HOW TO ASSESS & AUDIT YOUR ELEARNING/ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES

ETHAN HATHAWAY

GUIDE

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Why You Need to Audit Your eLearning Before Adding Anymore Content/Courses

A few years ago, we started producing online training courses. In the beginning, few enterprises wanted to leverage online training – mostly favouring in-person training events.

In-person training is valuable but so can online learning...

...if done right.

With a global pandemic blazing through multiple industries and countries, we've all quickly pivoted to the digital world...

...including accepting online learning.

However, what triggered me to produce this course was seeing how many companies were not seeing the effectiveness of the digital/online learning medium.

And after reviewing a lot of eLearning content they were using, I'm not surprised.

So, this course was borne to help you audit and assess your own eLearning content to help you select and produce more effective eLearning content for you and your colleagues.

The Ethan Hathaway Learning Manifesto

Below is a copy of our "Learning Manifesto" – our philosophy and approach to learning:

Online learning.

e-Learning.

Virtual training.

EduTech.

Whatever you want to call it.

Right now, schools, higher education institutions, corporate learning & training are all scrambling to move to online learning formats.

We've been doing it for years and during that time, we've tweaked and optimized the online learning format.

I see many training/course providers frantically switching over and slapping a live, in-person course onto a Zoom call.

That simply doesn't work. That method is broken. It's not meant to impart knowledge, it's meant to check off an item on a to-do list.

Ask any attendee on such a marathon Zoom "class" to recall what they "learned".

You'll mostly be met with silence.

Why?

The human brain is not built to learn that way.

These are the most common mistakes I'm seeing:

Half-Day or Full-Day Zoom Classes

As mentioned, I see many Instructors & providers merely slapping their live, in-person training onto a full-day Zoom call.

The human brain **cannot** focus for such a long time (and that's assuming they're highly interested in that topic).

Our **EH Learning Method branded** online courses are **designed to fit within the optimal attention span of the human brain**.

Free Content Everywhere

The rise in MOOCS like Coursera and edX offering "free" courses (free to consume the content **but you pay a full fee for the certificate**) are **notorious for their microscopic completion rates**. (Look at their website and notice how all the focus is on *enrollment* numbers, but **not course completions**).

The rise in "free" is detrimental to our learning.

Why?

You no longer know what is true, what is right, what makes sense, what is a common misconception and more.

How do you know you're learning the **RIGHT** thing about a topic?

It's a battle between overwhelming information (free) versus knowledge (premium).

That's where a paid course shows value.

We use a painstaking process to filter and select the **right instructors**.

Imagine climbing Mt. Everest, there are free guides (or Sherpas) offering their services to you.

Would you trust a Sherpa that is offering to guide you for free? How would you know you'll reach the summit or end up falling off a cliff?

Our carefully selected Instructor's job is to show you how all the information fits together. So, you reach the summit safely.

Completion Isn't Everything Either…

While MOOC's only yield tiny course completion rates, *course completion rate is only a small fraction* of what is important when it comes to training & learning (which is what many EduTech startups will make you believe)…

…it's about whether the **student retains, knows how to apply the learned skills and achieve the desired outcomes**.

Which sales person would you prefer to keep?

1. **Sales person A**, took your online on-boarding/training course through a shiny, new EduTech learning platform, passed a multiple-choice test **OR**
2. **Sales person B**, took your learning optimized on-boarding/training course, and actually sold something

Online But Not Digital…

Whaaaat??? What does this mean?

Our ever-increasing reliance on our digital devices is actually **hurting us in terms of learning**.

As Jim Kwik, famously known as the Brain Coach, writes,

> *"The less we use our brains, the less we remember and retain."*

Your brain is a muscle – either use it or lose it definitely applies here.

While we use online/digital channels to **deliver** materials to you, we **suggest analog methods** to consume the learning materials.

For Serious Learners Only

As you can see, there are many nuances and methods to optimize your learning.

Some people only want the piece of paper at the end of a course to check that box off, and there are **the serious learners** who understand that learning, retaining that learning and knowing how to apply that learning in your life and job are the desired outcomes.

Over to you...

...which type of learner are you?

The Model for the Future of Learning

A few years ago, as I was researching the viability of online learning, I came across this [TED talk by Salman Khan](#).

If you haven't heard of Salman Khan, he is the founder of Khan Academy. A learning portal with a vast library of free video lessons – covering mostly K-Grade 12 topics.

Khan's vision of how education and learning, making use of digital learning assets & content to better educate our kids and people in general really resonated with me.

It just made sense.

So, at Ethan Hathaway, we've adopted Khan's vision and model of leveraging online content with our carefully selected expert instructors.

