



Blended Learning: The Benefits of Online + Face-to-Face Training

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Blended learning – online components plus face-to-face training – combines independent and collaborative learning experiences that can contribute significantly to student satisfaction and success. Blended learning has been called ‘learner-centric’ because it caters to such a wide variety of student needs and demands. In fact, it is becoming the preferred style of training in the corporate world, offering a streamlined training process that can be delivered to a large number of learners.

What is blended learning?

Blended learning is any form of training program that combines classroom learning with other types of learning. In the home performance and weatherization industry, many trainers already use a form of blended learning, combining classroom time with field work for diagnostics testing. In the wider training industry, ‘blended learning’ typically refers to a program that combines the support of classroom learning with the flexibility of e-learning. With this definition, blended learning for a home performance and weatherization program could start with a preparatory self-directed online course, then combine classroom time, field visits, a webinar and specific training videos. The online aspects of a blended learning program include a learning platform that allows both the student and the instructor to track progress, manage assessments and keep up-to-date on resources, assignments, scheduling and events.

Types of e-learning

Self-directed Courses

Virtual Classrooms

Audio Conferencing

Chat Rooms

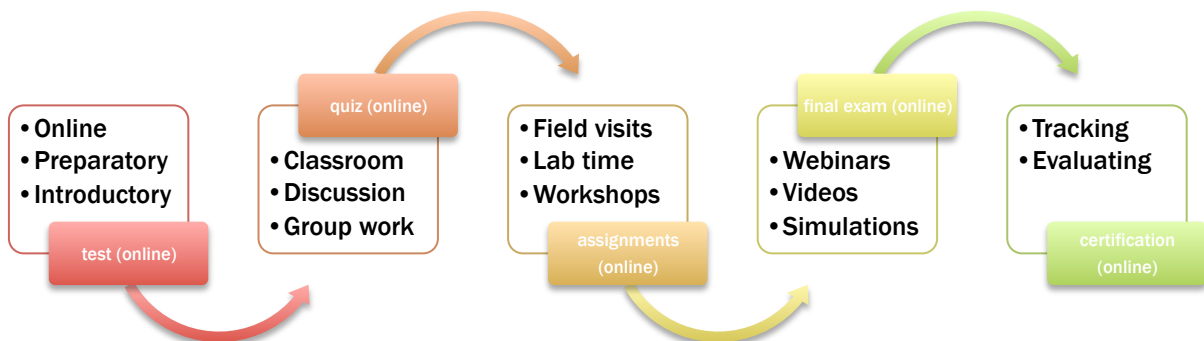
Discussion Forums

Instant Messaging

Podcasts

Vodcasts

Online Games



Why choose blended learning?

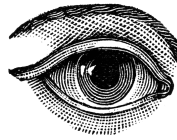
There are different learning styles, and each person has a mix of learning styles but usually has one that is 'preferred', or dominant. Learning styles are not related to intelligence, mental ability or actual learning performance, rather, they are the predictable and common ways in which a person gathers and processes data from their environment.

In a very simplified way, we can group preferred learning styles into three categories:



Auditory

- **Learns best by hearing information in lectures, discussions, podcasts**



Visual

- **Learns best by reading books and print-based media, powerpoints, diagrams**



Tactile

- **Learns best by doing, hands-on training with equipment, labs, and participatory classes**

Often, the preferred learning style of people in construction is tactile – they learn by doing – yet traditional classroom training is often delivered using primarily auditory and visual methods. As industry trainers know, a blended approach, with classroom as well as lab or field time, is likely to have better results than face-to-face training alone.

Online training adds another dimension to the blended learning experience: having 'free-range' access to content and instruction gives the student the opportunity to drive their own learning experience. Studies have shown that self-paced learning can increase knowledge retention. The online content of a blended learning program allows the student to learn or review key concepts at their own pace, on their own schedule, while face-to-face sessions focus on more in-depth discussion and demonstration of the practical application of concepts.

A 2009 report on a long-term study carried out by the US Department of Education, [Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning](#), looked at the effectiveness of blended and online learning compared to face-to-face instruction. Blended learning was found to be more effective than face-to-face training, and "(E)ven when used by itself, online learning appears to offer a modest advantage over conventional classroom instruction."

What are the Benefits of Blended Learning?

√ Time Saving

From the trainer's perspective, the online component of a blended learning program gives the instructor real-time feedback so learner performance and needs can be quickly assessed. A learning management system (LMS) allows the trainer to automatically track learners' progress through courses and assignments, and the results of tests, quizzes and other assessments. In addition, resource materials for the whole program can also be managed efficiently and kept up-to-date via the learning platform.

√ Cost Reduction

Minimize travel costs, classroom costs, trainer costs, lunches. The cost of delivery for e-learning is all in the production. However, there are minimal monthly or annual costs associated with a fully-functional learning platform package. Taking some tasks on in-house, and using some of the low-cost or open source tools that are available can mean that very specialized e-learning programs with relatively small audiences still make sense from a cost perspective.

√ Flexibility

Adding e-learning to a training program opens up deeper and broader learning opportunities for learners by allowing them the freedom to learn at their own pace, within the confines of their own schedules. This is very important for those who are returning to a learning environment after being in the field for several years.

√ Learner Engagement

Learning is not always best done in a group. Some people prefer a private experience when they are first introduced to a subject. It's difficult for some learners to reveal how much they don't know about a topic, and so, they often fall behind, or don't participate. There are also learners who are well-versed in topics and concepts, but don't have any paper trail showing their understanding. Uneven knowledge base is a significant problem for trainers in the home performance and weatherization industry, and trying to engage on all levels in the classroom is a challenge. E-learning components can create a better and more meaningful introduction or preparation for face-to-face training, regardless of learner experience.

Some of the most common subjects that e-learning is used for include:

Introduction/Induction

Product or service knowledge

Sales training

Compliance

Health and safety

Performance management

Leadership

Systems / process training

Marketing and communications

√ **Effective Learning**

E-learning sessions are typically shorter than classroom training sessions because the logistics of welcomes, introductions, set up and breakdown of classroom and field gear, breaks, etc. are taken out of the equation. It's estimated that an e-learning course can be 25 to 60 percent shorter than a classroom course on the same subject.

√ **Creative Learning**

E-learning is not the same as learning-by-doing, whether on the job or in a classroom setting. However, well-designed simulations can get a lot closer to reality than a lecture or presentation. There are some excellent HVAC and building envelope simulation packages available that give learners the opportunity to see what happens when they follow, or don't follow, the protocols they are learning. Goal-based simulations and scenario learning exercises require more interaction between the learner and the program and can incorporate real-world challenges.

√ **Learner Control**

E-learning gives learners more control over their training than just adjusting to individual schedules. Learners are able to work their way through the learning material at their own speed, not the instructor's speed. This can minimize the frustration felt by those who would otherwise struggle to keep up, or who become bored and lose interest. Topics can be revisited at will, and because e-learning is generally shorter than face-to-face training learner fatigue can be reduced.

√ **Consistency**

The more consistent the learning experience, the lower the risk of errors being introduced on the job. Key concepts and messages, performance testing protocols, interpretations of policies or guidelines – these can all be delivered in different ways by different instructors. Key points can be missed or mis-communicated. Core topics and points can be delivered consistently to all learners via e-learning. Well-designed assessments and questions can check for understanding, and the learner's ability to apply the learning in the field.

