

GUIDANCE FOR DESIGNING ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR ADULT LEARNERS



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Introduction

The Region 5 Comprehensive Center (R5 CC) worked in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) to develop an adult learning framework and toolkit. These resources support education stakeholders in efforts to ensure all professional learning experiences implemented are:



high quality,



conducted and assessed consistently across the state, and



aligned with adult learning theories.

Technical assistance providers from R5 CC partnered with instructional design faculty to develop guidance for individuals who create asynchronous learning experiences.

This guide is a companion to the <u>Adult Learning</u> <u>Framework (ALF)</u>. It works in partnership with the framework while considering the unique challenges associated with the development of engaging and effective online, asynchronous learning experiences that have become embedded in the fabric of learning for all.

How to Use the Guide

The information contained in this guide focuses on:

- 1. the design of adult learner asynchronous learning,
- 2. the implementation of adult learner asynchronous learning, and
- 3. the selection of strategies, tools, and techniques.

The guide's appendices provide sample worksheets to support instructional planning and adult learner support.

Asynchronous Learning Definition

Asynchronous learning is distinguished by the following elements:

- » Time-based delays between instructor and learner
- » Either cohort-based (instructor facilitated) or stand-alone, self-paced (learner focused)
- » Fully online
- » Increased learner responsibility for managing time, information organization, and information synthesis

Majeski et al. (2016) defined asynchronous learning as such:

Completely asynchronous online learning with multimedia refers to learning that occurs entirely in the online classroom without a real-time component. It may include the use of multimedia such as video lectures, graphics, and/or other visual and auditory media. The asynchronous multimedia online classroom may utilize announcements, discussion board forums (e.g., threaded discussions), and course material—such as audio-embedded PowerPoints, video lectures, and other visual/auditory media—to facilitate the achievement of course learning objectives. The role of the instructor is that of a facilitator of knowledge construction, skill acquisition, and transmitter of information. The role of students is that of learners who actively engage with course materials, other students, and the instructor to understand, analyze, and apply course concepts and skills.

The assumption for development of an online training solution is that there is an identified **performance gap** due to a **lack of skills or knowledge**. The performance gap is not caused by individual motivation, policy, and/or an environmental gap.¹

Why Should Asynchronous Learning Be Considered?

Asynchronous learning plays a strategic role in the ongoing development of educators and school staff. Some of the reasons asynchronous learning experiences may be highly desirable to adult learners are:

» Adults prefer agency in their learning: High-quality, ondemand forms of learning are often advantageous and desirable to adults who prefer to choose when, how, and what they will learn. Asynchronous learning allows for this choice, grants learners agency to set a pace that's right for them, and potentially minimizes time away from their professional role in the classroom, office, or work site.

¹ See Romiszowski (1992); Rossett (1987); Chyung (2008); and Ripley (2016).

- » Adults are more open to learning when they feel respected and safe: Not all adult learners are comfortable in large-group settings, where they may feel vulnerable or uncomfortable. Asynchronous forms of learning may be a more suitable match for many.
- » Adults seek relevance and usefulness in their learning: Asynchronous learning design holds promise for facilitating learning that is targeted and role-specific, therefore enhancing usefulness and relevance for the end user.

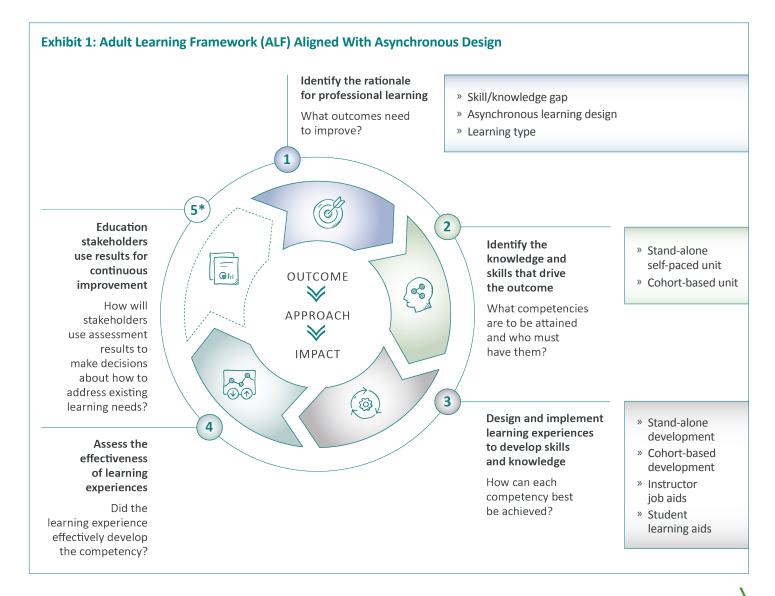
No matter the method, learning experience designers should always begin planning with the end in mind and are prompted in Step 1 of the ALF to identify the rationale for professional learning, specifically in terms of the desired outcomes for student performance (when appropriate). The decision to design an asynchronous learning experience can happen as late as Step 3d, when a designer determines a useful training method. However, there are considerations a designer may bring into the

