

# 3 SIMPLE STEPS TO MOVE TRAINING ONLINE

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## Introduction

If your organization is like most, then you are scrambling to convert your traditional instructor led classes to a live online format. You may be hoping to take advantage of the cost savings offered by virtual training, such as saving time, or reducing travel expenses. Maybe you are moving your training online in order to reach your dispersed workforce. Regardless of your reason, the time is now for virtual training. With the advances in technology, growth of mobile devices, and the increased mobility and globalization of the workforce, virtual training just makes sense.

Over the past 7 years, delivery of traditional instructor-led training classes has decreased from 70% to 49%, while other methods, including virtual instructor-led training, are increasing to fill the gap<sup>1</sup>. So while traditional in-person classes still comprise a large percentage of training delivered in organizations, virtual training offers many benefits. Live online delivery can help you offer more training to your employees, and to reach your increasingly mobile workforce.

Whether you are an early adopter of live online training, or just getting started in your transition, you need to know how to transition your training classes. This white paper outlines the three steps you should follow when converting your traditional, in-person training classes into online ones. It also reviews the types of live online sessions you could have, and will help you avoid the three most common conversion mistakes. Whether you are a trainer, a designer, or someone overseeing training, this paper is for you.

## The Importance of Good Design

Virtual training suffers from a poor reputation because many people think it's boring or not an engaging way to learn. They may have attended a lecture-style webcast, or they can't imagine how they could meaningfully interact with others online. However, when designed well, synchronous virtual training can provide meaningful learning opportunities for participants.

### Definitions:

Synchronous?

Live online?

Virtual training?

Yes! These terms all refer to virtual instructor-led training, or vILT.

## What Can Convert?

It doesn't matter what type of training you have, almost anything can be taught in the live online environment.

It's possible to deliver technical training, software training, interpersonal skills training, communication skills, and even sales training using the virtual classroom.

Your success with virtual training will depend upon a design that engages participants, helps them learn a new skill, and creates a great learning experience.

This paper assumes you already have a well-designed traditional in-person training class. Your challenge is how to translate this design into an equally superior online class. The three steps outlined in this white paper will help you do just that.

Of course, if you are starting from scratch to create a virtual training course, many of these same design principles will apply. You will still need to determine what type of online session you will have, still need to avoid common virtual training design mistakes, and still follow the three steps.

## Types of Live Online Sessions

Let's begin with a look at the types of live online sessions you can have because this distinction will help determine your design decisions.

As I discussed in chapter 1 of my book, *Virtual Training Basics*, there are varying types of sessions. These sessions have both in-person and online equivalents. In the in-person environment, you have four general categories of gatherings: meetings, presentations, seminars, and training classes. It's the same in the live online environment:

In-Person Type	Definition	Online Equivalent
<b>Meeting</b>	A gathering of people to discuss topics.	Meeting
<b>Presentation</b>	One-way communication on any topic from a speaker to audience of varying sizes. No interactivity except for Q&A at the end.	Webcast
<b>Seminar</b>	One-way communication on an educational topic designed to impart knowledge from an expert speaker to the audience. Some interaction between speaker and audience may occur.	Webinar
<b>Training</b>	A method of improving someone's performance, centered on learning objectives.	Virtual Instructor-Led Training (vILT)

Each of these gatherings has a purpose and an opportunity for design. There is not a right or wrong format for the type of session you will have.

However, it is important to define the type because it will drive your design decisions.

Designing for a 15-person training class is different than designing for a webinar that will have 75 people in it, and creating a design for a small virtual meeting will be different than designing a webcast with 2000 people.

Recognize this difference so that you can design the appropriate type of session.

## Define Expectations

It's important to make sure you and your team are using the same definition of formats, so that there is no confusion.

For instance, many training professionals and experts in the field will refer to their virtual training classes as "webinars." In this distinction, what really matters is the meaning behind the words.

If you call your interactive online training session a "webinar" and someone else thinks that you mean "one-way presentation" then those mismatched expectations could lead to problems. Set expectations appropriately with everyone who will be involved with designing, delivering, and consuming your online sessions.

## Three Common Conversion Mistakes

There are three common mistakes made when converting traditional training classes to the synchronous live online environment. *Let's explore each one, so that you can avoid them when translating your classes.*

1. **Mistake number one** is taking an interactive, instructor-led classroom session and turning it into a presentation-style webcast. This happens more frequently than you would think because presenters can fall into lecture mode when they can't see participants. In addition, slides tend to be the easiest thing to convert to the live online environment, so facilitators might rely on them too much when presenting.

