Wake 'Em Up!
7 Tips for Interactive E-Learning.

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Pre-Reading Notes: Before you begin reading this article, please print the note-taking worksheet titled "First Think It, Then Ink It," on page 9. You will also need a pen/pencil because you will be writing on this worksheet as you read.

This article is formatted using the 4 Cs Accelerated Learning instructional design process. To get the most from this article, you are encouraged to participate along the way. You will learn more, and be able to apply what you learn, because of your participation.

For more information about the 4 Cs, log onto *www.Bowperson.com* and download the free article titled: "Bag It! A Quick and Remarkably Easy Instructional Design Process."

CONNECTIONS

One-Minute Fast Pass

On your note-taking worksheet, jot down the names or descriptions of a few interactive e-learning strategies you have used or have seen used.
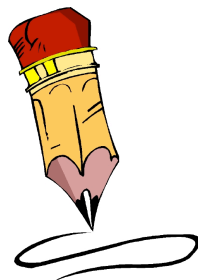
Please take 60 seconds to do the Fast Pass activity. As you continue reading, compare the strategies that you wrote down with the 7 tips in this article. Can any of your strategies be listed under any of the 7 tips?

CONCEPTS

E-learning means many things to many people. For the sake of this article, we'll define as e-learning any information that is electronically delivered. Included are: teleconferences (audio only), webinars (audio and visual), synchronous or distance learning (live, real-time, virtual classes), and asynchronous learning (computer-based courses attended by individuals at times of their own choosing).

With the definition out of the way, let's toss out two false assumptions about e-learning:

• E-learning is boring (it doesn't have to be).

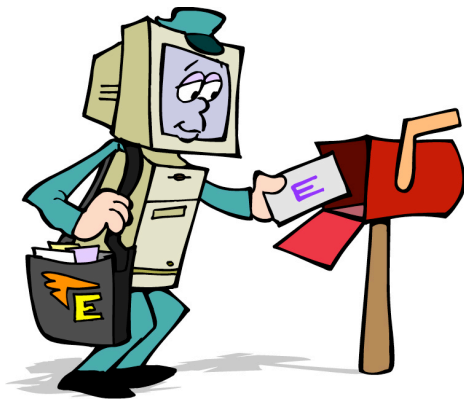• E-learning is not interactive (it should be!).

As with face-to-face training, the problems of boring and non-interactive e-learning programs lie with the design

and delivery, not with the content or the learners. Even the most complex, technical material can be made both interesting and interactive in quick, easy ways. And even the most passive learners can be invited to participate in short, interest-catching learning activities. In fact, in order for any *real* learning to take place, both interest and interactivity *have* to be part of the program. Humans don't learn well unless they are interested and involved throughout an entire learning experience.

So, how do you go about creating interesting, interactive e-learning programs? Here are six simple ways to get started:

1. Send Out Warm-Ups with Built-In Accountability.

Warm-Ups are pre-program instructions, sent via email, detailing a variety of simple, topic-related activities learners can choose from before the e-learning class begins.
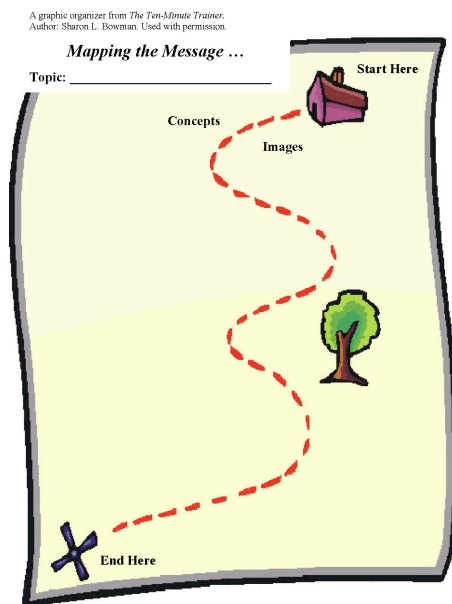
Some examples are:

- *Make a list of as many topic-related facts as you can that you already know. Be ready to state some of these facts during the class.*

- *Interview an "expert" (someone who knows more than you do about the topic), and be ready to tell the class what you learned.*

- *"Google" the training topic, or keywords related to the topic, and be ready to share what you learned from your internet search.*

- *Ask co-workers what they know or have heard about the topic and make a list of facts and opinions. Be ready to send this information via email to the other class members.*

- *Make up a short, pre-training quiz with some questions you want answered during the training. Send these questions via email to the instructor.*

Give learners choices. For example, they can choose two of the five options to do, or do all but one, or do one of the given options and then make up one of their own.

Build in accountability with each option. In other words, learners must show that they did one or more Warm-Ups. In the examples, learners must be ready to report their findings to the class, or send something to other learners or to the instructor.

