



WRITING FOR E-LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, writing has evolved continuously, right from the scripts on the walls of caves, to the pages of the books and to the pages or screens of an e-book. This change has emerged out of continuous thinking process and its practical applicability. Similarly, writing is also a continuous thought process. Any piece of scripts in written form is used to convey a message or provide a message. A script is always produced keeping in mind, the end user who would read it. Messages could be through any medium, books, magazines, religious or holy books, newspaper, handouts, pictures and so on. Each of these medium have the capacity to make the reader sit through and read the message and acquire knowledge. For each of these mediums, the age, interest, message to convey and how you convey them are the prime parameters behind every writing process.

This paper discusses how writing skills can be improved and train people in the organisations to make them eligible to design courses for learners in the classrooms or a web based mode. This writing varies from the regular writing for academics, text books, novels or newspapers. Today, reading is not limited to books or papers alone, reading is happening in a variety of different ways, like mobile chats, social media, blogs, ebooks, etc. This paper will also serve as a guide for people or content writers or instructors who are looking to explore the new platform to train people online and to do so would requires specific writing skills and address the needs of learners. The target audience for any online course can be anyone who are either located globally or within your area or region and who are adults. Writing to train them in order to help them acquire the desired skills, knowledge and develop a change in behaviours as a result of the course is challenging and interesting.

Keywords: Content, Technology, E-learning / CBT Writing, Effective, Words, Powerful



INDTRODUCTION

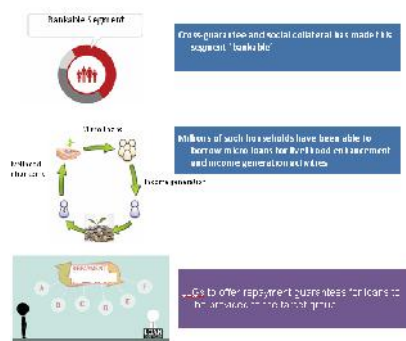
Do you remember your favorite book, a novel, a comic or a newspaper article that must have hooked you to read on to know more? Surely, yes! Did you reflect over this to know what is 'That' something in that book or novel which is different and stands apart from the other regular books which you have read? Well, the answer is simple. One of the elements is developing the curiosity. Not all authors can do this...not all books can do this...not all writing can do this.... Any piece of writing which has the capability of keeping the learner curious by connecting his or her life experiences to something unknown is an art. An art of specialised instructions to help the learner to commit mistakes, to guide them to know the right way through the use of constructive feedback requires creative and critical thinking skills. This paper reflects the skills required by writers who would intend to write for training adults. Writers, who opt for writing for web or classroom training, are referred as content writers or content developers. The writers have to develop content for their learners who are mostly adults and who do not like to be taught. The writer therefore needs to plan his content in such a way, that it not only hooks them to take a course, but also motivates them to know more in a self paced learning environment.

The writer, before he begins to write or develops a course, needs to know why the learner needs to go through a particular course? What does the learner already know? What kind of approach or treatment will help to achieve the desired outcome? The course may be to train the learner on soft skills, on a company's products, to observe a change in behaviour as a result of taking a course, on how to use the organisation's software, and so on. The writer needs to ask these questions to himself, before setting off to write - How can I make the learning personalised? What approach will help to keep the learners motivated to take the course till the end? Will a story based approach work well or will games satisfy his need to take the course. What if, the learner finds the course less challenging and demotivates him? How will the learner be able to take the course through the comfort of his home or office? Will the content be enough? What if the learner is a kinesthetic one and learns by doing? What if the learner learns better through visuals? What if the learner wants to just hear the course while doing his work? The list is endless.

Post identifying the needs of the learner, the writer should analyse the content, identify the gaps in the existing content and fill those gaps. Adults do not like to be taught, because they assume they know everything. But, if the same is presented in a way that makes them feel, that they are not taught but are being appreciated for their decisions taken in certain situation, then it will motivate them. Adults like to be praised than being punished for their decisions, though the same also applies to children also. A writer should therefore build the course content in such a way that it guides the learner to take the right moves when presented with situations that relate to his or her real life experiences.