In a nutshell, this new model of learning can be summarized:

- Instead of having Instructors waste valuable time presenting lectures in person, lectures are delivered via recorded video

- Benefits to the student or learner is that they can review the lecture as many times as they need to understand the concepts. They can pause and rewind to parts they need to review until they understand. For learners who have already understood the lesson, they don't have to sit through additional explanations as they normally would in a traditional classroom setting.
- The benefit to instructors is that they can spend more customized time helping individual students work on areas they need help with. The time previously used to deliver a lecture is now replaced by the video lecture and this freed up time may be used to help students one-on-one.

You can watch Salman Khan's TED talk below:

https://www.khanacademy.org/college-careers-more/talks-and-interviews/talks-and-interviews-unit/conversations-with-sal/v/salman-khan-talk-at-ted-2011-from-ted-com

Why Training Can't Solve This ONE Mistake…

Growing up, I was a Star Trek: The Next Generation fan. One of the spin-off Star Trek TV shows back then was Star Trek: Voyager.

One of the main characters on the Voyager series was named Chakotay, a character with Native American influences.

The producers of the show wanted to ensure they did the character justice by hiring a Native American consultant.

Unfortunately, the "consultant" they hired was a fraud and gave advice that was completely made up and racist. [Source: Wikipedia]

Over the many years working with clients and helping develop staff skills, what we realized was, no amount of training could make up for a bad hire.

So, the ONE mistake companies make is thinking training can overcome a bad hire.

It all starts with knowing how and who you should hire for the job first.

The training should be able to stand on its own and not expected to perform miracles or a lack of skills and characteristics that cannot be trained (e.g.)

Key Takeaway

Review and audit your recruitment process and requirements as this can be the **ROOT cause** of many staff issues that training cannot overcome or resolve.

Putting the Cart In Front of the Horse
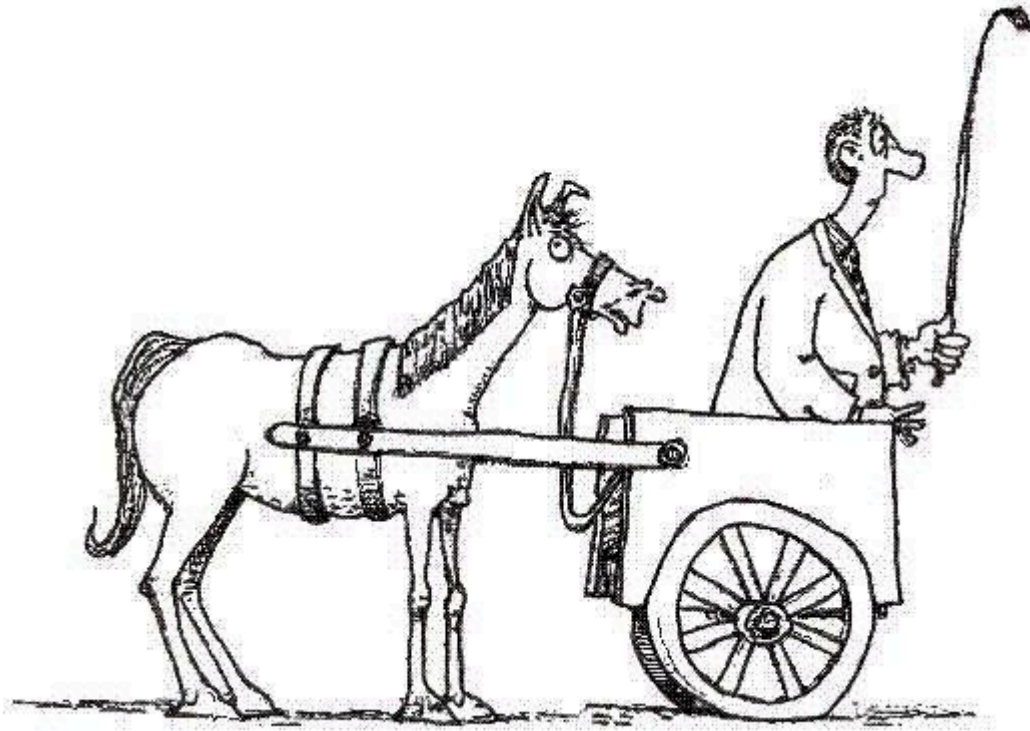
Imagine this conversation between a client who wants to build their dream house and the architect:

Client: I would like you to design and build my dream house. Can you do it? Please give me a quote.

Architect: Great! I need to ask you a few questions first before I can answer you and give you a quote.