During the e-learning program, begin with some of the Warm-Up reports. Or pause for a few minutes at different times during the training to have volunteers share their reports.

For an asynchronous course, learners can email their findings to their supervisor, instructor, or to another person designated in the course.

2. Create an Interesting Graphic Organizer.

Email a graphic organizer, that is, a note-taking page (pdf format works best) to the learners - one that you've created before the e-learning class begins.

The note-taking page should be visually interesting, with plenty of space for writing and doodling. It should NOT be a Powerpoint® handout with slide images and lines to write on - use these as resources only. Instead, the note-taking worksheet should have topic-related graphics, shapes, forms, and interesting places to write or doodle. See examples in the article "Nifty Notes" on the website www.Bowperson.com.

A graphic organizer from *The Ten-Minute Trainer*.
Author: Sharon L. Bowman. Used with permission.

Mapping the Message …

Topic: _____

Start Here

Concepts

Images

End Here

Send out an email reminder before the class that tells participants to print the note-taking page and have it, and a pen/pencil, ready when the class begins.

During the program, be sure to stop and direct learners to write important words, phrases, or concepts. DON'T assume

they are writing just because they have the page in front of them. Instead, say "This is profound, so write it down!" and then STOP SPEAKING to give them time to do so.

You can also direct learners to draw doodles (icons, cartoons, squiggles, shapes, or images of metaphors) representing the concepts being learned. Images help learners remember information longer than words alone.

As an alternative to an instructor-created graphic organizer, learners can create their own note-taking pages as well. Or they can write notes on various other materials: index cards, chart paper, tablets, paper bags, paper placemats, post-it notes, and the like.

For asynchronous courses, printed instructions can direct learners to do the same thing with note-taking pages, much as this article has done with you, the reader.

3. Begin with a Fast Pass.

At the beginning of an e-learning class, participants are expecting introductions, technical information, program agendas, learning objectives, and any other housekeeping details that most training starts with. Imagine their surprise when you direct them (via voice, slide, or other visual) to jot down the three most important things they learned from the Warm-Ups they chose, and be ready to report this to the class. You give them a minute or so to do this, then you begin the class with their reports. If the class is large, you might ask for only a few reports, saving the rest until later in the program.

What you are doing is creating interest and involvement with a quick opening activity called a Fast Pass. This activity connects learners to learners. It also connects learners to what they already know and what they will learn. Furthermore, it captures learners' interest since it is an unexpected way to begin a training. The novelty and immediate involvement motivate learners to pay attention. Later in the course, they will link what they already know to the new information being presented.

After this quick, opening activity, you can include introductions, technical information, agendas, and all the rest.

For teleconferences, you verbally state what you want learners to do. For distance learning, each site's participants can report to their respective site group. For asynchronous programs, the printed instructions can direct learners to write a short summary of what they learned in the Warm-Ups, and send it to you via email.

Other examples of the Fast Pass include:

- *In the chat room on the webinar screen, jot down what you want to learn from this class, or a question you want answered.*

- *On the webinar whiteboard, print a word or phrase associated with the topic.*

- *Think of three things you already know about the topic. When you are ready to tell the class what you know, press the "hand" icon to raise your hand beside your name on the screen.*

- *At your distance-learning site, brainstorm with the other participants what you already know about the topic, and write your list on a chart paper.*

One-Minute Fill-in-the-Blanks

On your note-taking worksheet, fill in the blanks for the first 3 interactive e-learning tips. Check your answers by rereading the article up to this point.
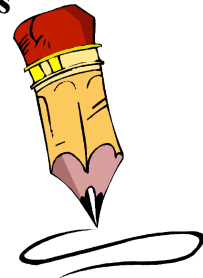
Once you have done the 60-second review activity described in the slide above, please continue reading.

4. Follow the 10-Minute Rule.

Regardless of the type of e-learning class you are facilitating, ALWAYS use the ten-minute rule, that is, break up your slides, lectures, or printed material into segments of about ten minutes in length. In between each ten-minute segment, insert a short, one-minute activity that gives learners the opportunity to review the information you just presented.

Why ten minutes? Because that is the average amount of time most people are used to listening to information being presented. Prime-time television programs run about ten minutes in length, between commercial breaks. People have become habituated to this time frame, especially in "television-saturated" cultures like the U.S., where TV viewing approaches 4 hours per day per viewer.

You don't need to simplify your content; just divide it into smaller lecture segments. Close enough is okay. Ten minutes is a guideline. Sometimes 15 - 20 minutes will work as well, but lecture longer than 20 minutes and you will definitely be losing participants' interest.