Next is the delivery mode. The writer should know the mode in which the course will be delivered to the learner. Is it a classroom or a web based? Now, you would like to know why is this? - Because the mode of instructions will vary. The instructions will vary based on the delivery mode. For example, in classroom training, the instructions will be given in a way that will guide the facilitator to present the content and make it engaging through appropriate examples and scenarios. Whereas, in a web based training, the instructions will be given not only to the learner who will be guided on every step on how to proceed to get the information, it will also include the instructions to the designer so that they build the course and programme it accordingly to achieve the desired outcome. The writer should decide on balancing the amount of text and visuals. For example, a second thought on 'Are the visuals apt; is there consistency in presenting the content; are proper instructions given to the learner; what content can be replaced with visuals; will case studies help; and so on.' After, teaching a concept, the learner should be tested on it. To know this and to keep the learner engaged, activities like drag and drop, puzzles, treasure hunt, True or False, Word search etc needs to be designed. All this requires proper planning and lots of creativity and critical thinking. Next, comes the actual presentation of content. Given below are a few examples.

Text A: (Example 1)



Bankable Payment

Participants use social collateral to make the payment bankable.

Millions of such households have been able to borrow micro-loans for livelihood on government and non-government activities.

...to offer repayment guarantees for loans to the borrower through the group.

Text A: (Example 1)

Characteristics of Groups

- **Un-bankable and Poor** Non-poor have other resources to get the loans
- **Close proximity of Group Members – (Approx 500 meters from one another)**
 - Facilitates communications
 - Ensures knowledge of each other's repayment capacity
 - Ensures members personally know the earning capacity and credit worthiness of all other members (important in cases where members have to help out with repayments)
- **No Close Relatives in same group**
 - Discourages family issues from cropping up into the center
 - Prevents collusion among family members
 - Stops hierarchies of power that exist in the household
 - Stops hierarchies among relatives to function within the group (Such hierarchies of power will make it impossible for the mechanism of peer support to work.)
- **Mutual Trust** Members serve as guarantors for each other so trust is necessary for group cohesion

Of these two examples, which one do you think is that which will help you to retain the knowledge for a longer duration of time. Yes! you are right. The content with more relevant and apt visuals with little content will help you to retain the concept longer than the content which has only text, text and text....Now, that we have to the text part, let us also discuss about the structure of the sentences, grammar and punctuation. Let us also consider this with the help of examples.

Examples



Of these two examples, which text has enabled you to remember what you just read? Try to answer without looking back. Yes, the text box B and not text box A. Why? Because the text in text box B has very short and crisp sentences and apt visuals for better retention; whereas, in text box A, the sentences are too long and will take more time for the learner to grasp the underlying meaning. So, how should you write for such an audience?

DISCUSSION

In writing for E-learning, keyboard is mightier than sword. Every word written is powerful, which can motivate or demotivate the learner, develop curiosity or dampen the spirits of the learner. So, writing should be more than writing than just sticking to the rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Following are some simple basic steps that a writer may follow in order to make his writing engaging, evocative, and effective.

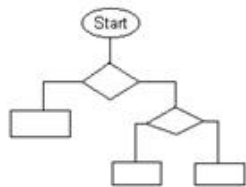
Step 1: Write for the Learner

The writer should always begin by keeping the learner in mind. In order to ensure that your writing brings about a change in the learner, you should place yourself in the learner's shoes. Every word that you write, every sentence that you frame, every image that you use, should have a thought and a question in mind- 'Will this text or image add value to learning'? If your answer is NO, then simply chop off that text or image. Remember, that using words or text just for the sake of using it may mar your course and all the efforts will go to drain. Hence, decide what is just right for the learner and how much information should be given at a time. Bear in mind, the learning psychologies, and write to empathise.

Step 2: Plan before you write

What do you do when you plan a trip to your favorite holiday spot? Plan well in advance, right? This is what exactly can be followed in writing too. The journey that the learner would take as a result of your writing should be planned - What approach you take, what learning outcome you want to achieve, how can that objective be achieved, how to ensure that the learner does not get bored, and so on. To plan, a writer can first create a story board. All the steps can be listed out in small frames and modified or deleted before it is finalised. You cannot transfer all the contents of the text of the screen, nor can you simply cut out on important information. You should decide what is most important and how will the learner identify or get the desired information.

Here is the sample of a storyboarding process:



Organise Material



Define Goals



Select Instructional Approach



Sequence Content

Organising Materials: Identify what the subject you have to work with-Technical, Financial, Sales, Soft Skills, Process, or any other. Is the learning material enough to develop your course? If not, ask for more to fill the gaps. If yes, plan to break the mountain of content into chunks and easily digestible bits to be assimilated by the learner.

Defining Goals: Without a goal, nothing can be achieved. Keeping that single goal in mind, try to work on the smaller goals, and create the context to achieve the goal.

Selecting Instructional Approach: Approaches or treatment that can be opted depends on time, budget and the organisational goals. Decide if you want to use a story telling, a game or scenario based approach.