decision-making process much sooner that solidify the intention to design an asynchronous learning experience from the start.

Additional Considerations

- » Speed with which new knowledge must be disseminated and absorbed by the field
- » Desire to offer choice of methods for learning the same content
- » Desire for flexible, just-in-time learning options for relatively static information
- » Time and resource challenges that prohibit synchronous largegroup learning experiences (virtual or in person)

Exhibit 1 illustrates where decisions regarding asynchronous learning may occur, along with additional decisions designers make related to the type of asynchronous method to employ for a given set of learning objectives. These decisions are further discussed below.



Within the context of asynchronous online learning, there are two formats: stand-alone self-paced units (single sessions) and cohort-based units.

Stand-alone self-paced units (single sessions): Some asynchronous learning takes place where there is no interaction between the learner and any instructor or other learners. Within this context, learners take on the primary responsibility for their learning. Learning is facilitated through active engagement with content. Feedback to the learner occurs through engagement with the content and the learning interface. Assessment of learning is commonly done using auto-scored quizzes. However, self-assessment can also be included by using reflective activities and/or providing self-assessment rubrics, worksheets, and questionnaires.

Stand-alone self-paced units are appropriate for promoting awareness of a content area at the level of remember and understand, as well as developing attitudes, opinions, and behaviors (affect). Examples of self-paced units include recorded webinars accompanied by an engagement guide, on-demand learning modules with embedded tasks that are housed in a learning management system (LMS), guided inquiry, and self-directed inquiry.

Cohort-based units: Some asynchronous learning takes place in cohorts, in which a group of learners engage with skills and content, as well as with one another, within time parameters. As with self-paced units, learning in cohort-based units is facilitated through active engagement. However, cohort-based learning includes additional types of engagement: learners engaging with the instructor and each other, as well as with content, to build a community of learners.

Cohort-based units are appropriate for facilitating higher levels of learning, including the development of intellectual and affective skills, as shown in Exhibit 2.

Types of Learning

Smith and Ragan (2005) used Gagné's conditions of learning and Bloom's taxonomy to create a mapping between the types of learning and levels of learning. Exhibit 2 illustrates the alignment between the types and levels of learning and the asynchronous instructional organization (stand-alone self-paced or cohort-based).

Exhibit 2: Types and Levels of Learning²

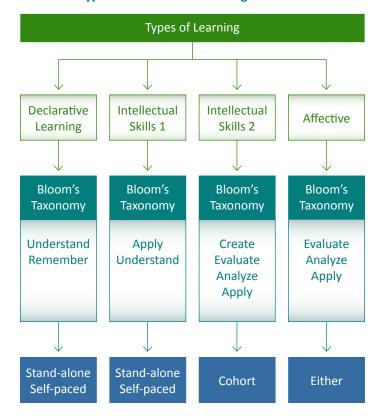


Table 1 defines each learning type and further explores its alignment with Bloom's Taxonomy² to give a clear picture of the cognitive processes that thinkers encounter at each level, along with the continuum of increasing complexity.

We provide a definition, the delivery format(s), and Bloom's Taxonomy level for each type of learning for:

- » Declarative knowledge
- » Intellectual skills 1
- » Intellectual skills 2
- » Affective skills