Remember, you are converting training, not one-way presentations. Just because participants are dispersed doesn't mean that your live online class should be a lecture. Don't forget what you know about adult learning principles and how to engage participants in learning. Those guidelines apply to all types of training, including virtual. Your virtual training design should be just as engaging and interactive as if it were in-person. Use the built-in engagement features of the online training platform so your virtual attendees don't have to

suffer through a lecture when what they need is a training class.

2. **Mistake number two** is thinking that an 8-hour, instructor-led class will be an 8-hour, live online virtual session. The reality is that one minute of classroom time does not equal one minute of virtual time.

For example, in an in-person class, you might have participants go around the room and introduce themselves one-by-one. But in the virtual classroom, participants can type their introductions in the chat window. The in-person introductions could take more than 20 minutes, while the online chat introductions might only take 2 minutes.

So when you convert in-person classes, especially lengthy ones, recognize that you can find ways to shorten activities and economize time. While every activity may not move faster, you can use technology tools to your advantage. This is one of the many benefits of virtual training.

3. **Mistake number three** is to unintentionally inflate the number of participants in the live online class. Most traditional in-person training classes are designed for small numbers of participants. Typical training class numbers range from 10-25 participants, depending upon the subject matter and other logistics.

Yet the temptation to vastly increase participant numbers in the equivalent live online class size seems difficult to resist.

Just because you can put hundreds of participants in an online classroom, doesn't mean you should.

There are most certainly times when large numbers of participants in an online session is a good thing. If your goal is to present information in a webcast format, or your goal is to have a knowledge-awareness-only online seminar, then go for a large number of participants. You can achieve economies of scale when holding online meetings.

Remember, the important thing is to distinguish these large events from your training classes. If a training class is designed for 20 people, then the training class is designed for 20 people whether it's in-person or online. If you increase the participant numbers then you will lose the interactivity, the discussion opportunities, and the ability to easily coach participants on the new skills.

Of course, it's possible to have an interactive session with large participant numbers. The important message, however, is that you lose out on the small group dynamic that's often necessary in a training class. And perhaps more importantly, if your training design is for a small group and you apply it without modification to a large group, then you will not achieve the intended learning outcomes.

You can avoid these common mistakes when transferring your training classes to the online environment by making better choices about your virtual training design. And now that you know what mistakes to avoid, let's learn how to move your traditional training to the online classroom.

## Three Steps to Convert Training Classes

There are three simple steps to convert your traditional training classes to the live online classroom<sup>2</sup>:

1. Return to the Learning Objectives
2. Select the best format for each
3. Design appropriate activities

<sup>2</sup> A version of these three steps were briefly mentioned in my book, *Virtual Training Basics*, published by ASTD Press in 2010. This white paper expands upon them in much greater detail.

## Step 1: Return to the Learning Objectives

The first conversion step is to look at the in-person class learning objectives. What do learners need to know or do at the end of the session? What skills should they have? What changed behavior should there be? What do they need to start doing? Or stop doing?

By going back to the learning objectives, you have a sense of what needs to be done in the virtual session. The learning objectives reveal your end goal, your end target, and what you want your learners to accomplish. The learning objectives tell you what's important and will guide you in the conversion process.

What to do if your class doesn't have learning objectives? Or it has weak learning objectives, ones that begin with 'know' or 'understand'? Then return to an instructional design model, such as ADDIE, to analyze and determine what your learners need to know or do as a result of the training.

In fact, it's a good idea to go back and revisit the learning objectives of your traditional training class anyway. Even if you just quickly review and check to see that they are still valid, you may uncover more significant challenges that can be addressed before converting to the live online format.

Keep in mind that learning objectives are not the same as an agenda or what you want to cover. Instead, they are a reflection of what the learner needs to know or do afterward. Learning objectives are the foundation of your course; they are essential to each and every training program.

As you examine each learning objective, you decide which ones belong in the virtual class versus which ones might better translate to pre- or post- class activities.

## Effective learning objectives

The best learning objectives are ones that specifically tie to what learners need to know or do on the job.

According to Julie Dirksen's fantastic book, *Design for How People Learn*, well-written learning objectives should indicate "something the learner would actually do in the real world" and something you can "tell when they've done it."

Even when knowledge is the expected outcome, there is usually some way that learners need to act upon that knowledge.

Therefore, expected outcomes in your learning objectives should be stated with action verbs. One sign of a weak learning objective is the use of "know" or "understand" as the verb, because neither of those actions can be measured.

