

How to create digital training that will engage your learners

What do learners want from their experience with digital training?

This is a question that many L&D professionals are faced with, and one we aimed to find the answer to through our learner survey by asking over 2,000 of our learners what aspects of digital training they enjoy, and what elements they think enhance their learning.

There was an overwhelmingly positive response to 'e-learning', with 77% of respondents saying that it enhanced their learning.

But e-learning is complex and can include a large range of different components, from videos, practice questions and downloadable resources to VR, 3D elements and games. How do we know which to use and when?

This is the question we aim to answer here as, though it is a great first step to know what learners will engage with, it is also vital to know how to use these components to

create the best possible training. Yes, learners may like digital training and love a video, but if they aren't used in a suitable way, the learners won't gain the real benefits.

Let's take a deep dive and see what these different components can offer, when they should be used and how they can help the learner.



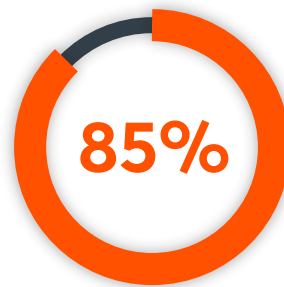
What did the survey reveal?

At the beginning of 2021 when we surveyed over 2,000 of our learners we wanted to understand what they expect from their learning experience. So, to begin with, let's have a look at the two questions which were particularly insightful into what learners want from their digital learning.

What elements or aspects of digital learning do you enjoy?



**I can access it
at any time**



**I can complete it
at my own pace**

As may be expected, the two highest-rated answers are 'lifestyle gains'. The learners value the flexibility that digital learning provides, suggesting that this may be a driving force that is encouraging learners to make the shift to digital learning. And it makes sense, as they can easily fit it into their schedule, accessing it at any time or place that suits them.

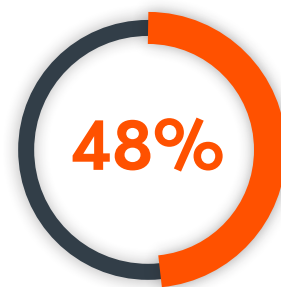
What else did they value?