² https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/blooms-taxonomy/

Table 1: Cognitive Processes and Delivery Formats

DECLARATIVE KNO	WLEDGE (FACTS/INFORMATIONAL)
Definition	"require a learner to recall in verbatim, paraphrased, or summarized form facts, lists, names, or organized information. Learners are not required to apply the knowledge that they have acquired but merely to recall, recognize, or state it in their own words" (p. 79). ³
Delivery Format	Stand-alone self-paced
Bloom's Taxonomy Level	Understand Explain ideas or concepts Verbs - classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, recognize Remember Recall facts and basic concepts. Verbs - define, list, state
INTELLECTUAL SKI	LLS 1 (DISCRIMINATIONS, CONCEPTS)
Definition	"the application of rules to previously encountered examples students learn how to not only recall, but also to apply knowledge to instances not encountered during instruction" (p. 80). ³
Delivery Format	Stand-alone self-paced
Bloom's Taxonomy Level	Apply Use information in new situations Verbs - use, interpret, execute, implement, schedule Understand Explain ideas or concepts Verbs - classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, recognize
INTELLECTUAL SKI	LLS 2 (PRINCIPLES, PROCEDURES, PROBLEM SOLVING)
Definition	"the application of rules to previously encountered examples students learn how to not only recall, but also to apply knowledge to instances not encountered during instruction" (p. 80).3
Delivery Format	Cohort-based
Bloom's Taxonomy Level	Create Produce new or original work Verbs - Design, construct, develop, formulate, investigate Evaluate Justify a decision Verbs - Appraise, argue, defend, judge, support, critique, value Analyze Draw connections among ideas Verbs - Compare, contrast, question, test, relate Apply Use information in new situations Verbs - use, interpret, execute, implement, schedule

³ Smith and Ragan (2005).

Table 1: Cognitive Processes and Delivery Formats (Continued)

AFFECTIVE SKILLS	
Definition	" a mental state that predisposes a learner to choose to behave in a certain way attitudes influence the choices learners make" (p. 82). ³
Delivery Format	Stand-alone self-paced Cohort-based
Bloom's Taxonomy Level	Evaluate Justify a decision Verbs - Appraise, argue, defend, judge, support, critique, value
	Analyze Draw connections among ideas Verbs - Compare, contrast, question, test, relate
	Apply Use information in new situations Verbs - use, interpret, execute, implement, schedule

Situating Asynchronous Learning Along a Progression of Learning

The ALF describes three phases that are useful in capturing the intent of a learning experience. The movement from awareness through capacity and on to implementation represents increasing complexity and demand in the application of skills and knowledge for adult learners. Designers should thoughtfully and skillfully consider the match between session type and learning phase, as described below.

Session Types

Each session type contains a number of differing organizational elements to be considered in the design and development of stand-alone self-paced or cohort-based learning. While each session type may use the same LMS or content delivery platform, the design and delivery of the learning, the types of LMS tools, and the student assessments implemented may differ. Table 2 presents an overview of considerations a designer brings to each session type.

Table 2: Session Type Organizational Elements

	STAND-ALONE SELF-PACED	COHORT-BASED
Learning Management and Content Delivery	» Self-paced modules» Video slide deck» Quizzes/exams» Handouts	» Video slide deck» Threaded discussions» Quizzes/exams» Instructor prompts
Levels of Learning (Bloom's Taxonomy)	» Apply» Understand» Remember	» Create» Evaluate» Analyze» Apply
Learning Phase	Awareness	» Capacity building » Implementation
Instructor Role (Type of Engagement)	» Course structure » Course organization	Active, ongoing engagement throughout training

Table 2: Session Type Organizational Elements (Continued)

	STAND-ALONE SELF-PACED	COHORT-BASED
Learner Role (Type of Engagement)	Self-directed learner-to-content engagement facilitated by course activities	 » Learner-to-instructor engagement facilitated by instructor » Peer-to-peer engagement facilitated by course activities » Learner-to-content engagement facilitated by course activities
Tools	 » Advance organizer » Session worksheets » Auto-scored quizzes » Rubrics⁴ » Self-assessments 	 » Advance organizer » Session worksheets » Auto-scored quizzes » Rubrics⁴ » Self-assessments » Discussion boards » Project-based tasks » Group projects
Techniques	 » Intentional integration of asynchronous tools⁵ » Feedback⁶⁷⁸ » Cognitive strategies » Authenticity strategies » Self-regulated strategies » Reflective strategies » Student support⁹ 	 » Intentional integration of asynchronous tools⁵ » Discussion boards⁵ » Instructor prompts » Adding information » Asking follow-up and guided questions » Learner-to-learner interactions¹⁰ » Feedback⁶⁷ » Cognitive strategies » Authenticity strategies » Self-regulated strategies » Reflective strategies » Student support⁹
Assessments	» Self-scoring quizzes» Exams» Self-assessment rubrics	 » Self-scoring quizzes » Exams » Projects » Collaborative projects » Case studies

⁴ Wyss et al. (2014).

⁵ Zhu (2006). 6 Giacumo and Wilhelmina (2020).

