

Beginner's Guide To Online Training

Learn the Basic Tech, Tools and Terms

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INTRODUCTION

While many organizations or learning professionals are quite familiar with the tools and technology used for online training, others are still quite new to them.

If you'd like an introduction to the technology, terms, and techniques used in online training, then this guide is for you.

We hope you find it helpful and we invite you to reach out if you have any additional questions we can answer.

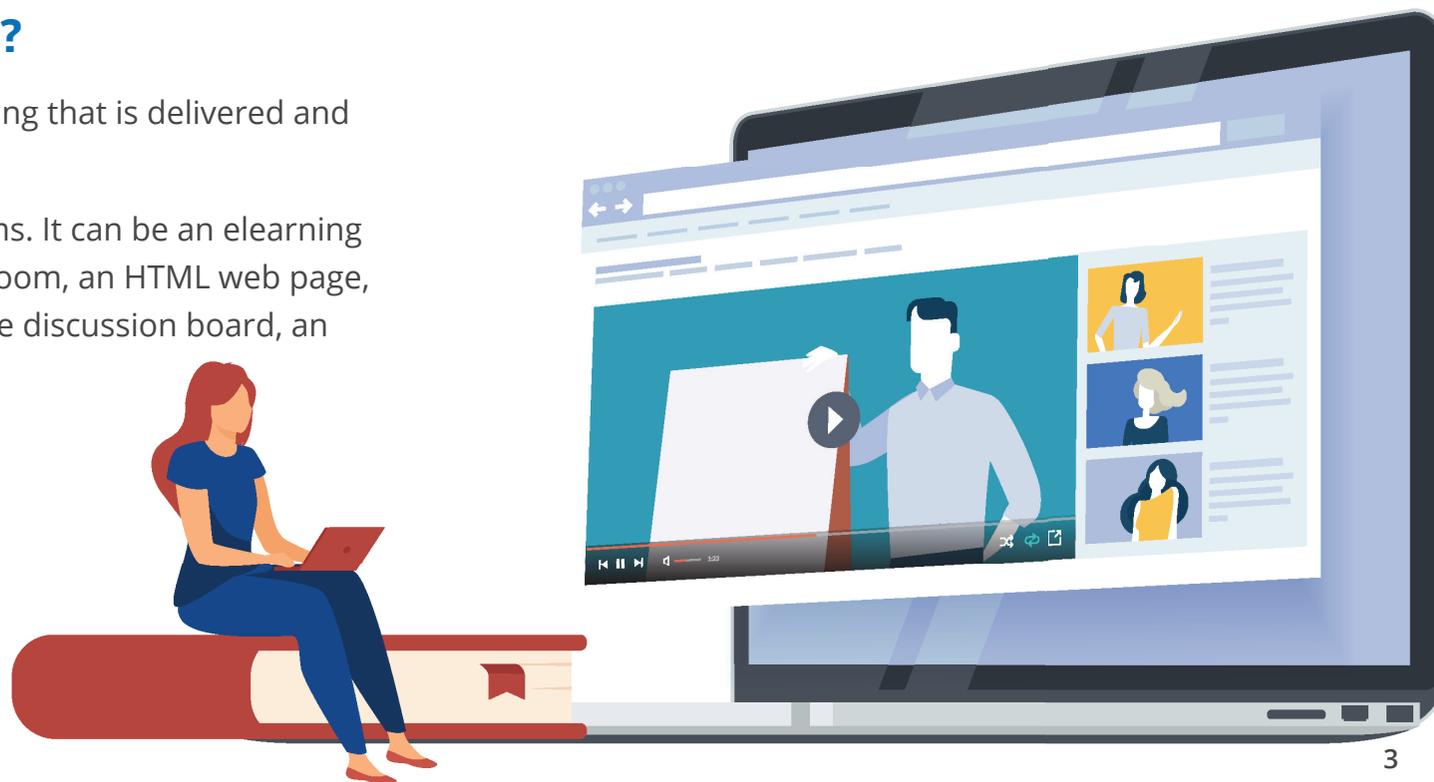
What Is Online Training?

Online training, simply put, is training that is delivered and occurs online.

Online training can take many forms. It can be an elearning course, a video, a live virtual classroom, an HTML web page, a PDF, a PowerPoint deck, an online discussion board, an online quiz, or more.

And with technologies that are becoming increasingly common and inexpensive today, online learning can also be thought of as including virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and chat bots. And it can sometimes make use of artificial intelligence (AI).

And of course, it's fair enough to think of email and even text messaging as tools you can use for online learning as well.



WHAT IS A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS)?

A learning management system, or LMS, is the software application that's most commonly used to administer and manage training programs, including but not limited to online training activities.

