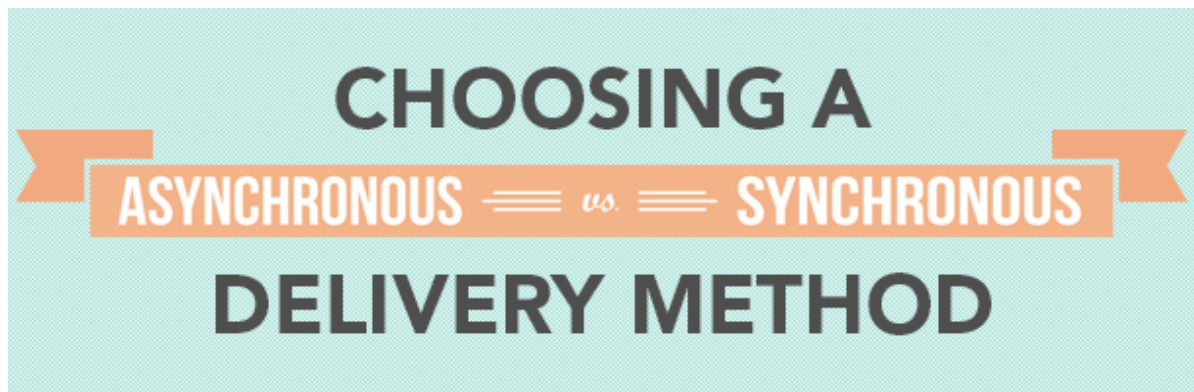


Synchronous or Asynchronous? How to Pick Your Training Delivery Method (Jun 13)



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The creation of online training presents many challenges. The design must be instructionally sound, of course—it must support and lead learners to the desired levels of skill and knowledge. But it must do much more than that.

To be successful, online learning must also match the characteristics of the learners and the nature of what it seeks to teach. It must fit the circumstances of the learners—their schedules, their proximity to each other, and their need for support from a live instructor. How can an eLearning producer satisfy all of the requirements?

Instructional designers have a vast number of options for approaching and developing training; however, there are two basic types of training to choose from: asynchronous and synchronous. Figure 1 contrasts these, and offers some guides to help you make the best choice for your situation.

Asynchronous training—also known as self-paced training—does not require students and instructors to be online or in person at the same time for instruction. This technology allows instructional designers to create courses that participants can go through on their own with little or no help from an instructor.

The type of instruction most of us remember from high school is called synchronous training, or instructor-led training, and it requires the instructor and students to be present at scheduled times—either in person or online—for instruction, discussions, and activities.

Advantages and disadvantages of asynchronous training

There are advantages and disadvantages to both types of training. Asynchronous training has some strong advantages:

- It is extremely flexible, so learners can fit it into their regular work schedule.
- The overall cost of the training is lower because there are no travel expenses.
- Participants can skip or test out of content they already know.

Like everything, it has some disadvantages as well:

- There is no immediate access to an instructor for questions or problems; this is especially an issue with highly technical or difficult content.

- Even though message boards and chat rooms allow for interaction, there is a lack of collaboration.
- Self-paced training requires a level of self-motivation to complete.

