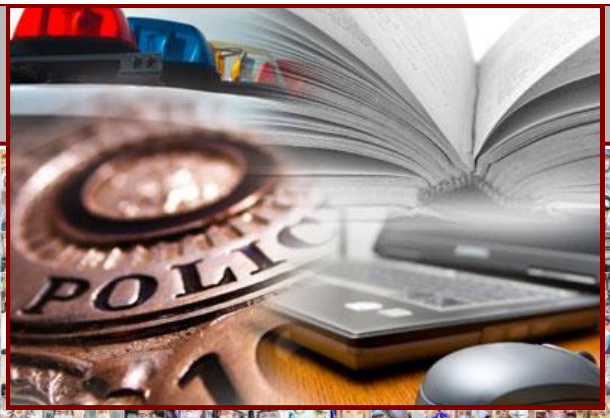
ILEETA
International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association

Spring Edition

Volume 10
Edition 2

2020



Covid 19 Selfie Project April 2020 D a n S u n

The ILEETA Journal

Online Learning

by Kerry Avery, M. Ed.

Many institutions quickly moved their courses from classroom to online delivery. What they were able to achieve in a crisis is admirable. I am concerned it will contribute to the myths that online learning is an inferior substitute when classroom isn't an option, and a classroom instructed course can be facilitated online with little planning.

Distance education has been around for 100 years. Before the internet, this mode of learning was delivered through books, radio, audio and video tapes, and paper correspondence courses.

In high school I applied for a college journalism program. On the entrance exam I scored four out of four on the essay but failed the spelling test component, miserably. I was advised to take a spelling correspondence course which came with a workbook and tapes. The tapes consisted of a monotone voice sounding out the letters in the alphabet. I fell asleep every time I turned it on. I never finished the course and subsequently never studied journalism, but I now have numerous articles published and I'm the managing editor of this publication. How did I improve my spelling? Through reading, writing, looking up words in the dictionary, and feedback from spellcheck.

The internet has made information and resources available at our fingertips which has advanced our ability to engage in learning without being in a classroom. What would that spelling course look like today?

- Practice tests with feedback specific to words spelled incorrectly
- Videos explaining common rules and exceptions
- A spelling bee game
- Exercises to identify misspelled words

There are several meta-analysis studies which show distance education is at least as effective as classroom, but this is only the case if the course objectives are appropriate and designed for the delivery format. Making resources, such as presentation slides or a video, available online is not providing training. To be training, a course needs to have some form of assessment and should include exercises.

Distance learning is any course that does not require the instructor to be in the same location as the participants. There are options for the format of delivering online training. Asynchronous courses are available to be taken at any time. These are stand-alone modules with no instructor immediately available. The other format is synchronous which has a facilitator and requires people to participate at the same time. Post-secondary courses offered online are usually a hybrid of asynchronous and synchronous because students do not have to attend at the same time, but they are on a schedule for posting in forums, handing in assignments etc.

To begin designing an online course or converting the delivery of an existing course from classroom to online you need to answer the following questions:

Who is the audience?

Determine the primary audience and design the course for them. Online modules can serve multiple purposes, e.g., recruit training and recertification, but it is easier to design for a primary audience and develop an approach for subsequent participants later than it is to create a course that meets the needs of multiple audiences.

How is it going to be delivered?

Determine the format, synchronous or asynchronous. The design of a stand-alone module is vastly different than a facilitated synchronous class.

Where is it going to be hosted?

Asynchronous modules are usually hosted on a learning management system (LMS). There are organizations and sites that offer this service, or you can create your own with moodle or a wordpress plugin. The LMS often has the capability to upload files and create quizzes, or the module can be programmed using software such as Adobe Captivate or Articulate Storyline which creates a file that is uploaded to the LMS.

Synchronous classes require a way for instructors and participants to connect. A place to host and share course materials (e.g., documents, videos) may also be needed. Google classroom can be used to share documents, host discussions, and even create assessments. For Virtual Instructor Led Training (VILT) you will need a video conferencing program such as Zoom.

What is going to be achieved in this course?

Writing the learning objectives is the key to all good course design. Determine what the participants will be able to do at the end of the course. Be realistic about what can be achieved in an online environment but do not limit yourself to the lower levels of learning (knowledge and understanding). Challenge yourself to develop exercises that engage higher levels of thinking (assessment and analysis).

How are the objectives going to be met?

The exercise and assessment components are what differentiate training from information sharing. A video, document, slides, and lecture are passive. These formats are effective for providing information, but how do you know the participants understand and can apply the content? This is why exercises and assessments are imperative for training. In order the meet the objectives, the participants need to demonstrate their ability to define, repeat, discuss, explain, apply, analyze, and evaluate the information. Design your online learning with exercises to engage the participants with the content. In a synchronous class it is possible to incorporate small group discussions with breakout rooms, full class discussions, interactive whiteboard, polls, and text chat. Asynchronous modules should include assessment exercises to practice recalling and applying the information to real world situations. For example, a course on interviewing will have the theory on the use of open ended questions followed by an exercise where they identify which interview questions are open and which are closed, or a scenario with options on the question they should ask next.

The internet is a powerful tool we should be using to improve knowledge and skills. Online learning is effective, providing it is designed specifically for a distance delivery. Developing an online course is an investment that can pay off for years to come if it is done well. I believe the end goal is to build a resource library of online training which will enable officers to access training when they need it instead of only during scheduled training days. **ILEETA**

About the Author

Kerry Avery is the owner of Odin Training Solutions Inc. Kerry has a Master's degree in Education and over 15 years' experience designing training programs, with the last 10 years spent working with law enforcement to develop classroom, online and blended learning courses. In addition to course development, Kerry coaches and teaches law enforcement instructors on course design and facilitation. Kerry is the editor for the ILEETA Journal, and has presented at the ILEETA, IADLEST, and IACP conferences. She can be reached at Kerry.Avery@shaw.ca.