



YOU CAN LEAD YOUR AUDIENCE TO ELEARNING, BUT CAN YOU FORCE THEM TO LEARN



by Tai Munro, Ph.D

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You have spent months creating and compiling the content for your eLearning. The material is essential to safety, or your organization's functioning, or your bottom line, or all three. You want to ensure that your learners hear every word of the course.

Requiring learners to spend a set amount of time on each screen, or "forced navigation," seems like a logical way to do this. You can already picture your learners skipping through the screens as fast as their fingers can click the Forward button, and you want to make sure that doesn't happen. But our experience has proven that forced navigation is not the way to go.

First, it simply doesn't work. Forcing learners to spend a certain amount of time on a particular piece of content, or to listen to all of the narration before moving on, does not in fact lead to increased understanding or knowledge retention. We often compare it to gluing students' fingers to their textbooks – you can make them sit there, but you can't make them learn.

Taking control away from learners often makes them feel patronized and frustrated. We have found that as soon as a learner is angry with the course, they are less motivated to learn. They quickly become disengaged. Learners who are not motivated will find ways around even the most restrictive course; they will go get a coffee or check their email until they can

move on to the next screen, instead of engaging with the content at their own pace.

And “their own pace” is key. With forced navigation, advanced learners may become bored, while others may feel pressured to move on before they are ready. One of the advantages of eLearning is that it gives learners the control, allowing them to spend as much time as they need to on concepts that are difficult or new, and to move on when they feel confident. Research into adult learning emphasizes the importance of self-direction: adults learn best when they are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning.

Finally, with forced navigation learners will be less likely to go back and review material they have already seen, or to use the course as a resource to which they can quickly refer later on.

So if forced navigation isn't the answer, what is?

The simplest answer is “make it engaging.” For some courses, this means video scenes or animated characters to guide learners through the content. For others, it means scenarios that immerse the learner in a realistic situation. We work closely with you to create the right feel for your course.

Frequent interactions or quizzes (often called “Try It Outs”) also motivate learners to pay attention to the material, and help them identify content that they may want to go back and review. For many courses we have also used tokens or badges that the learner collects by either completing quiz questions, or by clicking on hypertext or other buttons. The learner must find a certain number tokens to receive a course completion certificate, or to reach bronze, silver or gold achievement levels.

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