

Converting to a Distance Learning Format

Aniqua Donadelle

Walden University

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Dr. Ronald Paige

Introduction

Converting a face-to-face program to an online environment requires the instructional designer to do a lot of planning in order for the program to be successful. When converting a face-to-face program to an online environment, there are several components that should be considered to make the program a success. In this guide, I will provide best practices to use when converting a face-to-face program to a distance learning format.

Pre-Planning Strategies

The first thing the trainer would have to look at is a design model in order to convert his program to a distance learning format. The ADDIE Model is used for designing and developing effective instruction. The five phases of the ADDIE model are Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. The instructional designer would be able to work with the individual in designing and developing the course using this model. Dr. George Piskurich recommended that it is important that the facilitator work closely and is involved early in the development process (Laureate Education, n.d.) The facilitator can provide the instructional designer with any teaching methods or activities that the learners would do in order to apply what they have learned (Laureate Education, n.d.).

The trainer must focus on meeting the needs of the learners. These needs are as follows:

- “Content that they think is relevant to their needs
- Clear directions for what they should do at every stage of the course
- As much control of the pace of learning as possible
- A means of drawing attention to individual concerns
- A way of testing their progress and getting feedback from their instructors
- Materials that are useful, active, and interesting” (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek 2015).

Traditional Aspects Enhanced in the Distance Learning Format

The way in which the content was presented in the traditional classroom environment can be enhanced through distance learning format. There are a variety of ways in which content can be presented to distance learners such as, links to embedded media and/or scholarly work. Rather than utilizing PowerPoints, the facilitator can provide interactive links that would engage the learners. The activities that are aligned with the content should be interactive and provide ample opportunities for the learners to explore on their own (Laureate Education, n.d.). Activities and applications are the heart of online learning and it helps the learners learn the content (Laureate Education, n.d.).

There are a variety of Web 2.0 tools the trainer can have the learners utilize. However, it is important that the trainer and learners have access to the technology and are able to use it (Laureate Education, n.d.). If the learners are not able to access or know how to use the technology tools then it will be difficult for them to successfully complete the course. One thing that the trainer can do is to provide tutorials of the technology tools that will be used in the course. Some Web 2.0 tools consist of blogging, wikis, and podcasting (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek 2015). These tools would aid in enhancing communication among learners and the trainer.

Trainer's Role in Distance Education

If the trainer's role in the traditional classroom learning environment was more teacher-centered, then their role would change to be more of a facilitator. The learners are expected to take responsibility of their own learning. The trainer must provide the information in order for the learners to do so. The trainer should provide a detailed syllabus to the learners. The syllabus should include the following:

- Clear and concise learning outcomes
- Clear expectations of students
- Topics to be discussed weekly
- Identification of readings and other preparatory activities
- Schedule of activities (i.e. quizzes or exams)
- Assignments and due dates (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek 2015).

The trainer must remain in constant contact with the learners in an online environment and show that he/she cares about the learner's success (Laureate Education, n.d.). When it comes to the discussion boards, the trainer must make their expectations clear for each weekly discussion. In reference to the actual weekly discussions, the trainer should make their felt, but should not take over the discussion (Freeman, n.d.). Allow the learners to take control of the discussion and delve deeper into the topic. The trainer may pose thought provoking questions in response to learners to continue the discussion. The trainer should also intervene when necessary to clarify any misconceptions or inappropriate responses, add insight, or to get learners back on track if they stray from the topic.

Encourage Trainees to Communicate Online

The trainer should establish a learning environment that is student-centered because it promotes “active learning, collaboration, mastery of course material, and student control over the learning process” (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek 2015). In a student-centered learning environment, the learners are expected to be engaged and participate in weekly discussions.

Some other tips the trainer can do to encourage trainees to communicate online are:

- Make expectations and instructions clear for class participation
- Encourage the trainees to think critically by posting thought provoking questions

- Have students respond to each other's post
- Utilize blogs and wikis for assignments (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek 2015).

Converting a face-to-face program to a distance learning format is not an easy task and would require a lot of planning, but it is possible. As long as the trainer plans effectively using the tips provided and works closely with the instructional designer, the transition from face-to-face to a distance learning environment would be a success. Hopefully the trainees will have little to no difficulty with the transition and will be able to complete the program successfully.

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