

Conversion Best Practices

Blended learning is the term used to describe a learning environment where face-to-face (F2F) instruction and computer facilitated instruction are merged (Graham, Allen, & Ure, 2005). Since you have decided to transition your F2F training to the blended format, you may already be aware of its benefits such as the improvement of learning due to the variety of learning modes offered, and increasing the interest and accountability of learners (Zaineb, 2010).

This best practices document covers the following areas that will guide you in your conversion:

- Promote collaboration
- Pre-planning strategy
- Facilitate discussion
- Understand changing role

How do you promote collaboration?

To decide how to introduce more communication in a training session, it is important to know the different types of interaction. An overall goal to increase trainer and trainee interaction can be further broken down into the following categories as described by Moore (1989)

1. Learner-to-content (L2C) interaction describes the trainee's enhanced comprehension of the content through their increased interfacing with it.
2. Learner-to-instructor (L2I) interaction denotes the methods of communication between trainee and trainer/subject matter expert.
3. Learner-to-learner(s) (L2L) refers to contact between trainees that may, or may not, be prompted by the trainer.

The diagram below exemplifies methods to achieve these different types of interaction.

Learner-to-Content	Learner-to-Learner	Learner-to-Instructor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> PDF documents available online and on mobile devices<input type="checkbox"/> Online library<input type="checkbox"/> Course texts and manuals in hard copy format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Discussion boards<input type="checkbox"/> Wikis<input type="checkbox"/> Email<input type="checkbox"/> Skype	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> All the methods listed for learner-to-learner interaction<input type="checkbox"/> Assignments<input type="checkbox"/> Evaluations<input type="checkbox"/> Teleconference

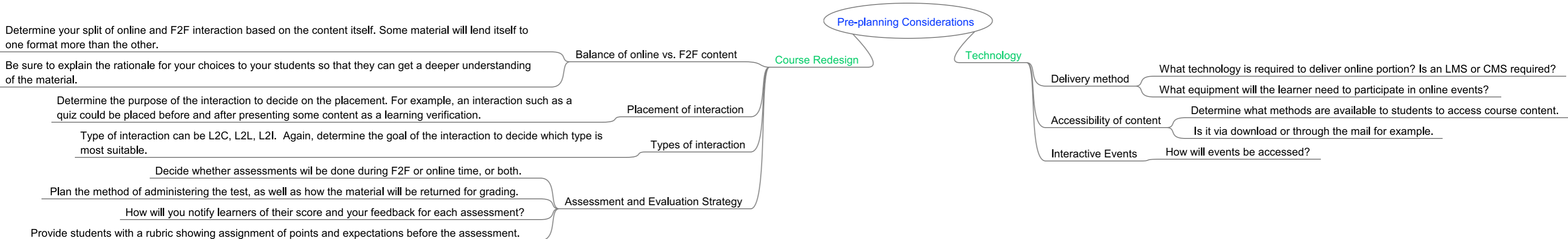
When you decide on the vehicles for interaction, have the trainer use the checklist below for specific techniques to facilitate the communication. The majority of these techniques can be adapted for both the F2F and online portions.

- Do you know your audience?** Get to know your trainees. For example, find out what internet and computer resources are available for the trainee to use for the online section (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009).
- Can your trainees “see” you?** Let trainees “see” you in, even in the online sections of the course. That means you will have to participate in activities like discussions so that students can perceive your presence (Laureate Inc., n.d.).
- Does everyone know what to do?** Be very clear about your expectations of the trainees, and make sure they know what is on the agenda and what kind of time commitment is required (Laureate Inc., n.d.).
- Are you using the collective experience?** To increase motivation, try to include elements of real situations that learners would have experience with and be willing to share.
- Can everyone use the technology?** Be aware that not everyone has the same comfort level with technology. Your role as facilitator is to integrate the technology so that it is seamless to learning (Berge, n.d.). Spend some time coaching students so that they can use all the various technologies, and know where to find help if needed.
- Is there an atmosphere of trust and respect?** Just as with any discussion, members will be more apt to participate if they have a sense of trust and respect from the others in the conversation (Herring & Smaldino, 2001). As a facilitator, you will have to monitor the discussion for undesirable behavior and deal with it swiftly so that trust is not lost among the rest of the participants.

Do you have a pre-flight plan?

Converting F2F training to blended learning involves more than just delivering a PowerPoint presentation along with the physical training. You are now able to add different levels of interactivity between students and instructors through use of the online delivery. Also keep in

mind that technology must be chosen carefully to support activities and deliver the course itself. However, technology itself should be used solely as “tool ...and not as a method” (Simson et al., 2009). The mind map illustrates the major pre-planning considerations for this project.



What is the role of a facilitator?