You can use an LMS to:

- Create or import training
- Assign training to workers based on their unique training needs
- Notify employees of their training assignments
- Deliver the online portion of training to workers online
- Manage offline training (classrooms, etc.)
- Set and assign due dates, training expiration dates, recurrent training requirements, etc.
- Create and store completion records
- Generate and deliver reports
- More

Learning management systems used to be installed on an organization's network and in some cases, that still happens, although today cloud-based learning management systems are much more common.

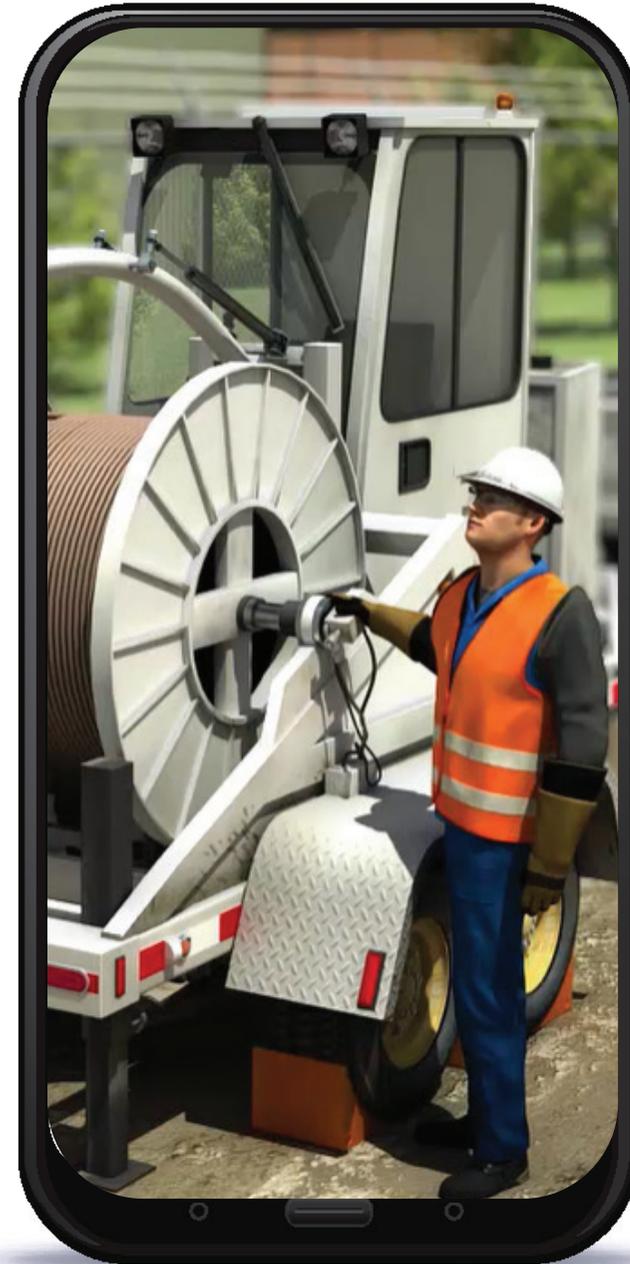
There are many, many different learning management systems on the market and none are the same. Although many will share a common set of features, including the features we listed above, each may have unique features as well and their user interface will be different as well. Additionally, learning management systems may be designed for specific purposes (such as academic LMSs used at schools, corporate training LMSs used for job training, LMSs that support continuing education, and so on) and some may have features that make them well-suited for specific purposes or industries (such as compliance training, safety training, industrial and manufacturing training, and so on). It pays to find the LMS that's the best fit for your organization's needs.



WHAT IS AN ELEARNING COURSE?

As mentioned earlier, you can use an LMS to deliver training in a lot of different forms: videos, PDFs, PowerPoint presentations, online quizzes, and more. But one of the more common uses for an LMS, and one of the things that first comes to mind when discussing online learning, is an elearning course.

An elearning course is what you probably thought of first when you thought of “online training.” It’s the training content, often packaged with practice exercises and a test.



You can license elearning courses “off-the-shelf” from providers or have providers make them custom for your unique organizational learning needs. You can even make your own custom elearning courses using relatively simple and inexpensive software programs known as elearning authoring tools (see the next section for more on elearning authoring tools).

Just as no LMS is the same, no elearning course is the same, either. The content, obviously, will be different. Additionally, some use still images, some use videos, and some use immersive 3D animations. Some are linear and follow one path from beginning to end, while others “branch” according to the decisions of the learners. Some present content in a narrative form, while others put the learner in a realistic scenario or game-like environment.

It’s also helpful to know that elearning courses come in any of three different types, forms, or “standards.” These are AICC, SCORM, and xAPI (also known as Experience API). The important thing to know is that you need elearning courses and an LMS that are compatible—for example, if you have elearning courses published in the SCORM format, you need an LMS that is compatible with SCORM courses.