To illustrate, consider these examples:

*"At the end of this training session, a participant will know three techniques for responding to an upset customer."*

Or

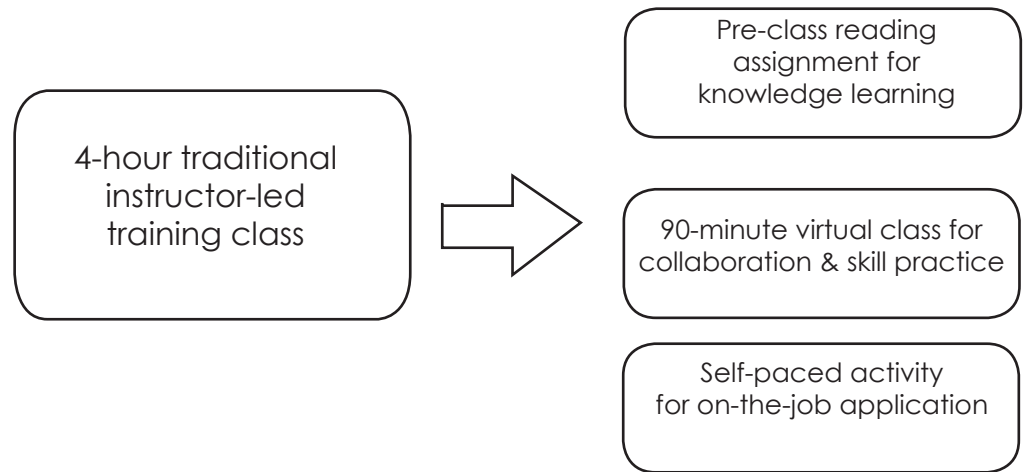
*"At the end of this training session, a participant will be able to:*

- *Recognize three techniques for responding to upset customers.*
- *Select an appropriate technique based upon an upset customer's situation.*
- *Use the appropriate technique to respond to an upset customer."*

Notice how the second example is much richer, ties to what the learner would need to do on the job, and enables you to plan out in more detail what the training program needs to cover.



When moving to the online classroom, it's common to take a traditional training class, and convert to a blended design. The knowledge-only pieces become asynchronous activities while the rest of the class translates into the synchronous class. For example:



This is one of the greatest benefits of virtual training--its flexibility, the ability to mix and match, to chunk and break down components of your in-person instructor led training into virtual instructor-led training.

You can think of it like a child's building blocks that can be pulled apart and put together in many different ways. You can chunk the class into topics, or sections, and then build it back together in ways that make the most sense to your participants and their learning needs. When done well, it's an art form.

## Step 2: Select the Best Format for Each Learning Objective

Once the learning objectives are set, the next step is to select the best format for each one.

There are three main factors to consider when choosing the “best” or the most appropriate format:

1. Learning Objectives
2. Technology Capabilities
3. Participant Backgrounds

**First** and foremost, use the learning objectives we discussed in step 1 as your basis for determining the best format. The learning objectives will tell you which topics belong in the virtual session, and which topics can be moved to a pre-class or post-class assignment. In other words, the learning objectives guide the foundation of the virtual class design.

When considering the learning objectives, ask yourself several questions such as, ‘how will you know they know?’ Is it observation? Do you need to see them practice a skill? Or, can you simply assess them through a knowledge check?

Each learning objective should be looked at for the following items:

- Is it a knowledge objective? If so, then this topic may be something you could put into a pre-session reading assignment.
- Would participants benefit from being together to learn it? If so, then this topic may be best addressed during the live online session.

Asking these questions will help drive your virtual training design decisions. For example, if participants can read a document and then take a written test to prove they can recall its content, then it may be sufficient to do a pre-session reading assignment for that objective. But if you need to hear them practice that particular skill, then this objective would likely transfer into the live online class.

When considering whether or not participants need to be together, think about interpersonal skills such

as communication or negotiation that need to be practiced with someone else. Or, you might have a topic where it would benefit learners to have synchronous, live discussions. In those cases, it makes sense to keep that topic in the virtual class.

**Second**, consider the technology capabilities within your organization and of your participants. Some of your virtual training design will be driven by these technology capabilities (or the limitations of them).

For example, if you want participants to watch a demonstration video clip but their computers don't have sound cards, then you might need to determine another way, such as still screen shots, to show the demonstration.

Or, if you want participants to practice a skill in small groups, and your organization's web conferencing platform does not support in-session groups, then you could design the training so that small groups would meet on their own after a virtual class, and then report back to the large group the next time.

To ensure your technology capabilities match your training needs, you should partner closely with your organization's IT department to select and implement the appropriate technology.

**Third**, think about the participants who will be in your sessions, and design with them in mind. For example, do participants have limited time available during the day to attend training? That restriction may influence the length of your sessions. You may realize it's better to hold three 90-minute sessions on the same day, with plenty of break time in-between. Or you may determine that it would be better for your participants to have five, 45-minute sessions spread out over several weeks.

