

Creating Self-Directed Workbooks

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If you have to create self-directed training workbooks, you know how difficult it can be to make them interesting, engaging and effective for learners. Here are some tips to consider the next time you are creating a self-directed workbook that will help you develop something that results in measurable learning.

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Set the stage

Learners need to know what self-directed learning is and that the workbook is the tool that will teach them what need to know. It will be important that they understand the benefits of working independently, and know what is expected of them to complete the training. In setting the stage, make sure learners understand what the training is about and why it is important. Relate what they will learn to other training they may have or will receive. It's also a good idea to let them know what resources are at their disposal and who to contact if they have questions or need help. The more comfortable they are with what will be expected, the more likely they will participate.

Think like the learner

As you introduce content in the workbook, ask yourself:
What questions would the learner have about this?
What would the learner find interesting about this?
What are the key messages that need highlighting?
Include statements that acknowledge what the learner might be thinking. Ask questions in the workbook that get the learner to think about the content they've been

presented. This will validate their thoughts and help reinforce the learning.

And finally, when you write the workbook, write as if you were speaking as a facilitator, using words like 'you' and 'your'. This is a less formal approach than writing in the third person and easier for the learner to relate to. Include elements of interaction

Although you don't have as many options in a printed workbook as you would in an electronic version of the training, you can always include rhetorical questions, look-up activities, matching activities, games and case studies, or anything that will allow the learner to absorb content and work with it to encourage understanding.

Think about including assignments that take the learner away from the workbook and into the real world (e.g., have them go to the company's website and find the answers to a series of questions).

Don't get trapped into linear writing

You don't need to present content in a linear format. Use text boxes to highlight interesting facts. Add quotes or graphics to add interest. Have learners flip to pages later in the workbook to find answers to questions in an Answer Key format. You can even have learners refer back to content they've already covered and relate it to something new you are presenting.

Despite the value of creative design and layout, consistency will also enhance learning. If your workbook includes multiple modules, be consistent with the structure and flow. Predictability in style makes learning easier because learners know what to expect.

Use graphics to enhance learning

Most current versions of word processing and presentation software include easy-to-use graphics that give punch to your content. For example, instead of listing the top three factors for success, present them in three parts of a pyramid or circle. Even better, use the graphic representation to illustrate a point about the content you are presenting. For instance, you might place one of the factors on the bottom of the pyramid and explain that it is the most important factor because it forms the foundation for the others. The old saying “A picture is worth 1,000 words,” still holds true.

Create learning check points

Incorporate ways of checking that learning is taking place throughout the workbook. This might include mini quizzes and problem solving questions. Whenever possible, suggest to learners that they actually go and complete a task they are learning. Determine how you will know that learning has taken place upon completion of the workbook. You may want to have the learner meet with someone to assess their knowledge and clear up any misunderstandings.

With some effort and experience, you will be able to develop the effective learning tool that is the self-directed training workbook.