

What Is Interactive eLearning?

The 4 different ways to approach it

By Robert S. Becker

The adjective “interactive” has morphed into a noun. In educational technology, the noun refers to responsive content that facilitates active learning.



Already I’m in the weeds and have to clarify!

First, “responsive” means sensing and answering. Responsive content figures out what you want, when you want it, and how to get it for you. If that sounds virtually human to you, you’re on the right track. Communication with an interactive is two-way, as though you’re working together.

Second, “active learning” occurs when your behavior goes beyond the passive one-way modes of watching, listening and reading static content. You also learn by creating; pulling just the content you want and making things with it, rather than waiting for information to be pushed to you and assimilating it.

Most discussions about e-learning promote the utility of interactives without mentioning that there are different ways to approach them. Here are four:

The baseline of course is *Not Interactive*, meaning that content is unresponsive. A next button is not content; so clicking a next button to advance slides is *Not Interactive*. Each slide can’t sense the needs or answer the questions of viewers. Clicking next in a so-called interactive is like turning pages of a book or pressing a television remote.

Not Interactive.

Above that baseline is *Reactive*, where content consists of pre-set programmed objects. For example, multiple choice questions and hyperlinks on images are examples of *Reactive*. Navigation is minimally nonlinear because there are conditional branches; but those branches are short and loop back to their starting points on a linear path.

Reactive design generates prescriptive rather than active learning. Students have bits of control over their instruction, but only to do what the interactive expects them to do.

The next tier is truly *Interactive*, meaning that content responds to your inferred needs and explicit inquiries. Problem sets, video-games, immersive tutorials and high-fidelity simulations are *Interactive* because they synthesize variables set by student behavior over time, and respond systematically.

Finally the top tier is *Interactive Plus*, which is just *Interactive* for groups. Synchronous distance learning, multiplayer training simulations and online games are *Interactive Plus* because the variables set by one’s autonomous behavior affect others. The interactive app judges all individual behaviors in parallel, not serially, and responds systematically.

Interactive and *Interactive Plus* are analogous to learning in real social situations or ecologies. That’s why they are always experiential.

Confusion occurs when the noun interactive is applied to *Not Interactive* or *Reactive* instruction. That leads to a faulty paradigm, where anything involving a mouse click is labeled *Interactive*. Incorrect!

Now, it’s wise to remember that e-learning doesn’t have to be *Interactive*. Often it doesn’t want to be.

Example. A MOOC is a slide lecture: *Not Interactive*. However a MOOC integrated in blended learning can become *Interactive* by virtue of live or immersive instruction that surrounds and enhances it.

Another example. Drills are *Reactive* because they follow a linear path formed by pre-set input objects. Students control the pace of instruction but not flow, style or content. The questions or challenges posed in the interactive are not theirs.

Do interactives determine the efficacy of e-learning? The consensus is that they do, because genuine interactivity promotes active learning and engagement.

The problem with this consensus is that it doesn’t broach a fundamental question: is run-of-the-mill e-learning a good way to do *Interactive* in a world with many design choices? **TEL**

This article first appeared [here](#).



Robert S. Becker has been professionally involved in corporate learning and multimedia since the mid-1980s. With Becker Multimedia, Bob leads an adaptive team of creative talents. He also consults personally with enterprise teams and vendor organizations.
Email bob@beckermultimedia.com
Connect www.linkedin.com/in/beckermultimedia
Visit beckermultimedia.com/home.html

Would like to Comment? Please Click Here.