Perhaps your participants use English as their second language? If so, then you might need to allow for extra reading and typing time during a session. Or, you might need to include a glossary of terms along with the participant materials, allowing global

participants time to look up unfamiliar words prior to class.

Once you consider these three factors, you can select the appropriate format for each objective and develop the foundation and structure of your virtual training program.

### Step 3: Design appropriate activities

Once you have determined which topics to cover within the virtual training session, the next step is to select and sequence appropriate activities that lead to accomplishment of the learning objectives.

The process of selecting activities is very similar to designing a traditional training class. What's different are the tools available to you in the technical platform: chat, polling, file transfers, annotating, and so on.

Some activities in a traditional training class easily translate into the live online environment. For example, a classroom-paired discussion activity could become an online-paired chat activity. Or a classroom competition between teams to answer questions could become an online competition using poll questions. And a 'live' demonstration could become a virtual demonstration through screen sharing capabilities.

There are two things to factor in when designing activities for your virtual class:

1. Plan to engage participants at least every 3 minutes. It's important to keep their attention on-screen, and away from the multitude of distractions in the environment around them.
2. Ensure that everything in the class leads toward the learning outcomes. It's important to use only relevant exercises and activities throughout the session.

**Important Note:** It's not just about keeping participants busy, it's about engaging them in their own learning.

Be resourceful when designing activities for the live online classroom. Your use of the technology tools is only limited by your imagination and creativity. For example, if you usually toss a foam ball from one participant to another in the in-person classroom, think about how that could be done in the virtual classroom. You might select the first person by typing their name in the chat window, and then ask them to select the next person, and so on, until everyone has been chosen.

Think about ways participants can use all of the online tools available to them. If you use handouts, have participants 'raise their hand' when finished with a worksheet exercise. When asking questions, direct participants to respond via chat. When surveying the group, create challenging poll questions to check for knowledge or to get participants thinking.

In a recent online survey compiled by Roger Courville of 1080 Group, attendees rated *multi-select polling* as the most engaging activity in a virtual session. Single-select polling followed close behind. Therefore, your design will be more engaging if you involve participants in the content by allowing them to interactively choose multiple or individual answers.

Pay special attention to the opening moments of your virtual session. Within the first five minutes, participants will decide if they will stay engaged or if they will turn their attention to other things. Therefore, plan a meaningful engaging activity within the first few moments of class. Not only will this get your class off on the right foot, it will set the tone for an interactive session.

In addition, remember to think about timing. For example, a traditional class might call for participants to watch a software demonstration, answer questions about what they saw, and then try it on their own. This

exercise might take 45 minutes. Yet in the virtual classroom, the questions might be converted to polling which is often faster online.

One common question is about converting lengthy, in-person classes into virtual ones: What should you do if you start with a two-week orientation program? Or a six-week in-depth technical series?

In both cases, you would follow the same process: return to the learning objectives, select the best format for each, and then design appropriate activities for the live online sessions. You will likely break the training class into many smaller chunks.

The two-week orientation may become 10 live online sessions with assignments in-between. The six-week technical series may become a shorter, in-person class, with follow-up on virtual sessions and on-the-job coaching. Again, your possibilities are endless, provided you engage participants in their own learning using all available tools.

Finally, remember to apply good design principles when sequencing activities in your virtual classes. Create a pattern, such as *introduce it, practice it, and apply it*, that's repeated throughout the session. Use a variety of interactive exercises and creatively use the technology tools available to keep participants interested. By following a logical order in your activity sequence, and engaging them frequently, you will help participants learn.

## In Summary

There are three simple steps to convert your traditional training classes to the live online classroom:

1. Return to the learning objectives
2. Select the best format for each
3. Design appropriate activities

Online training is an effective way to reach more people in an engaging learning environment. By following these steps, and avoiding the common conversion mistakes, you will be on your way to achieving success with your virtual training classes.

## Suggested Reading

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## About Cindy Huggett, CPLP

Cindy is the author of *Virtual Training Basics*, and coauthor of two ASTD *Infolines*, "Simple, Effective Online Learning" and "Designing for the Virtual Classroom." She has taught hundreds of synchronous, online classes for a variety of audiences.

Her favorite passion is to help trainers deliver effective and engaging live online classes. She also assists clients on their transition to blended solutions and conversion to virtual training.



Cindy served on the national ASTD Board of Directors in 2009-2010, and was one of the first to earn the Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP) designation.

You can find Cindy sharing training tips via twitter at @cindyhugg, or contact her via her website: **cindyhuggett.com**.

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