

Microlearning: What's Really Important?

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What's Really Important?

In our last post, we got some insight into the trending topic of microlearning. Because it's so popular and supports the way business is being done, there's lots of movement in the industry to put it into action. But, we need to make sure that it is done the "right way" for our learners.

Let's look at some of the important elements of quality microlearning that can guide the development and design process.

Where Does Microlearning Fit?

We tend to build our materials within a standard framework: a warm up; instructional and practice tasks; closure with takeaways; and then "on-the-job" application. Is there room for microlearning? YES!

Allen Communication's guide, *Microlearning Techniques: Driving Results by Empowering Learners*, demonstrates how microlearning easily fits in the three-stage learning lifecycle:

- **Readiness:** The stage where learners recognize why and what they are learning, and how they will be better for it. Microlearning can explain all that. What tools do the trick? Motivational videos, diagnostic quizzes, infographics and flipped pre-work.
- **Discovery:** This is where participants self-assess; put new skills and knowledge into action; and give and receive feedback. Which microlearning assets support these? Gamification, decision-making scenarios, video interviews, and how-to demos, all of which can be offered alone or with traditional training formats.
- **Reinforcement:** At this phase, learners use and reinforce what they learned "on the job." If people forget how to do something, they don't have to take the entire training again because microlearning can fill that gap. What helps participants in their work? Job aids, goal wizards, reference tools, and performance dashboards.

What About Those Objectives?

How do we figure out what to include at each lifecycle benchmark? You know this already: the performance objective. Sometimes, forming objectives is the hardest part of the design process (at least for me).

Add microlearning to the mix? Go ahead, make it harder. I can take it!

So, how do objectives and microlearning treatments get synced up?

First, decide whether microlearning is the right tool to use. If there are multiple objectives, one piece of microlearning will probably not address them all. But, if that is the case, you can break down the course into different microlearning pieces, each with a treatment authentic to the objective at hand.

Pierre Olivier, seasoned corporate instructional designer, uses an Adobe® Photoshop® employee training an example of this tactic. Individual steps focused on specific tools or design techniques, for example, can be divided into single microlearning assets, each with an objective. Plus, after the course, learners can focus on an objective for reinforcement purposes.

Time and Timeliness

There is no real consensus on how long microlearning should be. For now, three to five minutes is the way to go. But, know that timing can vary.

Grovo, in its "Bite Size is the Right Size" PowerPoint presentation, offers two useful strategies:

- **The 90/20/8 Rule:** Never run a full lesson more than 90 minutes. Change the pace at least every 20 minutes. Then directly involve learners in the content every eight minutes.
- **Grovo's Methodology:** Never run a lesson longer than three minutes. Change the pace every 20-40 seconds. Bolster recall with short assessments between modules.

Jae Curtis, author of "Microlearning: How Long Should a Mini Lesson Last?," counters the "prevailing opinion" that a micro-lesson should be about 10-15 minutes long.

"The actual time limit for microlearning," says Curtis, "depends on the instructional designer, SME, and teacher. Allow your e-learner the chance to absorb new information on their own

schedule, while allowing for better retention of the smaller bits of information. Five 15-minute lessons create a larger retention rate than a 75-minute instructional video."

One other time-based microlearning benefit is that because units typically stand alone, they can be regularly and easily updated. That means the larger training curriculum does not have to be completely overhauled...a tweak, here and there, but otherwise, changes are minimal.

Keeping It on the Development Radar

As we see, big learning can come from microlearning, especially when there is a sharp eye toward the particulars that drive its design. Look at it as "micro-developing" that ultimately makes it work.

Resources

[Understanding the Learning Lifecycle](#), Trevor Gran, AllenComm.com (2017)

[Microlearning Techniques: Driving Results by Empowering Learners](#), AllenComm.com (2017)

[The Micro-Learning Primer - Small Lessons for Big Results](#), Ben Shanbrom Skilled Up (2015)

[5 Steps to More Useful Webinars Using Microlearning & Social Networks](#) In this practical blog by Jennifer Hofmann, we gain tips for enhancing webinars with more interactive tools and user engagement opportunities.

[8 Tips for Creating Effective Microlearning Courses](#) This article by Sudarshana Ghosh provides basic development strategies that can make for a great microlearning product and experience.