



# Twelve Principles You Need to Know to Create e-Learning Content

by Jeffrey B. Harris  
Trivantis Corporation

## **Principle #1**

It's unlikely that 100% of your e-learning content will reach 100% of your audience 100% of the time.

### **Explanation**

The Internet is large and dynamic. Different computers, platforms, operating systems, plug-ins, browsers, bandwidths, screen sizes, sound cards, and more make it practically impossible to reach all the people all the time.

Communicating on the Internet, therefore, becomes an exercise in risk management. A large number of students, for example, increases the odds that something won't work. Aim for the majority and try to reach as many people as possible, but remember that there will always be someone out there who has a problem viewing your content. Don't despair: your success rate percentage will probably be in the high 90's.

## **Principle #2**

Know your students! If you take your audience's specific computer capabilities and learning environments as well as their general characteristics into consideration, you will dramatically increase your chance of creating successful e-learning content.

### **Explanation**

If you know the technical limitations, environments, and personal needs that your audience has to view your e-learning content, you can take that information into account and increase your chances of success. Will the students view the content in a cubicle, private office, home, hotel room, store floor, or airline seat? Will they view the content during work hours, off hours, weekends, or while traveling? How long will they have to view your content? A day, a few hours, or just a few minutes? What Internet access capabilities will they have? High speed, low speed, or none at all? What are their learning styles? Text, aural, graphic, hands-on or other? Are they computer savvy or inexperienced?

## **Principle #3**

A handful of media file types are all you need to create engaging multimedia e-content.

### **Explanation**

The number of file types is in the thousands and grows daily. Fortunately, a small number of file types will meet your graphic, video, audio, and text needs. For more information on the most common file types for creating multimedia e-learning content, see Trivantis' Introduction to Media File Types included with this CD.

### **Principle #4**

Content that communicates well in one medium may be a failure in another.

### **Explanation**

Different media and combinations of media have different strengths and weaknesses. When you move content from one medium to another, you must rethink how to present your message and adapt it to communicate effectively. Reading *Moby Dick* on a laptop computer sounds more like torture than enjoyment. Rather than assume your communication will work well in a digital format, take a step back and ask yourself if there's a better way to communicate the same information. For example, trying to describe what a corkscrew looks like in text may require a long paragraph or a whole page. Digitally, the same information could be conveyed faster and more effectively with a photo or short video.

### **Principle #5**

Use a small, specific group of fonts for your e-learning content.

### **Explanation**

Despite the thousands of fonts that are available, only a few have become regarded as standards for the Internet. This is due to HTML (hypertext mark-up language) which makes transmitting text across the Internet extremely efficient.

Although you may select an interesting font, like Chunky Monkey, for your content, the viewer's browser will substitute another font, say Arial, if Chunky Monkey isn't available on the viewer's compute. A browser makes the substitution to insure the text "arrives" if the original font is not a choice.

This system has evolved so that now a handful of fonts are regarded as default fonts. They are: Arial, Arial Black, Times, Comic Sans, Courier, Courier New, Georgia, Helvetica, Times New Roman, Times, Trebuchet, and Verdana. If you specify these fonts for live HTML text, your viewer will likely see them as you designed them. For other fonts, especially exotic ones, you should render your text a graphic file using a graphics editor like Photoshop or Illustrator or an authoring tool like Lectora. To insure your communications arrive as designed, stick to the short list.

## **Principle #6**

Respect copyrights.

### **Explanation**

It's easy to borrow content from other sites on the Internet. Most people are flattered if you want to borrow an image or some text, provided they receive appropriate credit. If you're using someone else's materials, be sure to find out if the content is copyrighted. Pirated images on the Internet are common so even if something isn't marked, it could be stolen already.

## **Principle #7**

Be practical first, and then be cool.

### **Explanation**

Creating digital content and websites is not about being tricked out. It's about transferring information quickly and efficiently. Vague navigation buttons, difficult to read text, and busy interface designs are usually counterproductive and fail to help communicate. Sometimes being obvious is not cool, but it's functional. If you have a navigation button that looks like a pork chop, that's fine as long as your audience knows what will happen when they click on it.

## **Principle #8**

*Lean towards lean!*

### **Explanation**

The more complicated you make your content, the greater the chance of problems. Keep it simple. Keep it perfect. The benefits from doing so will grow exponentially.

Something is not perfect when you cannot add one more thing. Something is perfect when you cannot take away one more thing (*old design principle*). When it comes to e-content: THINK LEAN! Keep it simple. Keep it perfect. You've heard this a thousand times, but when it comes to e-content, it's true.

## **Principle #9**

Engage 'em! Make it interactive!

### **Explanation**

The technology to create engaging interactive e-content is readily available. Multimedia interactivity is one of the great strengths of e-learning because the student becomes actively involved with the content. The more "give and take" you make your content, the greater the likelihood the student will achieve your learning objectives. With an authoring tool like Lectora, you can use this strength to your training advantage and deliver superior results for your training by easily creating interactive exercises and assessments.

**Principle #10**

Keep it small.

**Explanation**

A lot of success on the Internet is based on speed. One factor of speed is file size. Smaller files load faster, which reduces “lag time” and keeps your viewers engaged. Large screen pages usually make for difficult viewing and are not recommended. Monitor sizes and variable browser settings may result in a wide variety of sizes when it comes to live areas on a computer screen. A safe screen size that is considered standard is 640 pixels by 480 pixels. This is a conservative size if you’re looking to reach the most people.

**Principle #11**

Develop a storyboard or script before you create your first page of e-learning content.

**Explanation**

You will save yourself many headaches and substantially increase the quality of your e-learning content if you use learning objectives and plan the flow of your content using a storyboard or script. Honest.

**Principle #12**

Test your e-learning content on a variety of computers with different configurations and then test it again. When you think you’re done, test it one more time.

**Explanation**

As stated in Principle #1: different computer configurations deliver different results. By testing on a variety of computers using different browsers, bandwidths, plug-ins, etc., you’re likely to identify specific problems. If you can identify problems, you can often correct them.