⁷ Guo et al. (2014).

Hattie and Timperley (2007).
 Dickson (2016).

¹⁰ Oyarzun et al. (2018).

Techniques to Promote Engagement

Zhu (2006) noted the intentional integration of asynchronous tools was an important element of online learning:

The findings show that it is unrealistic to assume that online discussion will engage and improve interaction between students and instructors and among students themselves under any circumstances. The study also confirms that interaction does not simply occur due to the discussion online, but it must be intentionally integrated into the discussion and course (Berge, 1999; King & Doerfert, 1996), and nurtured by the instructor and students. The findings further reveal that an instructor's course/discussion design rather than the online environment (i.e., easy [sic] of posting messages and replying to peers' message[s]) that may regulate students' posting behaviors. Other factors that contributed to the types of interaction are found to be instructors' role in the discussion, facilitation, and discussion questions (p. 471).

Extrapolating Zhu's (2006) findings regarding online discussion boards, regardless of the asynchronous tool selected, designers should intentionally integrate these tools into their designs rather than relying on learners or instructors to make the connection between availability and intentionality. Some of the techniques outlined in Table 3 are defined below, with examples provided.

Discussions (Using Discussion Board Tool)

"[L]earners do not learn because they join a group or because technology was added to the course design; they learn when they perform activities that trigger specific learning mechanisms (Dillenbourg, 1999), and their activities, in turn, stimulate dialogue with others" (p. 85).11

Dialogue is present when two or more individuals engage in response to one another. Incorporation of discussion boards or forums into an asynchronous course encourages dialogue; however, specific strategies should be employed to ensure learners engage in dialogue.

Instructor Strategies

- » Provide discussion instructions and prompts.
- » Ask follow-up questions that prompt learners to provide deeper, not superficial, responses.
- » Provide additional resources.

The degree of engagement by learners is impacted by instructor presence. Learners need to feel their posts are being read; however, instructors should not appear to take over the discussion. Responding too quickly, without allowing other learners to engage first, can discourage peers from participating.¹²

Table 3. Suggested Techniques for Instructors by Delivery Format

Technique	Provide explicit and relevant prompts that promote analysis of concepts, principles, and processes; provide the opportunity for unique responses; and encourage learners to relate concepts to their past experience. ¹² ¹³
Delivery Format	Cohort-based
Examples	 Explain why Explain how How is [new knowledge] related to [your prior knowledge]? Can you think of a time when you've [some process or procedure that requires new content]? How are and similar or different? What do you think would happen if? Provide a case example and provide discussion prompt: How would you respond in this situation? What strategies would you use to solve this problem?
Technique	Ask follow-up and guided questions ⁶ 12

¹¹ LaPointe and Gunawardena (2004).

¹² Dennen (2005).

¹³ Mayer (2008).

Table 3. Suggested Techniques for Instructors by Delivery Format (Continued)

Delivery Format	Cohort-based
Examples	 » Can you give us an example? » Tell us more about that? » What are we missing from our discussion? » Are there alternative explanations to?
Technique	Add information to discussion boards ⁶
Delivery Format	Cohort-based
Examples	For additional readings or information of the posts made by student/group 1, please see
Technique	Add information to discussion boards ⁶
Delivery Format	Cohort-based
Examples	 » For additional readings or information of the posts made by student/group 1, please see » Author/Website has a good posting related to our topic from module 1 » Note that student 1 and student 2 have presented two sides to the issue » Add frame type one or type two (see below) or a concept map to summarize discussion board » List main points from discussion board
DDOMOTING	A ACTIVE I FADNING

PROMOTING ACTIVE LEARNING

Several strategies are useful for promoting active engagement by individual learners with the content. Learning designers choose strategies based on the type(s) of learning and related desired outcomes of a learning event. Several engagement strategies are described below.

INSTRUCTOR STRATEGIES

- » Cognitive strategies
- » Self-regulated strategies
- » Authenticity strategies
- » Reflective strategies

Table 3. Suggested Techniques for Instructors by Delivery Format (Continued)

COGNITIVE STRATEGIES Definition "... used to support information processing: these include selecting information to attend to, promoting the encoding and storage of information, and enhancing retrieval" (p. 244).14 Delivery Stand-alone self-paced Format Cohort-based Mnemonic Strategies:13 Memory aids that help learners remember facts. Mnemonic aids can be provided or learners Types can be encouraged to create their own. » Name Mnemonics: e.g., ROY G. BIV to remember the colors of the light spectrum (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet) » Visual Mnemonics: e.g., from physics, The Right-Hand Rule to determine the direction of current flow.¹⁵ » Music Mnemonics: e.g., The ABC song. Structure Strategies: 13 Strategies that help learners organize information. » Outline: using a structured outline, have learners fill in the information.

