10 TIPS TO **SAVE TIME** ON ELEARNING PROJECTS

Tip **1** TAKE FIVE MINUTES TO BE THE BOSS.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

Before meeting with stakeholders, take a few minutes to prepare. Review what you want to discuss, anticipate their questions, and be ready with answers. Practice saying, "Let me look into that and get back to you," so you can avoid saying an automatic "yes" to every stakeholder idea or request.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

Your stakeholders want you in the driver's seat. It makes their jobs easier! When they see your preparation and hear your responses to their concerns, you're conveying that you can be relied on, and that builds time-saving trust. You can also better guide the conversation and avoid being pushed into time-consuming approaches that aren't right for your project. Take some time to prepare for success.

Tip **2** # ANSWER KEY CONCERNS EARLY.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

If you perceive that your stakeholders are nervous about something – Will the project be done in time? Will the project look good? Will it run on their LMS? – take a few minutes to address the concern directly. Do this as soon as possible. Share your project planning, build a few quick slides, test a file on their LMS … and promptly communicate successful solutions to your stakeholders. The same applies if you're worried about something. Never sweep concerns (theirs or yours) under the rug.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

This one helps in two ways. First, you need your stakeholders feeling confident, not worried. People with a positive mindset are more flexible, patient, and creative. That is, just the people you want to be working with. Second, when you solve problems before they flare up, they can be easier to manage. Addressing concerns early lets you get solutions into your project right away, so you avoid time-consuming fix-its on work that's already been completed.

Tip **3** SET REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS (AND EXCEED THEM).

THE EXPERTS SAY:

Always set realistic expectations about what will be delivered and when, so your stakeholders can plan their schedules accordingly. Consciously avoid trying to be a hero! Don't make delivery promises if you're not directly asked, and when you are asked, make an honest assessment and add a little extra time to it. Your reasonable time estimates will allow you to impress your stakeholders by meeting (and possibly beating) the expectations you've set.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

eLearning development takes time and rushing the effort doesn't help. You're likely to work more quickly, make more mistakes, and have less time to double-check your project. Overly-ambitious delivery promises can mean delivering incomplete or substandard work, and that means more work in the future. Will you have more time then? Probably not.

Tip **4** # SKETCH YOUR PROJECT PLAN.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

Before taking any action on the project development, analyze the project phases and steps involved in their execution. This doesn't need to be formal, but it's good to work it out on paper answering questions like these: What are the big phases in the project? What kind of activity is needed, and when? What do stakeholders need to see and when? How long can (or must) be allowed for stakeholder review? How many rounds of revisions can the project timeline accommodate? What are some challenges you may face? What's needed to address these?

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

When you have a good map of the project process, you can anticipate next steps more easily. By noting what you expect to happen, you're able to communicate with stakeholders and stay on track. You're also better prepared to handle the unexpected because you'll be able to see things from the "big picture" perspective. No matter how informally, plan ahead before you start.

Tip **5** RELY ON REPEATABLE FRAMEWORKS.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

No need to reinvent the wheel for each new project! Certain tried-and-true approaches work well for different types of material, and it pays to employ these in your program. For example, a framework that's great for compliance training employs scenarios that put viewers in the middle of an unfolding real-world story so they can test their own responses. No need to develop an all-new approach – just employ this tried-and-true framework to build your compliance program. (Bonus points for taking note of your successful solutions as you build programs! You'll certainly thank yourself later for creating a sourcebook you can use over and over.)

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

A repeatable framework gives you a development boost, because it requires less advance planning and fewer iterations to get it right. Scripts and slides follow an existing formula, so you can focus on getting your program right, not on planning delivery details. When something works, use it again and again.

Tip **6** SCRIPT CAREFULLY AND BE STRICT ABOUT APPROVALS.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

Everyone is eager to see an eLearning program in action, so it's easy to gloss over the scripting process, dash something out, give it a light reading, and call the scriptwriting stage done. Don't let it happen! Scripting may be the most important phase in your project, so if you're writing a script, do so carefully. Think about flow and comprehension. Consider how it will translate into visuals. Read it aloud and adjust confusing spots and tongue twisters. Then send it to your stakeholders, and ask them to read it very, very carefully for content. Have them to consider questions like these: Does the script state things appropriately for the audience? Are the facts correct? Are the questions accurate? Plan for a couple rounds of revisions and hold off on beginning slide development until both you and your stakeholders feel positive about the script.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

Two words: Reduced rework! When you script carefully and get stakeholder input and approval before starting to build, you're working smarter. It's easier to make changes (even extensive ones) to a script that's still just a word processor document. Get the script right when it's easy to do so!