**Downloadable
resources**



**Interactive
elements**

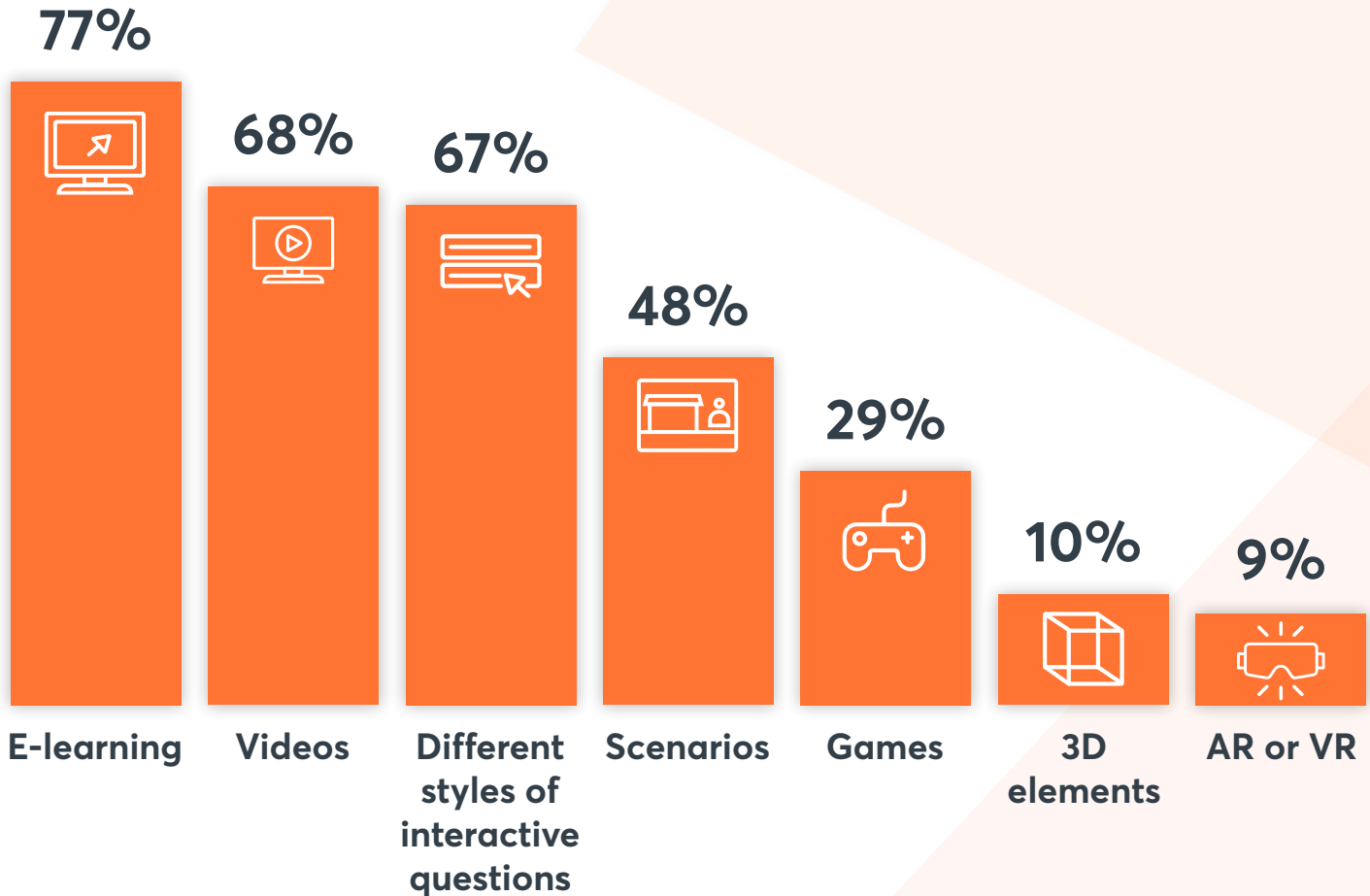


**Practice
questions**

We are not surprised to see these aspects so highly regarded. There is a lot of value to these, whether that is increasing the engagement of the training (interactive elements), helping learners embed the learning and practise in a safe space (practice questions), or giving them the opportunity to easily refer to learning at a later date (downloadable resources).

What digital formats do you think enhance learning?

In order of popularity, the answers were:



We believe the high-ranking for e-learning is a result of the pandemic, with more people having had to access to it and enjoying the flexibility it provides.

The high results for videos, interactive questions and scenarios suggest that learners want more of an interactive, rather than a

passive, experience, and the lower answers for games, 3D elements and AR/VR could suggest that either learners still need convincing about the newer, more modern digital formats, or they may simply not have had experience of these yet. We are curious to see if this changes as more people have exposure to them.

But, overall, it shows that a variety of different methods are desired. This makes sense, as not everyone learns in the same way – something L&D professionals must keep in mind when designing their own training.

Let's explore the different formats

To give you a deeper understanding of these digital formats and how they can best be used, we turned to some of our in-house team for their insights.



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Learning Experience
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1. Downloadable resources

After the 'lifestyle gains', downloadable resources were the highest-ranked aspect of digital training. There are three things that make them so popular: they provide an easy way of accessing the learning; they allow the learner to take away summaries of the learning and keep them for reference, which is great for learners who struggle to memorise things, and they are a great way of providing additional information or context that may not be included in the course.

Sabine's Top Tip:

They are useful as reminders of the key learning points, or as job aids, such as checklists. But when writing them, it is important not to regurgitate the course, instead make sure they are written and designed so they are easy to digest and clearly summarise the key points.