Advantages of online learning include the opportunity to receive personal attention from the instructor and communicate with peers, despite geographical and chronological separation. This format is also useful to break up the monotony of a single delivery method. As stated by Simonson et al., “The key to instruction in a synchronous environment is that the learners cannot remain passive for a length of time” (2009). Use the checklist below to identify some areas of the original training that could benefit from online learning:

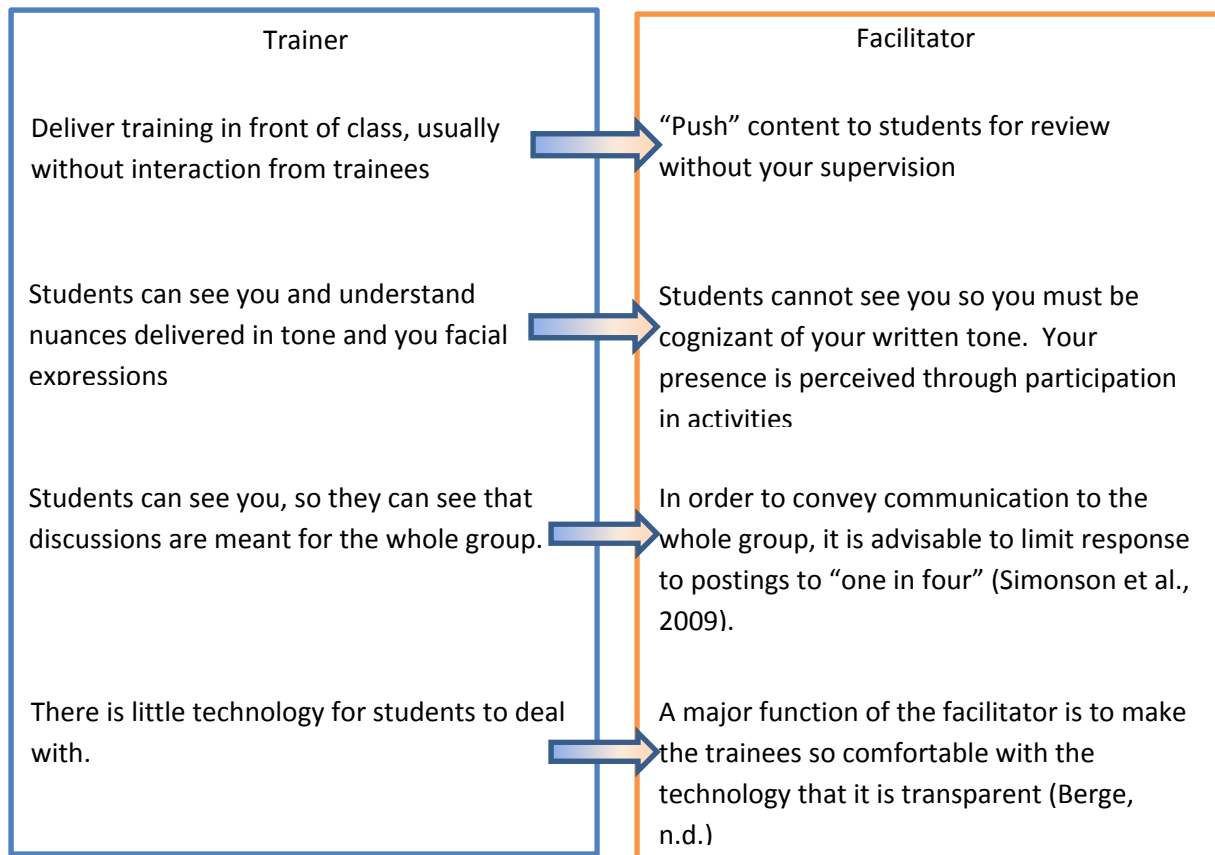
- Do you have a long period of unbroken, one-way lecture?
- Do you have a section where a new or difficult topic is discussed for the first time?
- Do you have a topic that could be described by personal experiences of the students?

The list below demonstrates some situations where online learning can be applied to enhance F2F instruction:

- Introduce a discussion after the introduction of a new topic or concept to allow learners to ask specific questions of their instructor and peers.
- Post the transcript of a lecture to a web page and include data mash ups and hyperlinks so that students can obtain a more broad understanding of the topic. Have students discuss their findings in the next F2F session.
- Include a problem based learning activity after a lecture

Be aware of your changing role

As you transition from your role as trainer to facilitator, you will also be moving out of a heavily teacher centered environment to one that is more student centered (Simonson et al., 2009). As students will have to be more self-directed in their learning in the online format, they will rely on your guidance in navigating the material as opposed to waiting for you to deliver the information directly to them as in a lecture. Use the diagram below to help prepare you for this shift.



References

- Berge, Dr. Z. L. (n.d.). The role of the online instructor/facilitator. Retrieved from http://www.cordonline.net/mntutorial2/module_2/Reading%20201%20instructor%20role.pdf
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Readiness Checksheet

Use this checksheet to assess your readiness for the conversion process.

1. Do you have a set of clear learning objectives for the blended format course?
2. Do you have a strategy to implement interaction in the course?
3. Is the technology to deliver the online portion of the course ready?
4. Have you identified the F2F portions of the course which will benefit from online enhancement?
5. Are you familiar and comfortable with all the software required to facilitate, assess, and participate in online activities?
6. Do you fully understand how an online facilitator role will be different from a F2F trainer role?
7. Do you have sufficient document to inform trainees of their expectations and syllabus of the program?