Tip **7** CONTROL TIME WITH WORD COUNT.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

Your stakeholders are likely to ask for a program of a certain number of minutes, and equally likely to give you content for a program twice that length! Since more content means a longer program and more time building, you need a tool to keep the project runtime in focus. The tool? Word count. Control runtime by controlling the word count of your voice over script or read-only on-screen text. For voice over, assume a delivery of 150 words per minute (wpm). For read-only programs, assume your viewer can read 235 wpm. Next, divide the desired program runtime by 150 wpm (or 235 wpm for a read-only). Limit the word count of your program script to that result. That's the magic number! If a script limited to that length doesn't accommodate all of your stakeholders' desired material let them know ASAP that the runtime – and, therefore, the project development time and cost – is more than originally planned. It's a great way to control expectations.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

The adage that a project will expand to fill the time allotted is nowhere truer than in eLearning development! When you rely on a quantitative approach like script word count, you have a solid benchmark to keep your program within the confines of both your stakeholders' expectations and available project development time. Keep development time under control by controlling script word count.

Tip **8** MAKE "SIMPLE" YOUR GO-TO.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

In every aspect of your project, choosing to go simple instead of fancy will shave hours off development. Start by committing to helping viewers learn what's most important and ask yourself throughout the process: Does this approach enhance the effectiveness of the learning experience? Of course, there are always cool new ideas being talked about in eLearning and you (and your stakeholders) may get excited about them. Before you commit to complicated approaches like gamification, virtual reality, and full-branching programs, though, ask a lot of questions! Get to the root of why the new approach is the best way to go. If it's not a clear win, save the approach for a different project where it will be.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

Jumping on the latest ideas can significantly complicate program development but add no real value for either stakeholders or learners. Before suggesting or committing to an approach, consider it carefully. Is it simple to implement? Can you do it without new tools, learning, or extra time? If the answers are "no," don't pursue that option. Instead, remind yourself and your stakeholders that complex solutions mean longer timelines for building, testing, reviewing, and revising.

Tip **9** **USE GRAPHIC ASSETS DESIGNED FOR ELEARNING.**

THE EXPERTS SAY:

The photos, illustrations, and characters available on both paid and free stock photo sites and (curiously enough) from within eLearning authoring tools are not designed for building eLearning. As a result, the graphics don't always work well in typical horizontal slide orientations, provide room for text, or allow sequential visual storytelling, and you must spend more time than you should getting these not-quite-right assets to work in your specific program. Customization to get the graphics to work requires tools and time you may not have. To save project time, stick to assets specially designed for eLearning, where the subtle, but important, requirements of slide-building have already been considered and addressed.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

Using a graphics library specially designed for eLearning gets you what you need for your slides without the post-download editing tour. Bonus time-savings can be had, too, if you design your program, storyboarding, and slide development around existing library assets. Doing that lets you choose what you know will work before you start the slide builds so you can avoid time sinks that gobble up project time. Let eLearningArt be your time-saving partner.

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Tip **10** COMMIT TO SMART DESIGN.

THE EXPERTS SAY:

In a multi-slide program, design decisions and the time needed to execute them can add up quickly. If you're smart about these decisions, you can significantly reduce the minutes (or, scarier – hours) to build each slide. What does "smart" look like in practice? It means limiting colors, choosing reliable fonts, roughing out your slide designs first, and confirming that what's in your mind's eye is fully-supported by available graphics that you have access to. It means being thoughtful about customizations that will have to be repeated slide after slide and controlling the stakeholder conversation by separating nice-to-have design approaches from those that can be efficiently executed. All of this can take a little self-discipline (sad, but true) and saying, "Maybe someday" to great ideas that will take too long to build. Save your ideas, though, because they will probably work great in the future.

HOW THIS SAVES TIME:

Making the design job easier means a quicker build, and that's significant in a multi-slide program. Good program design relies on consistency and repetition, so a design decision made on one slide is usually carried through to other slides. If that decision is easy to implement many times over, it's a winner. But if it adds extra time to every slide, it won't feel like a smart design decision. Be a smart designer.

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