2. Practice questions

Another of the highest-ranked elements, and with good reason – practice questions can play an important part in training. They allow the learner to be tested in a safe setting, and to try without fear of failure, both of which can help improve confidence before attempting the 'real' test. Not just that, they also help reinforce knowledge, support the memory and allow the learner to identify any knowledge gaps or areas that they may need to focus on.

Sabine's Top Tip:

There are many types of questions and it is important to realise that not all questions are fit for all purposes. To get the most out of them, the goal of the learning must be thought about carefully. For example, if you want to teach facts, then the questions should be simple knowledge checks which focus on the facts – these are a great way to support understanding and memory. For learning which needs to drive behaviour change, the questions should make the learners think, such as requiring them to make decisions, and then provide useful and detailed feedback.

3. Interactive elements

An interactive element is anything with which a learner interacts and can range from a simple 'click and reveal' to a complex scenario – in fact, a lot of our list here can be classed as interactive.

Why did 55% of our learners say they enjoyed the interactivity? Training can be dry and dull, and interactive elements are a great way to keep engagement high, cutting through the monotony and helping to 'mix things up'. They also help keep the learner motivated, as it is something to look forward to.

When used appropriately, they are also wonderful tools to help reinforce the learning. For example, a 'click and reveal' is a great way to help learners digest and remember complex information. By breaking down the information into manageable chunks, they allow the learner to focus on it a bit at a time, making it much less overwhelming than a solid piece of text.

Alex's Top Tip:

Beware: 'click and reveal' can be overused and leave the learner with too many 'clicks', which can be frustrating. It's easy to fall into this trap, but it's important to try and find a balance between overwhelming the learner with too much information at once and requiring them to click through too many smaller chunks, but using a variety of interactive styles should help here.

4. Videos

Videos can be used in a number of ways and are a great way to take into account different learning styles. They can help break down and describe a complicated subject or concept in a way that words alone could not; condense large amounts of learning and make it easier for the learners to understand, and help put learning into context and bring it into real life, such as 'talking head' style videos, which tell stories and can have a bigger impact than a written account.

But there are considerations that must be made. To ensure that they are suitable for all learners, closed captions and/or transcripts should be provided, and the length should be considered – they shouldn't be too long, as this can lead to learners switching off. If there is a lot of information that needs to be conveyed, several shorter snippets are best, with some questions in between. This will help make sure the learner understands the main points of each snippet before moving on to the next one.

Alex's Top Tip:

Try to avoid using video for the sake of it. If you want to provide some simple facts or basic information, a piece of text can be better, especially as text is much easier to scan or skim read.



5. Different styles of interactive questions

Interactive questions are engaging – it is one of the reasons they are so popular – but they are also much more than that. Learning by thinking and doing is usually much more effective than passive methods, and interactive questions help learners tap into this style of learning.

The questions should reinforce what they have learnt so far, helping the learner build their understanding and memory of the learning, and achieve a deeper understanding. When choosing which question style to use, you should first consider what you want to teach. A text entry is a great tool for reflection and will work well in a module focusing on awareness or behaviour change. Multiple or single choice activities and drag and drops can be great to check knowledge, though you could also use a multiple or single choice to create a simple scenario. Questions can also be used to encourage learners to think more deeply about problems and questions themselves, with the feedback confirming if they were right or wrong.

Sabine's Top Tip:

It is possible to use too many questions. I recommend spacing them throughout the learning: start with some informational slides and follow them by a question or two to help the learner reflect or test their memory.

6. Scenarios

Scenarios are a great method for driving behaviour change or raising awareness and can be used in a wide range of types of training, from safeguarding to health and safety.

What makes them so useful is that they help put the learning into context, such as a real-life setting that the learner can relate to. This provides them with an opportunity to put what they've learnt into practice and, importantly, allows them to learn from any mistakes in a safe space.