Sequencing Content: 'Anything dis-organised creates havoc'. Can you imagine what would happen, if you show the learner, the mountain before teaching him how to climb? Similarly, placing the content haphazardly, and trying to reach the goal may leave the learner confused and lost. It's important to guide the learner at every step and help him achieve the goal.

Step 3: Word limit

Unlike the pages of a book, an e-learning page is different. A text book page can have a thousand words, but a screen of an e-learning course should not be more than 90 words. The sentence length of a text in a book can go up to hundred words but a sentence written for an online course should not be more than 12 to 15 words. A writer should never overload the text on the screen. To achieve this, here a few tips:

1. Plan - Organise- Deliver
2. Break up the text into small bits
3. Use apt visuals to support the text
4. Keep paragraphs short
5. Align the text properly



6. Present the most important points first

7. Keep sentences short

Step 4: Rework on Language

E-learning embraces 'Simplicity'. Though text books are good for improving a readers vocabulary, in e-learning, it is always safe to avoid wordiness or jargons. Use simple words to replace difficult words. Remember to cut off weak words and try to present your text in active voice. A list of items can be presented by using bullet points. This will also help to reduce the word count without missing out on anything important. Try to read it aloud and check if it sounds unusual. Chop off abstract terms. Instead use analogies to explain technical concepts. Avoid adjectives and adverbs as they do not add much value and increases word count. When writing for e-learning, use a conversational style. Talk to the learner. Make him feel your presence beside him. Use 'Pleasant' tone and address the learner as "YOU", just like I am writing this article and addressing 'You'.

Step 5: Tone

You must have read books or articles, where the writer failed to impress you? How did you feel? What made you disconnect from the writer? Tone- the same is important in e-learning. Though technology aids in learning, the learners are not impressed by glitzy images or language alone. How you say it, is what builds the tone and makes a big impact on the content.

Step 6: Interesting and Relevancy

How can you decide on this? This is entirely at the writer's discreet to decide what is relevant and how to make it more interesting for the learners and keep them glued to read your content. Any action you do, anything you read, has an outcome; it can either be simply gaining pleasure from reading a novel or gaining a piece of information on reading a newspaper or knowing the end result as a part of your action. It makes one happy to know that by doing a particular action, they gain something. Focus on ' Defining clearly in the beginning, what the learner will gain from your course'. Present facts or statistics to support your statements. Use real life scenarios that depict common actions and the outcomes as a result of the actions- whether right or wrong. Give the learner something to take away with them as a result of your effort and their actions..

Step 7: Emotions

Connect with your learner through emotions. How can you get your learner experience the happy part without experiencing the sad part? The powerful word to use is 'Imagine'. Enter

the learner's mind and trigger a vision to help them think in reality. Use words that may tickle the five senses - smell, touch, taste, sound and sight. Use such words to detail the scenes and to create images with words.

Step 8: Self -explanatory

Adults don't like to be spoon fed. They assume that they Know-All, and do not feel the need to be taught. Hence, your writing should be such that it gives them something more. But, how will you do that? Make the course self explanatory. Allow the learner to search the answers for himself. Guide him on how to search for that extra information. Let him explore. Use catchy words to trickle their emotions.

Step 9: Humour

Just like you would have added that extra pinch of masala to spice up your meal, add a dash of humour to your writing. Use metaphors and novel words to describe people, places or objects to lighten up their aspirations and keep them engaged. Humor also lowers the stress of learning complex subjects and keeps them engaged and focused.

Context:

Given below is the screen shot of a few screens of an e-learning course which are effective and interesting. This has been written for employees of bank to give them knowledge about the bank's products, sales process and activities that helped to increase their knowledge retention.