Client: Can you just give me a ballpark figure?

Architect: I would love to give you a quotation and tell you can I do the job, but I'll need to understand in more detail what you'd like regarding your dream home.

For example:

How large a home do you want to build?

How many rooms?

What kind of material do you wish to use for your floors?

What kind of material do you want for your countertops?

What kind of function do you want to get out of your home? (e.g. do you need a home office? a movie room?)

So, you can see, answers to these questions will affect the cost and quotation and also whether there's any areas, I'm not equipped to do and may need to get specialist help to complete your dream home.

*****

The above architect dream home example, is very common.

Over the years, we see this scenario 9 times out of 10.

A business will try to select a solution provider BEFORE understanding what the TRUE needs are.

This is one of the biggest reasons for a client to be unhappy with a solution provider they've selected (and the blame falls partially on the solution provider who blindly says "Yes" to any client who approaches them).

All too often, I've seen prospective clients select the provider and then try to figure out what they're needs are (putting the cart before the horse) and this never works or ends well.

Key Takeaway

So, to avoid a lot of disappointment, figure out your needs first (it wouldn't be surprising to get help with a needs assessment too).

Are You Making This Learning Performance Measurement Mistake?

I once had a conversation with a former senior banker from a well-known U.S. bank about training:

Former senior banker: *"I remember we were required to complete some kind of online compliance-related training. I didn't really pay attention, just followed what my colleagues answered so I could just say I completed the course. Didn't take any time to read/pay attention to the content. We all just wanted to 'check that off our list'".*

I remember this conversation so vividly because it was a few years after the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, and I thought to myself *"Have we NOT learned anything from the Financial Crisis?"*

Not only that, but is this how some of the "training" was viewed by staff? Just something to check off a list?

It clearly demonstrated to me, that the common metric to measure **"learning progress"** was flawed.

Someone **"*completing*"** a course wasn't demonstrating whether **"*learned*"** anything or not. It demonstrated that measuring "course completion rates" was **not** an accurate metric to tell you whether people were learning skills.

For example, imagine two students going through "Sales Training":

Both students (student A and B) are shown to have completed the course.

Student A, quickly went through the content so he could mark the lesson and course as completed as quickly as possible. Student A, basically reverts back to his normal habits and does not implement any new learning.

Student B, has carefully gone through the exact same course content but has taken notes and made a determination to implement some of the key tips from the course.

Student B quickly outsells Student A.

If we base the learning progress on "course completion rate", both Student A and B look to have progressed the same.

But the real outcome is that Student B has demonstrated tangible outcomes from consuming the learning content vs Student A who has not shown any change in actual job performance while seemingly having taken the same course.

Key Takeaway

Reconsider your learning metrics. Does measuring based upon "course completion" make sense for what you want to achieve?

Figure out what are the REAL key performance indicators (KPI's) you want to be tracking for your students/learners.

Effective Learning Is About This, Not That

Think back to the last training (if any) you attended.

Do you remember if you implemented ANY of the lessons you learned?

Typically, a one-off training or course doesn't always yield performance results.

Why?

It's not that the training or the course content is bad, it's that the nature of "learning", a one-off course can't achieve the best results because learning is about developing **new habits**.

How do we build habits?

Through **on-going practice**.

The action of on-going practice is what builds and solidifies new neural pathways in the human brain from new learning.

Key Takeaway

Ask: "How you can incorporate practice in order build new learning into habits within your online learning content."