A popular use is to help learners make decisions and then learn from the consequences. For example, a learner might have been taught a process on how to deal with a customer complaint and they are then introduced to a scenario where a customer makes a complaint. This puts the process into context and allows the learner to work through what must be done.

Alex's Top Tip:

There are lots of different styles of scenarios, including text-based scenarios, graphical scenarios and videos. As with all these elements, it is important to think about the aim of the learning and choose the appropriate style.



7. Games

Games can often be seen as frivolous, but they are a fun way for the learner to engage with the training and test themselves.

They play on human psychology – motivating the learners to get their best score – which is a fantastic way of reinforcing the knowledge. In addition, they can be used in a similar way to scenarios, as they can help learners develop knowledge by making decisions, learning from the consequences and retrying until they get it right.

There are success stories of businesses using games to help engage their workforces. One business used it in their health and safety training. They set departments against each other to drive them to get the best score, something they could only do by engaging with the learning. But it's important to know your learners, as not all learner groups may have this competitive drive.

On the downside, they can be time consuming and expensive to create, depending on their complexity, so it is important that you pay attention to why and how you're creating them.

Sabine's Top Tip:

The most important thing is to start with who your learners are and what you want to teach them and make all your decisions based on this. You need to make sure that your game focuses on what you want to teach and not on the many 'cool things you can do'.

8. 3D elements

3D elements, such as 3D modelling or virtual 3D games, are useful for recreating large-scale, technical, accurate life-like objects or locations. This makes them the perfect introduction to a piece of equipment or an environment, allowing the learner to interact with it without being physically there.

As you can imagine, there is a cost attached to them and they take time to create, but organisations choose them for the long-term benefits they offer. This is especially the case for complex pieces of training, where learners will need to know a piece of equipment inside out.

Alex's Top Tip:

They are a great way to allow learners to practise as many times as they need, giving them the time to focus on amending any mistakes or uncertainties they have, which helps them build their confidence. They are also durable – no wear and tear that would happen to an actual piece of equipment!



9. AR/VR

VR and AR (virtual reality and augmented reality) provide different ways to interact with environments. VR is similar to a 3D game, as it creates a virtual environment. Learners can interact with it through a headset, and are immersed physically and mentally. AR enables learners to look at their environment through a device, such as a smart phone or tablet, and things are placed in that environment with which they can interact.

Like 3D elements, they are great for complex training needs. They are incredibly beneficial and provide a safe way of using and exploring dangerous pieces of equipment, allowing the learner to practise in a safe place without the dangers or the fear of real-life consequences. They can be used for a range of different needs, from teaching how to fix or maintain complex pieces of equipment to medical training.

Alex's Top Tip:

Yes, they are costly but they have so many benefits that they are worth the consideration. They decrease health and safety risks, provide unique learning opportunities, allow for multiple learners to train at the same time, and are available 24/7.

10. The graphical appearance

Graphic design encompasses all aspects of training, from the videos to the downloadable resources. If you think about it, the design of any training will be the first thing a learner sees, and it can be a reason why learners disengage before they've even started. To avoid this, it is best to get to know your audience's likes, values and preferred graphical styles, and treat them with intelligence – don't dumb down the graphics, rely on assumptions and stereotypes or underestimate what they can gain from the graphics. You don't want your message undermined by thoughtless graphics.

They can be used in a very practical way, such as to add branding or ensure consistency with other training or organisational resources. They are also a great way to convey data, or enhance the text, which can be especially helpful to those who are dyslexic or have English as a second language.

They can also be used to emotionally connect with the audience; for example, by conveying different emotional messages, such as using softer colours for sensitive topics, or bold, bright colours to convey confidence.

Emma's Top Tip:

When designing on a budget, consistency should be your key consideration. The graphics shouldn't be an afterthought, but be well planned, well thought out and well executed. If you don't think about them, or use a mixture of different styles, then it can result in an incohesive and jarring design.