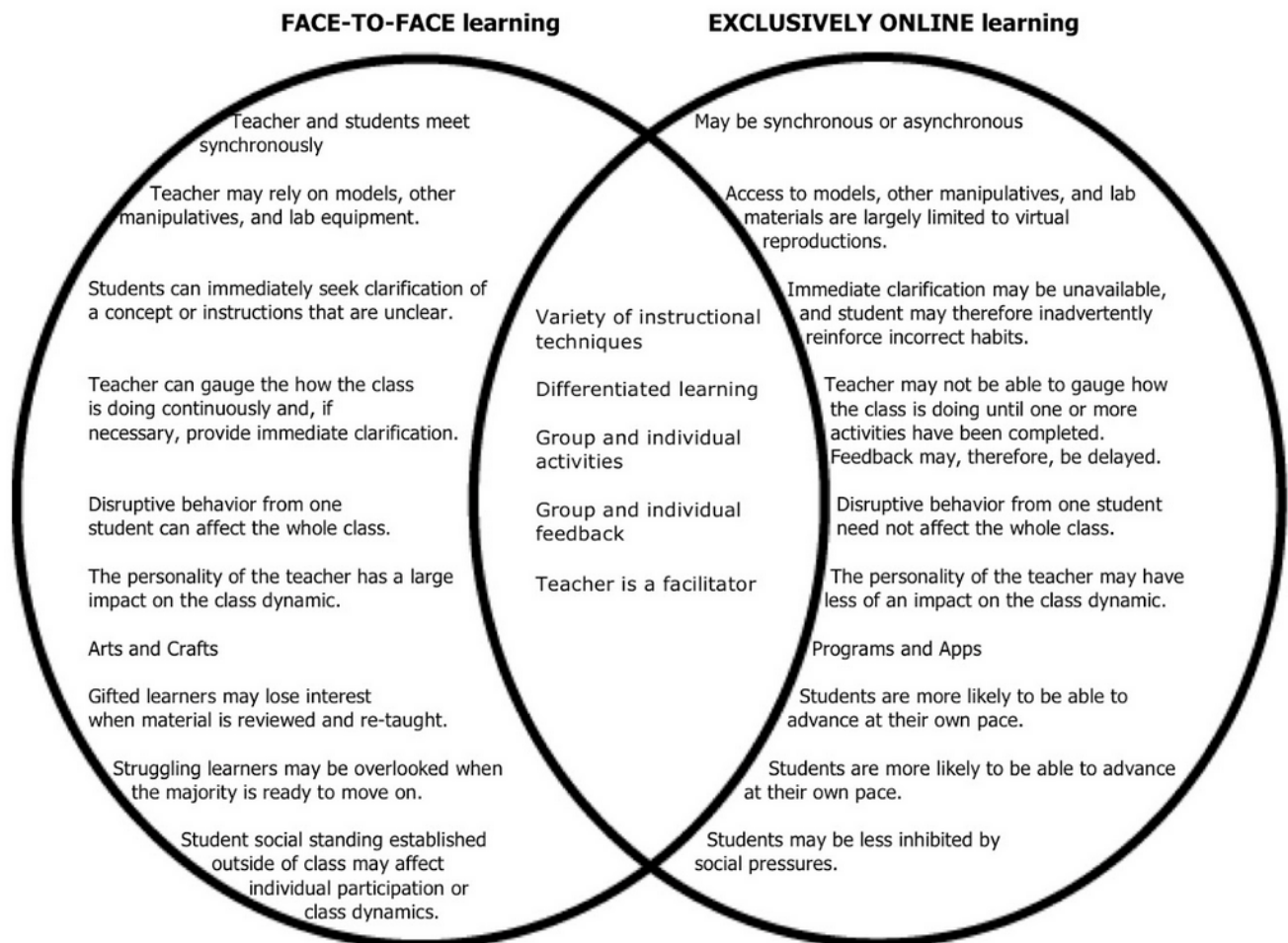
Enhancing Content & Communicating Online

When converting instructional materials from a face to face format to a blended learning format, the content can be enhanced to increase learning and interaction levels among students, while simultaneously encouraging online communication. Content can be enhanced by using a variety of technology tools from audio, video, graphics, blogs, wikis, podcasts and more. All of these technology tools can play a role in enhancing the content because it is not “what technologies are used, but how they are used what information is communicated using the technologies” (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012, p.115). Here is a list that may be useful when selecting what technologies should be used in this blended learning environment for your trainees (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012):



Change in Roles

The role of a face to face instructor and the role of a blended online learning instructor is quite different. Because blended learning classrooms can still meet in a face to face learning environment, some of the more traditional face to face teaching practices still occur. However, a majority of the teaching will be online and become more student centered rather than teacher centered. Below is a comparison between the two to help you prepare in this transition (blended and online teaching, 2013):



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