How to Choose the RIGHT Content Format for the Right Learning Outcome
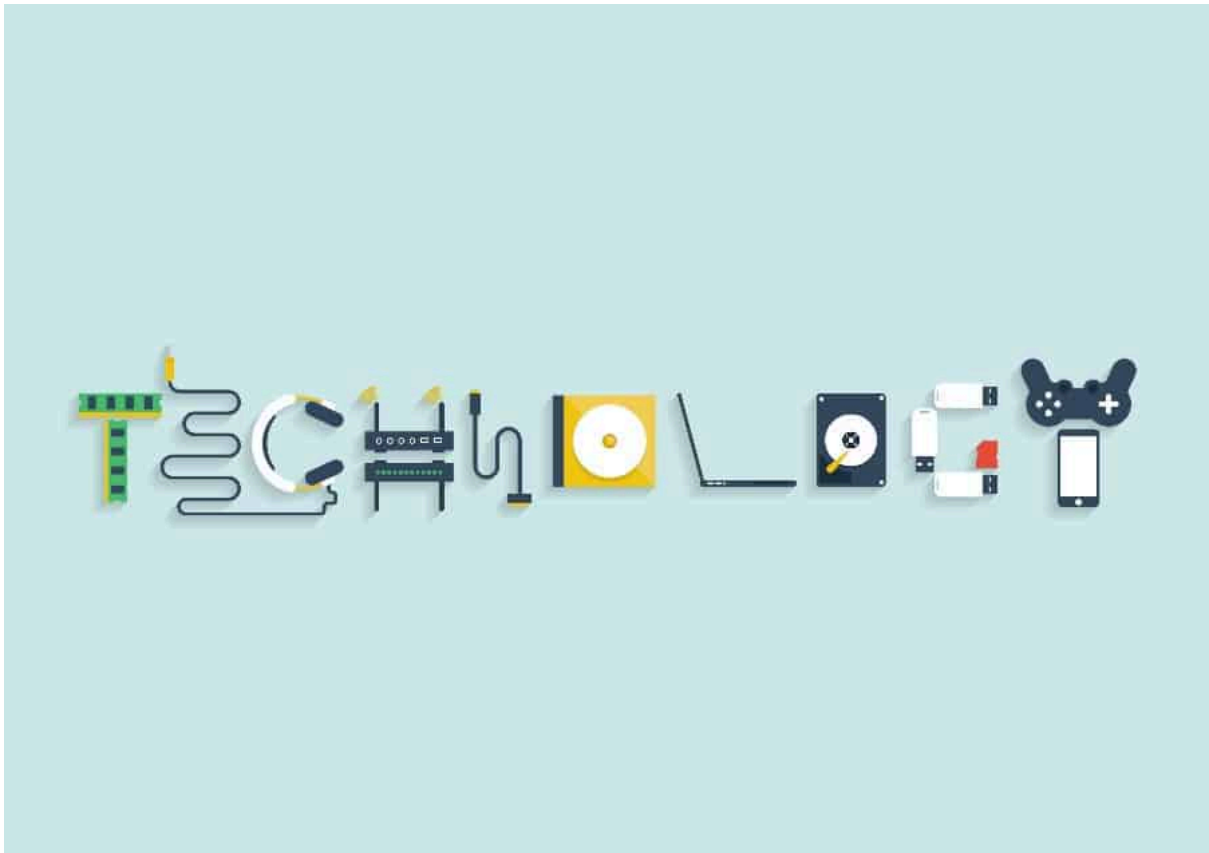
We often equate online learning with online videos.

But online video is NOT always the ideal format for delivering learning content.

Why?

Think about the last time you watched an online video – most likely it was a Youtube video – did you pay close attention to the video or did you just let it play and do something else?

Video and Audio is considered a "passive" media. Meaning a learner "watching" a video doesn't necessarily use their full attention and retain what is being taught.

So, what content format is conducive to "active" learning?

You may have guessed already, it's text (reading).

But when is it better to use video?

A simple way of looking at it is, if what is being taught is best taught through a demonstration (e.g. how to setup software), a video is a great way (and quicker) to get the teaching across.

There are no hard/fast rules to this though due to the issue of learning modalities.

Some people prefer and learn better through reading (long form text). Some may prefer & respond better to a video presentation or audio.

Key Takeaway

The main takeaway is to determine what your learning objective is.

If you want the learner to have an understanding of a concept – it might be better to have it mainly in text (with some visuals).

Whereas, something that is best "shown" to the learner – a video demonstration is more ideal.

Why Learners Are Not Consuming Your Learning Content

Watch this iconic scene from the movie, Ferris Bueller's Day Off:

https://youtu.be/yUjhSBjxuXA?si=I3t6BqVT8hUMfNcQ

What is it that hits you about the students in this class and the teacher's delivery?

If you answered: the students were bored out of their minds and the teacher's delivery was boring beyond belief, you have guessed correctly.

Unfortunately, the sad reality is much of what's out there in eLearning content falls into this category (being boring). That's the cardinal sin of teaching, being boring.

But that's not all, there's a second reason learners aren't consuming your eLearning content...

...have a look at the block of text below:

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What's your first impression when you see a block of text to read like this?

Most likely, you're thinking: "That looks like a LOT of work to read."

Or how about a video lesson that shows 1 hour 25 minutes as the duration?

Feels like it's a lot of work and going to be tedious to consume.

The Two Reasons Learners Aren't Consuming Your Content Are:

1. Content and delivery is boring
2. Content is a lot of work to consume and digest

Key Takeaways

Review your eLearning content and assess whether the content can hold a student's attention and interest.

Is your eLearning content too much "work" to consume? How can you make it easier to consume?