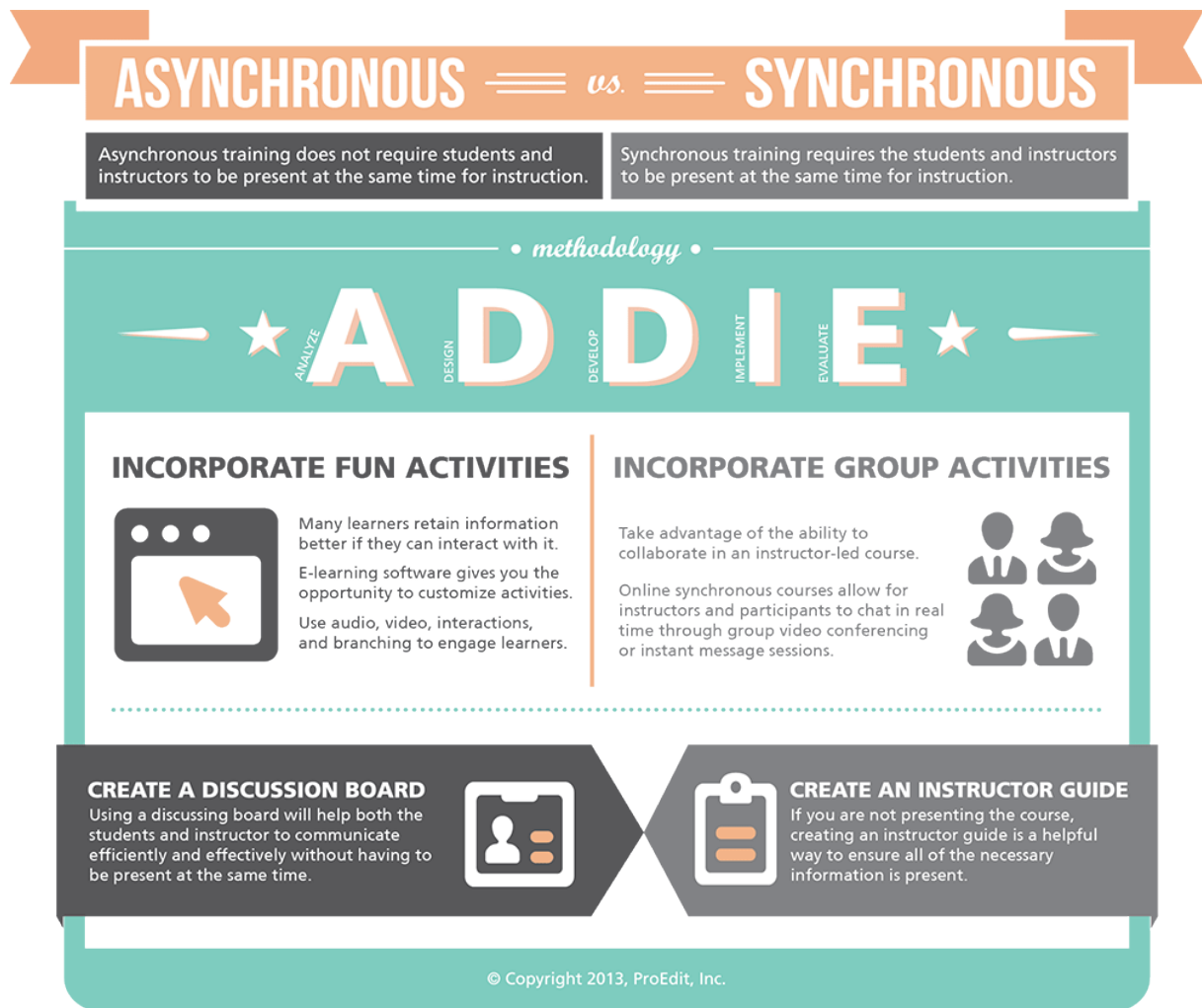


Figure 1: Asynchronous vs. synchronous (infographic by Johnathan Cunningham)

Advantages and disadvantages of synchronous training

Synchronous training has the advantage of having been the main method of training for as long as there have been people to train, so there has been ample time to improve it. Some other advantages of synchronous training include:

- Instructors can use multiple students for conducting group activities and exercises.
- Instructors can recognize when participants are confused or frustrated, and they can provide additional instruction or examples to clarify concepts.
- Learners can get their questions answered immediately and receive instant feedback.

As technology continues to expand training possibilities, the disadvantages of synchronous training become more prevalent:

- The instructor and participants have to be in the same place at the same time; for instructor-led training, this can be very costly when including travel expenses.
- The course is only as good as its trainer.

- The pace of the course must be matched to the slowest learner, and this prevents opportunities for more advanced learners to jump ahead.

How to choose between the two

A crucial step in the instructional design process is audience analysis. We need to determine what type of training will be most beneficial to the audience, and we must also consider practical matters such as Internet accessibility or instructor availability.

Before choosing a type of training, carefully evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of both types. For example, if you have learners with varying bases of knowledge who are located all over the country, then asynchronous training is the logical choice. Alternatively, if you have highly specific and difficult content that needs to be taught to learners in a central location, then synchronous training would be the better option.

Best practices for developing asynchronous training

The instructional designer usually has a lot of freedom when designing asynchronous training because of the endless possibilities technology offers. Often, the immensity can be overwhelming, so here are some best practices to help:

- Follow a methodology.
 - ADDIE is one of the most common instructional design methodologies:
 - A – Analyze
 - D – Design
 - D – Develop
 - I – Implement
 - E – Evaluate
- Incorporate fun activities.
 - Many learners retain information better if they can interact with it. eLearning software gives you the opportunity to customize activities and individualize them for projects. You can use audio narration, scenarios, images, and more to engage learners.
- Use discussion boards, if possible.
 - This will help with collaboration, and participants can get their questions answered.

Best practices for developing synchronous training

Following a methodology is a best practice for synchronous training as well; in addition, here are a few other best practices:

- Use PowerPoint wisely.
 - Only put key points in your PowerPoint presentation, and include other important information in the participant guide.
- Incorporate group activities.
 - Take advantage of the ability to collaborate in an instructor-led course.
- Create an accompanying instructor guide.
 - This is especially important if you are not presenting the course.

By choosing the most effective type of training, and developing courses with best practices in mind, we can create instruction that is entertaining, applicable, and memorable.