What is e-Learning?

by Ron Kurtus (revised 4 April 2004)

eLearning is a catch-all term that covers a wide range of instructional material that can be delivered on a CD-ROM or DVD, over a local area network (LAN), or on the Internet. It includes Computer-Based Training (CBT), Web-Based Training (WBT), Electronic Performance Support Systems (EPSS), distance or online learning and online tutorials. The major advantage to students is its easy access. There are some typical elements and a standard approach to developing or authoring eLearning material.

Questions you may have include:

- What does eLearning provide the student?
- What are the typical elements of eLearning material?
- What is the approach taken to authoring eLearning?

eLearning provides easy access

eLearning provides the student or learner with information that can be accessed in a setting free from time and place constraints. The student can go through the lessons at his or her own pace.

In many cases--especially in a CBT delivered on a CD-ROM--the material is media-rich information, including such multimedia forms as audio and video.

The progress and achievement of the student can be assessed in eLearning, with custom feedback and evaluation available in an interactive environment.

Typical elements

Typical elements of eLearning material comes from good instructional design and is similar to what is used in training and educational classes:

- Introduction or overview
- Information presentation
- Practice items with customized, instructive feedback
- Assessment
- Evaluation feedback

Authoring approach

Instructional authoring of eLearning, CBT or WBT material requires a methodical approach.

- The instructional design of the material should be clear and consistent. This is not an area to take shortcuts. Up-front planning is a most important element to eLearning.
- The user interface should be intuitive and easy to navigate. Fancy or obscure techniques can discourage a learner from continuing.

- There should be ongoing and purposeful interaction with and by the student.
- Real-world applications, exercises and examples are necessary.
- There must be an effective and systematic assessment of student progress and achievement.
- Multimedia should be used primarily to effectively communicate content and motivate learning, as opposed to showing off the latest technologies.