Here are a few examples of the one-minute review activities you can insert between lecture segments:

- *Think and Write - On your note-taking page, write one sentence summarizing what you just learned.*

- *Pair Share - In the chat room (or at your distance learning site) pair up with another participant and share the two most important facts from the lecture.*

- *Shout Out - As a group, we need to state 8 new things we now know about the topic.*

- *Whiteboard Writing - We'll now take one minute for everyone to quickly write a word or phrase related to the information just covered.*

5. Build in Body Breaks.

Stop reading this article now and do the one-minute Body Break described in the slide below:

One-Minute Body Break

During the next 60 seconds, stand, stretch, yawn, and take a couple of deep breaths. Walk one time around your chair or office and then sit back down.

The slide above just instructed you to stand and move. Could you instruct your e-learning participants to do the same? Of course you can! There is no rule that says they have to be sitting during the entire class. However, there IS one powerful reason for learners to stand and

move, especially during a lengthy training: *the human brain works better when the learner is standing and moving around.*

Movement makes the blood circulate better which, in turn, sends more oxygen to the brain. When training participants, even in e-learning classes, stand and stretch, they wake up their bodies *and* minds.
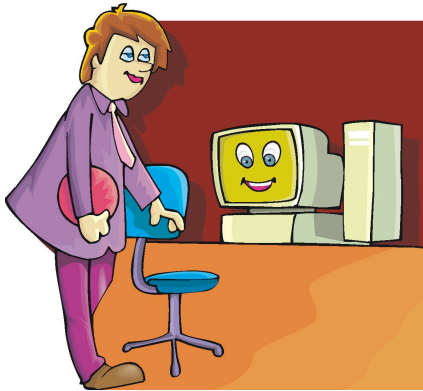
Will they do it? You have no way of knowing for sure, but they probably will. After all, you are the "teacher" and they are used to doing what teachers tell them to do. Besides that, they'll *feel* better standing and stretching after sitting for awhile. So the suggestion benefits them on many levels.

Vary the movements each time you suggest a stretch. And tell them why standing and moving helps them learn.

Some examples are:

• *Stand, Stretch, and Speak - Stand up, stretch your body, and then state a topic-related fact you have learned that you didn't know before.*

• *Mini-Walkabout - Stand up, and walk one time around your chair, breathing deeply as you do so.*

• *Micro-Macro Stretches - A micro stretch is a small muscle like fingers and toes. A macro stretch is a large muscle like arms and legs. We need a volunteer to verbally lead us in a micro or macro stretch, telling us all what part of the body to stretch as we stand.*

Written instructions for asynchronous programs can be printed directly into the material, much as the One-Minute Body Break was included as part of this article.

6. Become Familiar with Interactive Features - and Use Them.
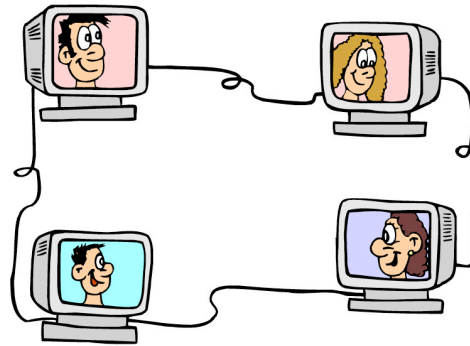
Many computer-based programs have a number of interactive features built into them now. Explore the ones that are available to you and become familiar enough with them that you don't have to learn them "on the fly," that is, while you are training. Such interactive features may include: whiteboards, chat rooms, hand icons, polling, applause, and other visual signals. You can also

have participants circle important concepts with the electronic pencil, draw doodle representations of important concepts on the whiteboard, or fill in the blanks.

7. Lengthen the Learning with Follow-Up Action Plans.

Action Plans are the learners' written or verbal commitments to use what they have learned. As such, Action Plans help learners review and evaluate the new information as they decide how they will put it all to practical use back on the job. Action Plans can also have an accountability piece built into them as well.

Here are a few examples:

- *On your graphic organizer, write one or two sentences describing how you plan to use this information at work. Also write the name of one other employee (or your supervisor) whom you will discuss your Action Plan with.*

- *In the chat room, write your Action Plan for how you plan to apply what you've learned. Put your name beside your plan. We'll copy the Action Plans and email them out to everyone when the class is over.*

- *On an index card, write one thing you can do immediately with what you have learned. Tape this index card to your desk or bulletin board at work. Send an email to the instructor in a week letting her know how your Action Plan is going.*

If you know how to set up a quick blog or wiki site, these can be ways to lengthen the learning as well. Instruct participants in how to access the blog or wiki to post their after-training insights, questions, best practices, etc. For more information on these two electronic learning tools, do an internet (google) search, or look over the blog and wiki books listed on www.amazon.com.