Here’s a little additional information about these three elearning standards:

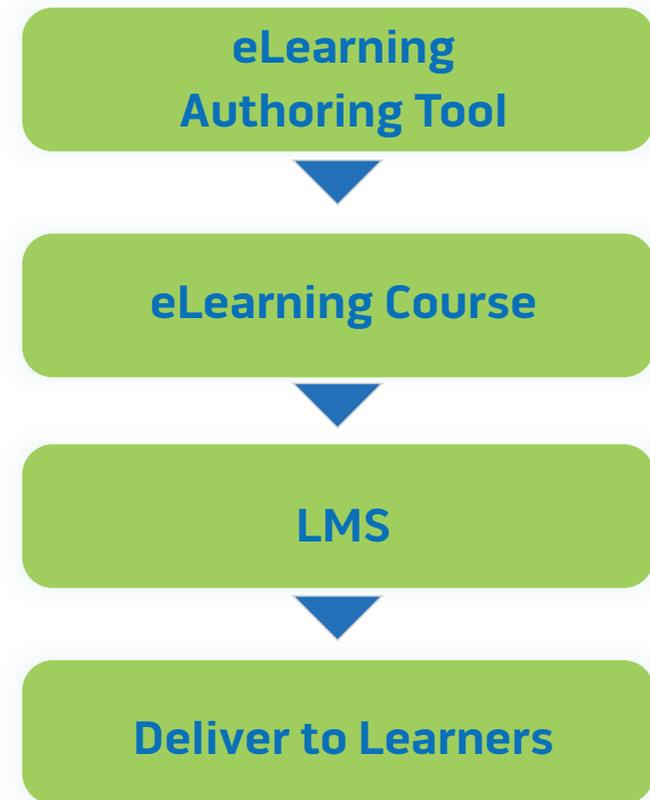
- **AICC** — the oldest of the three and no longer supported by its creators
- **SCORM** — the most common of the three and the industry standard at present
- **xAPI** — a newer alternative but not yet as widely adopted as SCORM

WHAT IS AN ELEARNING AUTHORIZING TOOL?

In the section above, we mentioned you can make your own elearning courses. To do this, you need an elearning authoring tool.

There are many elearning authoring tools on the market and each has its own strengths and weaknesses. In general, any of the industry leaders should satisfy your organization's elearning creation needs.

eLearning authoring tools are relatively inexpensive and easy enough to learn and use, at least at the novice level (that's not to say you can't spend a lifetime becoming an increasingly expert elearning developer). In fact, at the novice level, many elearning authoring tools are designed so you can import a PowerPoint presentation, add some pre-formatted interactivity and quizzes, write a test for the end, publish in one of the formats we mentioned earlier (AICC, SCORM, and/or xAPI), and then import your published elearning course into your LMS. It's that simple!



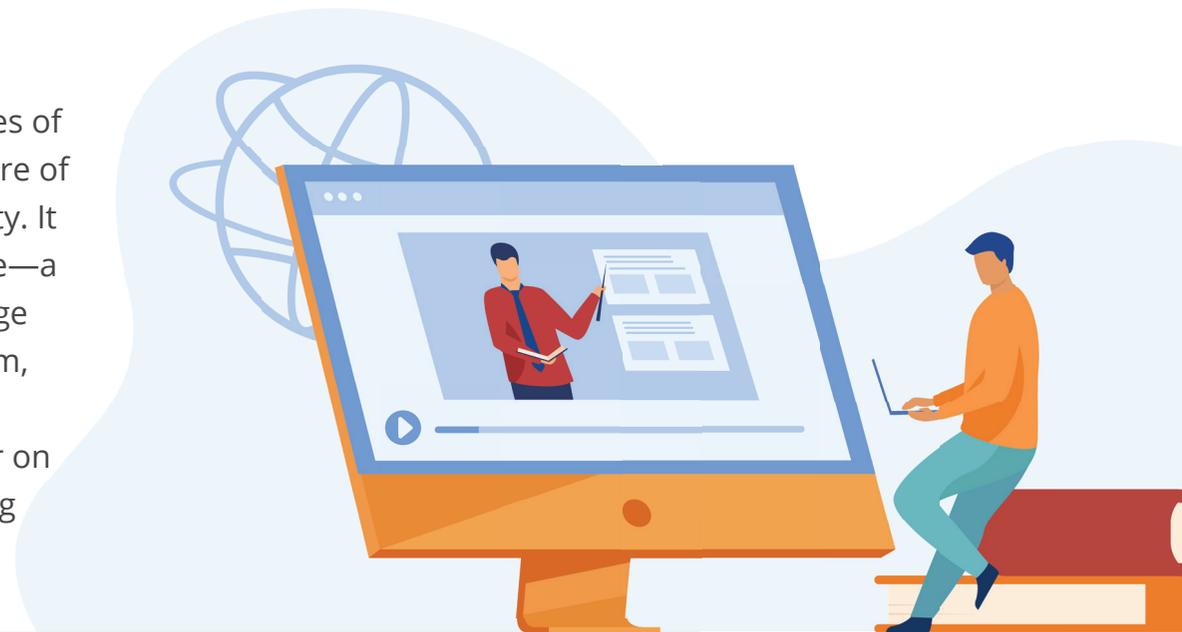
WHAT IS “LIVE ONLINE LEARNING?”

