

# The Tagoras Collection



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## Tips for Effective Online and “Hybrid” Education

written by Jeff Cobb



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To increase the effectiveness of your Webinars, Webcasts, and hybrid learning experiences (learning events delivered simultaneously to a classroom and an online audience), you can try the following guidelines for development and delivery.

## Rules of Engagement—Online and Off

Most of the principles that apply to high-quality online learning are the same ones that apply in the classroom. Adult students tend to get the most out learning experiences when the following conditions are met:

- **Why** they need to learn something is obvious.
- **What** they will learn is immediately relevant to them.
- **How** to apply the learning to specific tasks or problems is clear.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to knowing that effective instruction needs to address these why, what, and how questions, research in recent years has revealed a great deal about how the brain functions.

- We don't pay attention to boring things (at least not for very long).
- Repetition—both in the short term and over time—is essential to remembering.
- Instruction that stimulates multiple senses—but especially vision—is more effective.
- We are hard-wired to explore, test, and experiment as a preferred way of learning.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These points are adapted from Malcolm Knowles's *The Adult Learner*, the foundational text in the field of adult education.

<sup>2</sup> These points are adapted from John Medina's *Brain Rules*.

## Delivering Engaging Learning Online

Drawing on the principles above, here are five tips for ensuring that your Webinar, Webcast, or hybrid presentation is as engaging as possible for your students:

1. **State your objectives; share your game plan.**

While learning objectives are often included as part of a course description, they are less often used well within the context of the course itself. Presenting a slide that states the learning objectives and also going over the objectives verbally goes a long way toward addressing the why, what, and how questions listed above. It also helps map out a general plan for the session. Make it clear at the beginning how you are going to guide students towards achieving the objectives, and be sure to alert them frequently to where you are in the process as you proceed with your presentation.

2. **Break the learning into 10-minute segments.**

One of the habits nearly all of us have when discussing things we know a lot about is to provide too much information too fast. At the same time, research shows that the average human brain needs a brief breather about every 10 minutes when processing new information; otherwise, we begin to check out. When presenting online, it is especially important to be aware of this tension between information and attention. You can't see the learners, so it is difficult to know when or how to adjust your presentation to keep their attention.

To address this challenge, try as much as possible to divide your presentation into key concepts that can be conveyed in 10-minute

segments. At the end of each segment, pause and provide some material that helps to shift gears into the next segment. This may be as simple as a recap of the previous segment or highlights of the segment to come. This is also a great point at which to share case studies and stories or to include some interactivity (see the next point). In general, these transitions do not need to be complex or involve a lot of work on your part—mainly they need signal enough of a shift in your content to re-stimulate learners' attention.

### **3. Provide regular meaningful interactivity.**

A useful approach to maintaining attention while also giving learners the opportunity to test their knowledge, try out particular concepts, or apply their learning is to provide opportunities for interactivity throughout your presentation. For example, many Webinar and Webcast platforms provide capabilities for posting polls to which learners can respond. They also often provide the ability for users to submit questions. Use these at relevant times in your presentation to gather and share input from the audience.

For presentations in which you have both a classroom and a Webcast or Webinar audience, tools like polling and questions can create a bridge. A poll of the online audience, for example, can be shared with attendees in the classroom. In general, it is important to acknowledge the online audience with some regularity during a presentation that includes both

classroom and online attendees. This may even include activities specific to the online audience. For example, while having the classroom attendees engage in some brief group work, ask the online audience to consider a particular problem and submit solutions in text.

### **4. Use relevant visuals to support learning.**

We learn best when instruction is aimed at more than one of our senses, but research suggests that seeing is particularly powerful. Using pictures, charts, and other graphics to complement your words can be very effective—so long as one important rule is observed. The visuals must help the student understand the material you are presenting. Visuals that are purely decorative or humorous do not contribute to learning and can even have the opposite effect by being distracting. This doesn't mean that you can't include the occasional humorous cartoon in your slides; just don't do it too frequently or at times where it might distract from an important point.

### **5. Provide handouts that support recall and application.**

Whenever possible, provide students with tools that will help them remember the key points of your presentation and apply them. Ideally, these should be very brief and tightly tied to your learning objectives. Tip sheets, checklists, and templates for performing tasks are examples of the types of materials you might provide. ■

## About the Author

A managing director at Tagoras, Jeff has nearly two decades of experience in the world of marketing, education, and technology. He was cofounder and CEO of Isoph, a leading provider of e-learning technologies and services to associations. He has also served as senior vice president of business development for Quisic, an e-learning partner to top-tier business schools and fortune 500 companies, and as vice president of business development for LearnSomething.

Jeff is an award-winning teacher, author of the highly popular *Learning 2.0 for Associations*, and co-author of *Shift Ed: A Call to Action for Transforming K-12 Education* ([www.shiftedtransformation.com](http://www.shiftedtransformation.com)), published by Corwin. His next book, *Leading the Learning Revolution*, will be published by AMACOM in the summer of 2012. He has served on ASAE's Professional Development Section Council, as well as on the research committee of the eLearning Guild and the editorial board of Innovate, a leading resource on technology and education.

Jeff speaks frequently about the impact of new technologies on business, education, and society in general. More information about his speaking is available on his personal Web site at [www.jeffthomascobb.com](http://www.jeffthomascobb.com).

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