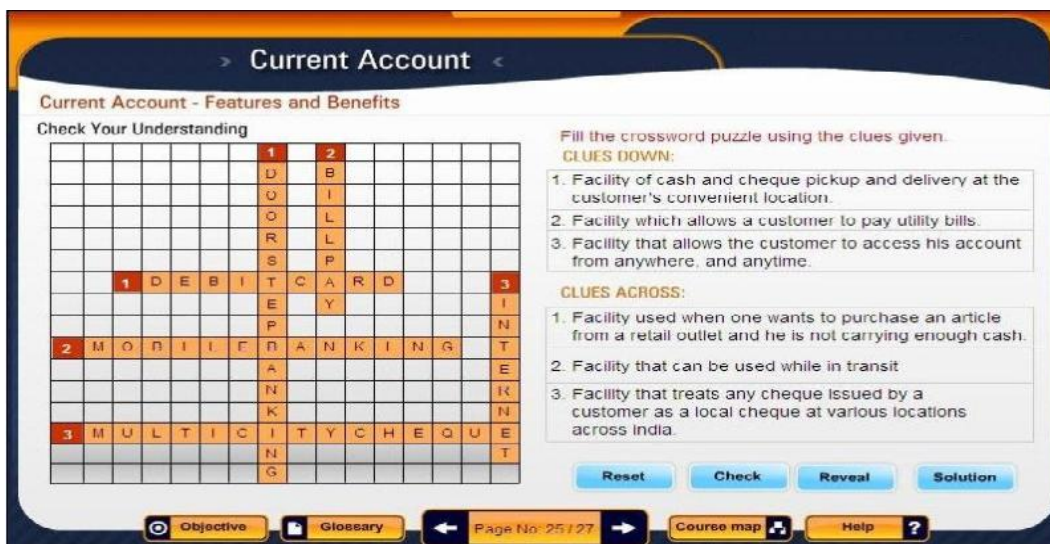


Figure 1: Screen shot to show the puzzle activity to enhance retention of learning



Figure 2: Screen shot of Drag and Drop activity to allow learner to make mistakes and guide to take the right decisions




Figure 3: Screenshot of using a cricket theme to engage learner and make learning fun




Figure 4: Screen shot of storytelling way approach to introduce learners about new product and how they can increase sales for the organisation.



Given below is the template used for storyboarding process. Only few slides are shared that shows the progression of content in an organised manner. Instructions are given to programmer and to the learner. Learning objectives are listed. Facts are presented to relate to the context.

Course Title	Remittance	Screen No	1
Screen Title	Welcome		
 <p style="text-align: center;">Enter</p> <p>Click 'Enter' to begin the course</p>			
Visual Description: Show the globe. Then show two arrows appearing from both ends towards the center of the globe. Label the arrows as given= Money on one arrow and Transfer on the other arrow. In between, the two arrows, display text 'Enter'. Allow user to click on it. On click, let the user take the course.			
Programming Instructions			

Course Title	Remittance	Screen No	2
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Screen Title	Learning Objectives
	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 20px; background-color: #add8e6; padding: 10px; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="color: #0056b3; margin: 0;">Welcome to the Module on Remittance</p> <p style="margin: 5px 0 0 20px;">On completing this course, you will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define remittance List the steps taken by FATF on regulating remittance Explain UK Plc retail remittance pertaining to Home Vantage and Non Home Vantage current account holders </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin: 10px auto; width: 60%;">  </div>
	Visual Description: Show the image and display bulleted text one by one on the screen.
	Programming Instructions

Course Title	Remittance	Screen No	3
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Screen Title	Overview
<p>Scenario: Use the reference image to show a customer in a bank. Retain alpha of screen and display text patch on a white screen.</p>  <p>In this globalizing world, migration of people from one country to another for employment opportunities has become quite common. As such, along with savings and credit services, remittance services are among the most important financial services for many people. Dominant migration corridors have</p> <p>Now zoom to show the customer at the counter and display text beside him and then the callout.</p> <p>Meet Mr. Prem Gupta. He is employed with UAE's leading manufacturing company. He regularly transfers money to his family residing in India.</p>  <p>Hello! I am the manager of Parag Trading Company in UAE that manufactures a range of electronic weighing scales, balances and systems. I draw a decent salary and send home money to my family in</p> <p>But many a times, they do not receive money on time due to limited access and inefficient reliable remittance services. Travelling to the nearest pay-out point is also time consuming and costly.</p> <p>Provide a next button. Display image as water mark and on it display text</p> <p>Studies emphasize that migrant remittances and their investment are hampered by inefficiencies and access barriers in financial services both in sending and receiving countries. This is a regulatory concern and limits the opportunity for people to become better economically integrated by gaining access to basic financial services. The World Bank and the Bank for International Settlements have developed international standards for remittance services.</p>	

Many governments and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) have taken steps to provide some regulation on remittance. 'Financial Intelligence Units' (FIUs) cooperate with them for addressing information on value channels.



Visual Description:

Programming Instructions

Conclusion:

A good writer can bring tears, happiness, suspense or a change in the behaviour through his writings. Hence, develop and write your content keeping in mind the learner and the end objective. When writing for online users, keep your content simple, yet effective, interesting and engaging. Hope this article will help the novice content developers or any writer who wish to enter the online industry.

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