Live online learning is pretty much what it sounds like: learners complete an online learning activity “live” in the presence of an instructor and typically with other learners as well.

Just as there are many different elearning authoring tools, there are many different platforms your organization can use for live online learning. And all of them are easy enough to integrate with your learning management system to make training assignments, delivery, and completion tracking simple and painless.

It’s best to think of live online learning as having two types of forms: webinars and virtual classrooms. A webinar is more of an information broadcast and not really a learning activity. It can be a good way to tell people about something simple—a new, simple policy, for example—and you can have a large number of people attend the webinar. A virtual classroom, by contrast, is an intentionally designed learning activity that will aid comprehension, retention, and later transfer on the job. Virtual classrooms are much more active learning

experiences, should include a smaller number of learners, and should include features built into the live online learning platform, such as breakout rooms, chats, white boards, annotations, and so on.



MOBILE LEARNING APPS

Mobile learning allows employees to complete training when and where they want to. This is a great benefit to employees, as it expands on the freedom that online training gives them from having to strictly comply with the schedule of face-to-face trainers.

Mobile learning allows workers to access, view, and complete training on mobile devices, such as a smartphone or tablet. In some cases, this means accessing the LMS through the web browser on the mobile device. In other cases, this means accessing the training through dedicated apps on the device itself.



POINT OF NEED PERFORMANCE SUPPORT

Although the focus of this guide is on online training, you'll want solutions that help you deliver performance support to workers when and where they need it on the job as well.

Training's great, but it's also great to support employees with necessary information as they complete their real job tasks.

So when you're thinking of adopting online learning at work, don't forget about performance support (and keep in mind the role that mobile devices play in performance support, too).



EMERGING LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

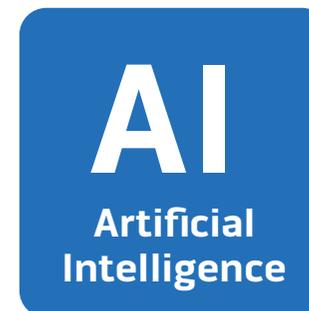
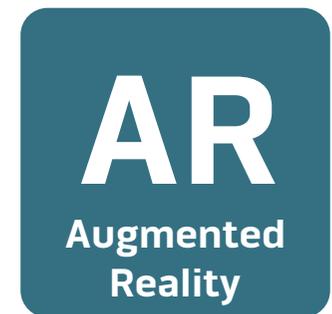
Learning management systems, elearning courses, videos, live online learning (and in particular virtual classrooms), and the other activity types we mentioned earlier (PDFs, online quizzes, etc.) are the backbone of most current online training programs.

However, that doesn't mean there aren't other technologies already being used that will become increasingly common over time.

We won't go into a lot of detail about these in this guide, but we'll list a handful of key technologies and briefly describe them for you. You may want to learn more about how they're used in L&D and ask providers you work with how they incorporate these now or what their future plans are:

- Virtual reality (VR)—immerses the learner in a 360-degree virtual environment and allows the learner to practice skills
- Augmented reality (AR)—the learner holds a device (smartphone or tablet) and looks through it and things are “superimposed” on the real world

- Chatbots—like the chatbots you're familiar with on the Internet, but programmed to answer questions at your workplace or to further a learner along his or her unique learning path(s)
- Artificial intelligence (AI)—used to personalize and/or recommend training based on the learner's unique abilities and interests



WHAT IS BLENDED LEARNING?

Blended learning simply means to deliver training in multiple different forms.

Blended learning is most commonly used to refer to using face-to-face and online instruction together; the “flipped model” is a common way to do this. In the flipped model, you use online learning (such as an elearning course or video) to introduce content to employees and allow them to practice on their own and deeply process the content at their own pace. Then, you follow the elearning course with face-to-face instruction, providing more demonstrations, watching learners practice, giving constructive feedback, answering questions, and performing other synchronous learning activities to help employees acquire knowledge, gain skills, and later apply it on the job.

Many studies show that blended learning approaches improve training effectiveness, and a learning management system is a perfect tool to help organizations administer blended learning.

As a final point, it’s worth keeping in mind there are other ways to blend training beyond just the flipped model. Consider blending many different types of training delivery (a written PDF, an elearning course, a virtual classroom, and then an online discussion board, for example) and consider designing purely digital blends as well.



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