One-Minute Fill-in-the-Blanks

On your note-taking worksheet, fill in the blanks for the last 4 interactive e-learning tips. Check your answers by skimming the past 3 pages.
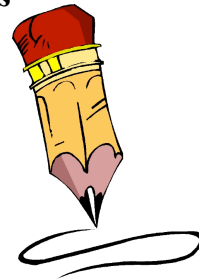
CONCRETE PRACTICE

Look back through this article now, and circle two or three interactive strategies you have decided to include in your next e-learning class. When you have time, re-design an entire e-learning program using these or other interactive strategies from this article.

As part of the Concrete Practice for this article, you can also do a quick Myth or Fact game to review major concepts. See the game instructions and cards on the following page.

One-Minute Myth or Fact

Sort the cards below into two groups by labeling each card M for Myth or F for Fact (careful: this isn't True or False!). Then check your answers.

1. E-learning should be lecture-based, with minimal interaction.

2. Standing and moving helps participants learn better.

3. Accountability means learners have to show they did the activity.

4. Graphic organizers are note-taking tools.

5. Learners must remain seated during an e-learning class.

6. To create interest, send out pre-program Warm-Ups.

7. Divide your lecture material into 10-minute segments.

8. End with participant-created Action Plans.

9. Begin with introductions, agendas, and technical information.
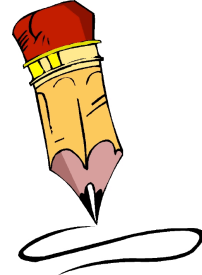
Answer Key

1. M	2. F	3. F
4. F	5. M	6. F
7. F	8. F	9. M

How did you do? If you got them all, bravo!

CONCLUSIONS

One-Minute Action Plan

Think about what you have learned. On your note-taking worksheet, describe your Action Plan: how you plan to use what you have learned.

Do the 60-second Action Plan described on the slide above. Then continue reading.

Of course, by now you realize that this article "walked the talk," that is, it modeled many ways to create an interactive learning experience, even when the information-delivery method is just reading. If a printed article like this can be made interactive, imagine what you can do with other e-learning media!

Be creative! Experiment with these strategies, make up your own, and share what you have discovered. Begin to design e-learning programs that capture and hold the interest and involvement of your learners from the moment they log on until the moment they log off.

You'll "wake 'em up" and keep them interested, learning, involved, and wanting more when the e-learning experience is over!

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Note-Taking:
First Think It, Then Ink It!
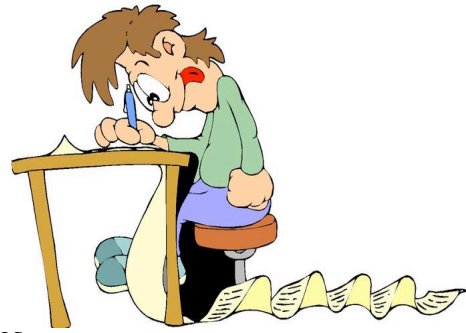
Topic: 7 Tips for Interactive E-Learning.

Fast Pass: In this box, take one minute to jot down the names
or descriptions of a few interactive e-learning strategies you have used or have seen used.

Fill-in-the-Blanks:
7 Tips for Interactive E-Learning.

Fill in the blanks with the missing words.

1. Send out _____ _____ with built-in _____.

2. Create an interesting _____ _____.

3. Begin with a _____ _____.

4. Follow the _____ - _____ rule.

5. Build in _____ _____.

6. Become familiar with _____ features.

7. Lengthen the learning with follow-up _____ _____.

My Action Plan: In the space below, describe how you plan to use what you have learned.

This article is part of Sharon's newest book, to be published in 2008 by Pfeiffer Co., a division of John Wiley & Sons. Log onto *www.amazon.com* for Sharon's five popular training books already in print.

Log onto Sharon's website at *www.Bowperson.com* for other free, downloadable PDF-formatted articles about effective training.

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Resources for this article:

The Accelerated Learning Handbook.
David Meier

Mapping Inner Space.
Nancy Margulies

Michael Allen's Guide to E-Learning.
Michael Allen

Preventing Death by Lecture.
Sharon Bowman

The Ten-Minute Trainer.
Sharon Bowman

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Sharon Bowman helps educators and business people "teach it quick and make it stick," - fine-tuning their in-formation-delivery skills and turning their passive listeners into active learners.

Sharon is also the president of Bowper-son Publishing & Training, Inc., professional member of The National Speakers Association (NSA), and member of The American Society of Training and Development (ASTD). Over 70,000 of her popular training books are already in print.

For more information about Sharon and her books and training services, log onto *www.Bowperson.com*, or email her at *SBowperson@gmail.com.*

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