» Frames:16 Provide a visual display and organization of information.

Definition

Term

> **Type One:** "... a grid, a matrix, or a framework for representing knowledge ... The frames include labels of main ideas in rows and columns" (p. 60). Frames can be used to help organize facts, ideas, concepts, examples, concepts, procedures, processes, descriptions, and explanations (p. 60).

Example

- > **Type Two:** "The distinguishing feature of frames, type two, is that some law-like principle or statement allows, through inference, the completion of slots [or cells]. The principle is used to construct facts logically, to elicit personal knowledge from memory and to place that knowledge into the visual array, grid or frame" (p. 78).
- » **Concept maps:**¹⁷ Have learners draw visual representations of concepts or processes. Later, the instructor can provide a concept map for comparison.

Generative Strategies: strategies that help learners connect new information to prior knowledge and their experiences.

- » Propose questions: Instruct learners to write down questions they have as they work through the unit materials.
- » Write a summary: Instruct learners to write a summary, in their own words, of the content presentation (readings, videos, etc.).
- » **Develop a visual summary:** Instruct learners to create a visual representation of the unit materials.
- » Personal stories: Write about an experience that comes to mind when studying a unit.

SELF-REGULATED STRATEGIES

SELF-KEGUL	DELL-KEGOLAIED SIKAIEGIES		
Definition	" strategies that promote self-regulated learning and a degree of intellectual independence are those where students are encouraged to engage with learning activities that are self-directed and autonomous" (p. 2).18		
Delivery Format	Stand-alone self-paced Cohort-based		

 $^{^{14}}$ Smith and Ragan (2005).

¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Right-hand_rule

¹⁶ West et al. (1991).

¹⁷ Novak and Canäs (2008).

Table 3. Suggested Techniques for Instructors by Delivery Format (Continued)

SELF-REGULATED STRATEGIES

Types

- » Pre-instruction self-assessments of skills and knowledge
- » Learning contracts
- » Daily or weekly list of tasks/goals
- » Forum/discussion board where learners can post any questions or problems and share solutions
- » Self-scoring quizzes
- » Tutorials to support learning

AUTHENTICITY STRATEGIES

Definition	"Authentic activities provide students with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills needed for specific contexts, jobs and roles." (p. 5)18
Delivery Format	Stand-alone self-paced Cohort-based
Types	 » Providing authentic/contextual cases and examples » Problem-based activities using "real" cases examples

REFLECTIVE STRATEGIES

Definition	" a deliberate act of thinking about past or future events in which a perceived problem or activity is examined" (p. 4)18
Delivery Format	Stand-alone self-paced Cohort-based
Types	 » Reflective journals » Peer-to-peer assessments (cohort) » Peer-to-peer sharing of reflective journals (cohort) » "What if" discussion threads

. .

¹⁸ Luca and Oliver (2002).

Appendices

Session Planning Worksheet¹⁹

GAGNÉ'S NINE EVENTS	LEARNING PROCESS	PLANNING NOTES: HOW IS THE EVENT GOING TO BE ACCOMPLISHED?
1. Gaining attention	Reception of patterns of neural impulses	
2. Informing the learner of the objective	Activating a process of executive control	
Stimulating recall of prerequisite learning	Retrieval of prior learning to working memory	
Presenting the stimulus material	Emphasizing features for selective perception	
5. Providing learning guidance	Semantic encoding; cues for retrieval	
6. Eliciting the performance	Activating response organization	
7. Providing feedback about performance correctness	Establishing reinforcement	
8. Assessing the performance	Activating retrieval; making reinforcement possible	
9. Enhancing retention and transfer	Providing cues and strategies for retrieval	

¹⁹ Gagné et al. (2005).

Self-Directed Learner Session Worksheet (Pre-Session)

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М	Modify questions to match session purpose and information.			
1.	What are the session objectives?			
2.	What are my desired outcomes for this session?			
3.	What do I already know about the topic?			
4.	What questions do I have?			

Self-Directed Learner Session Worksheet (Post-Session)		
М	Modify questions to match session purpose and information.	
1.	How will the information in the session impact me?	
2.	What questions do I still have?	
3.	Are there any follow-up action items I need to undertake?	

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