Why Your Tests Might Not Be Working

Referring back to the story I shared about the former senior-level banker who would just copy colleague's answers in order to "complete" a required training demonstrates the problem of merely tracking test scores or learning for the sake of passing a test.

This issues raises a couple of issues:

1. The tests aren't setup properly to mitigate against cheating
2. Test scores are NOT an accurate indication of learning (merely memorization and/or ability to falsify results)

Don't get me wrong, there's a place for tests. Sometimes, it's the only feasible way to get some kind of indication of learning progress.

It's why we implement in the test we use, we incorporate settings that discourage the ability to easily cheat on a test, such as (but not limited to):

- Randomizing the questions (e.g. question 1 for student A may be different from student B)
- Randomizing answers (e.g. multiple-choice answers for student A may be in a different order than student B)
- Setting a time limit once a test is started (e.g. reduces the time a student may try to get external help)
- Incorporating outcome-based projects, assignments and demonstrations in addition to tests

Key Takeaways

Review your current tests to assess whether it is easy to cheat on the tests and whether the test are truly a good indicator of learning achievements.

Less is More

Once my kid is in bed, my wife and I are able to sit down and relax and check out what's on Netflix.

We've already binged on our favourite shows and now we're scrolling for something interesting to watch.

With the copious amount of selections available, nothing just seems to stand out.

We keep scrolling.
Next thing I know, twenty minutes have passed!

I just spent twenty minutes trying to settle on something to watch but haven't watched anything in those twenty minutes!

Have you ever had that happen?

That's the dilemma with a "buffet" of choices presented in front of you. There's so much to choose from, you end up choosing nothing.

It's analysis paralysis.

So, just like many online learning providers, many try to sell you on the "vast" library of content they have.

Take for example, Coursera or edX, I've enrolled in many courses they offered.

Guess how many courses I've completed?

Zero.

Not one.

What's worse?

There's not one course where I've gotten past the first lesson.

It's why they try to sell you on the absolute number of enrollments, but they don't tell you about the completion rates (which happen to be an [abysmal 3.13%](https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/01/16/study-offers-data-show-moocs-didnt-achieve-their-goals) - source: https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/article/2019/01/16/study-offers-data-show-moocs-didnt-achieve-their-goals).

I did mention in an earlier lesson, that course completion rates are NOT the best performance metric to track regarding eLearning. That still holds true, but when completion rates are so low, it means your learners are not even consuming any of the learning content (let alone implementing of the learnings).

The problem with the current era of information and the Internet:

We're drowning in an ocean of information and choice.

It's why one of our philosophies is we don't try to bombard you with an endless amount of "courses" but we believe in carefully curating and selecting the best and most useful types of courses.

It's why one of the lessons I learned from the wonderful book, [Essentialism by Greg McKeown](#): Less but Better.

Key Takeaway

Carefully curate and select the RIGHT type of eLearning content. Don't focus purely on volume of content available.

A Question to Consider

In the iconic movie, Top Gun, about the US Navy's best Navy pilots, the lead Instructor for the Top Gun, code-name, Viper (played by Tom Skerritt), is welcoming the latest new recruits selected to attend the Top Gun training:

Viper: "*In case some of you are wondering who the best is, they are up here on this plaque.*" [Viper turns to Tom Cruise's character, Maverick]

Do you think your name will be on that plaque?"

Maverick: "Yes, sir."

Viper: "*That's pretty arrogant, considering the company you're in.*"

Maverick: [In an emphatic and an air of "Yes, I know."] "Yes, sir."

Viper: "*I like that in a pilot.*"

This scene reminds of what I see quite often in how a company selects online training providers, often the pre-conceived limitation is that you may only limit your selection to ONE provider only.

But the question I like to ask is:

"Are you looking to select the best course for the specific skills & topic you're looking for? Or are you looking for the provider with the most bells and whistles (fancy features you may not need)?"

For example, if you want to provide online training to your marketing staff, do you want to source the best kind of digital marketing course or are you satisfied with whatever course that's included in your primary course provider (whether it is taught properly or produced by any so-called marketing expert)?

A course provider that specializes or has the best course in marketing may NOT offer the best course in business finance for example.

Key Takeaway

Consider the above question to see if you're setting invisible limits on how you're selecting and implementing online learning within your company.

What's Next?

I hope you've found this course showing our process for assessing and auditing eLearning content to be helpful.

In general, it's a great start to assessing and reviewing your own eLearning content. But I know there are many nuances and special circumstances that may require an experienced touch.

If you need help in assessing and knowing how to optimize your eLearning content, you might consider our eLearning Audit service.

Just complete the application form below to learn more: https://www.ethanhathaway.com/members/elearning-audit-application/

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