



75 e-Learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive

by Ryan Watkins
reviewed by Erika R. Gilmore, CPT

Each time that I learn of a new book about e-learning, I immediately experience mixed feelings of anticipation and skepticism. I wonder: Will this book be sound and helpful? Will this book be based on solid instructional and performance improvement principles? Will this book help people make better decisions about the appropriate selection and design of e-learning experiences? Or will this book lack substance and turn out to be just another lackluster attempt at riding the popular e-bandwagon?

After all, we all know professionals who advocate e-learning and e-everything just because of the convenience, glamour, and cutting-edge reputation it still seems to carry, whether appropriate for the situation or not.

Fortunately, International Society for Performance Improvement member Ryan Watkins brings a straightforward, credible effort to the table with his new book *75 e-Learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive*. This book is great for people who are either actively involved in designing e-learning or are interested in doing it; the book can even inform classroom instructors who want to supplement their traditional courses with interactive online tools.

Overview

75 e-Learning Activities is extremely user friendly. It is *not* a dense, theoretical work. On the contrary, it is full of tips, guidelines, lists, and lesson plans that can be read, digested, and *implemented* quickly. An accompanying CD-ROM gives readers an even bigger jumpstart by providing ready-made templates, instructions, and other resources that can be used to implement the activities. Another noteworthy feature of the book is the selection matrix provided in the Introduction. Given the large number of activities in the book, Watkins' selection matrix helps focus the choices given particular context variables, such as group size, mode (synchronous or asynchronous), and time required to complete an activity.

The author encourages readers to use the book with a cook-book metaphor, as it provides “recipes” to help designers and instructors introduce (or markedly increase) the ingredients of creativity and interactivity in the e-learning experiences they create or deliver.

Book Sections

Watkins’ remedies for humdrum or ineffective online learning events appear in the following sections:

- **Section One: Tip for Effective e-Learning Design and Delivery.** This section includes more than 70 tips, including learner readiness, e-learning design, teaching online, using email, synchronous chats, and asynchronous discussions.
- **Section Two: Introductions and Icebreakers.** This section includes 13 activities to help build relationships and positive experiences during the critical initial stage of online instruction. It is good to get peers connected early!
- **Section Three: e-Learning Skills.** Section Three includes eight activities to help learners ensure success in their efforts with online instruction.
- **Section Four: Collaboration and Team Building.** Here are five techniques for getting groups off to a strong start. Members of cohesive, collaborative e-learning groups are often more successful as e-learners when compared to individuals who are isolated from peers.
- **Section Five: Elaborating on Course Content.** Section Five includes 20 ideas for getting learners to dig more deeply into course topics. This is where subject matter learning, exploration, and expansion of perspective can really come into play. Creative examples include “Dear ADDIE Letters” and “Learner-Crafted Scavenger Hunts.”
- **Section Six: Increasing Interactivity.** This section includes 29 more ways to engage learners in interaction at the beginning of a course or to revitalize interaction during online instruction. Examples include “Digital Chain Letter,” “Guest Speaker Press Conference,” “Online with Socrates,” and “Course S.W.O.Ts.”

Summary

As the section titles indicate, the author does not engage in a debate or try to persuade readers of the merits of e-learning in this book. Instead, Watkins provides advice and strategies to engage learners and create more rich and interactive encounters than most typical online courses include. In other words, he works from the premise that if you’re going to do e-learning, you should do it well! His argument is convincing, and his suggestions are attractive because most readers have had experiences with mind-numbing,

noninteractive e-learning events that did not achieve the instructional goal and completely turned learners off.

This is an important point, because it gets at the heart of Watkins’ intent for the book: It is a book inherently about ensuring learning occurs as a result of instruction. And when learning is appropriately called for and other elements of a performance system are sound, learning should translate into improved performance. The context for learning in this case just happens to be e-learning. It is refreshing to see that the underlying theme of the book emphasizes good instructional design and a focus on learning outcomes as opposed to using the glitz and glam of technology just because it exists.

As you would expect with a “how-to” book, there are not a lot of theoretical references or research citations embedded throughout the body of the book. Yet Watkins’ theoretical perspective came through as I read his rationale for the book, and he does provide a short list of references and additional resources that readers may consult as they continue to build interactivity into e-learning experiences.

Engagement of learners is key, and whether you are designing or teaching a semester-long university course or a 2-hour online learning workshop, I guarantee there is something for you in *75 e-Learning Activities: Making Online Learning Interactive*. 🍄

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Reviewer Bio

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