

The Ultimate Guide

How To Create Great eLearning Content



Table of Contents

eLearning Design & Content Roadmap	4
SMEs, Stakeholders, and Roles	12
Writing Essentials for Authoring On-screen Content	18
Tips & Tricks for Audio/Video Narration	24
Creating Enhanced Learner Assessments	30
Creating Interactive & Immersive Content	39
UI/UX Best Practices for eLearning	45
Ensure Efficacy & Accessibility in Your Content	49
Sharing Content: What Are Your Options?	55
Final Thoughts & Examples	57

About the Author



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1. Quickstart: eLearning Design & Content Roadmap

When referring to eLearning or instructional design, we mean the entire process of creating and authoring, from concept to deployment. What we'll focus in this part on is getting the project done in an effective manner.

Methodologies

All of you know and probably work with different methodologies, like Waterfall, ADDIE, and SAM. Perhaps your company or clients expect you to work in Agile or an iterative SCRUM-like environment, or you have your own methodologies. What's more important is to understand that there is always a pipeline you need to go through no matter what. Even if it's your own internal process.

The first bit of advice would be to develop your own process. If you don't have any yet, just go and find one. Try Agile, SCRUM, ADDIE, or any other you like, or create your own hybrid method. Whether you give it a name or not, learn it and stick to it, as it's very important in terms of getting your job done.

General content roadmap



Planning. At this stage, you're gathering all the information and identifying the key personnel and subject matter experts (SMEs). It's also time to plan and schedule each stage of your eLearning project, clarify different responsibilities and define everyone's understanding of the project or the content.

Goals and objectives. This doesn't necessarily mean creating a list of objectives that you'd normally see at the beginning of any presentation. It can also mean what level of ability you want someone to have at the end. It's very important to define how your learners would transform after taking the course and what skills would they obtain.

Audience. Understand your learner and make every decision based on your audience. What devices are they using? What do you expect them to do? Will they really study on the subway? Is this something they can take home or is it just-in-time learning? Do you have staff to augment and support your learners after you train them? These are the questions you need to ask and answer, as you go along.

Learning platforms. Think about learning platforms. Many of us have to work within LMSs or LRSs. In producing for an LMS or LRS, some testing

needs to be done. For example, if your SCORM package is communicating with an LMS, make sure you allow time for that.

UI. You'll also need to understand how to create content for different devices. Think about how your material will work and look on different screens, and how the learners will experience it.

Here's a distilled collection of things to talk about, whatever methodology you're using:

- who are the key players?
- what is the reason for this learning?
- who is the audience?
- what devices are they on?
- where does it have to live after I've created it?
- what is the best experience and clearest layout for users?

Planning and pre-development stage

There are a few things you should consider before any content is created, any assets are assigned, and before you even open PowerPoint for the first time.

Gathering data. Information and all the things you'll need to shape the content.

- Who's your audience and what's their "story"? (The learner's story is those small vignettes and questionnaires that you have to answer for yourself).
- What's the device?
- What's the platform?

Plan. Many of us work with storyboards; some of us call it wireframing. Agree on the visuals on this stage, and have your clients give you the OK for the fonts, colors, etc.

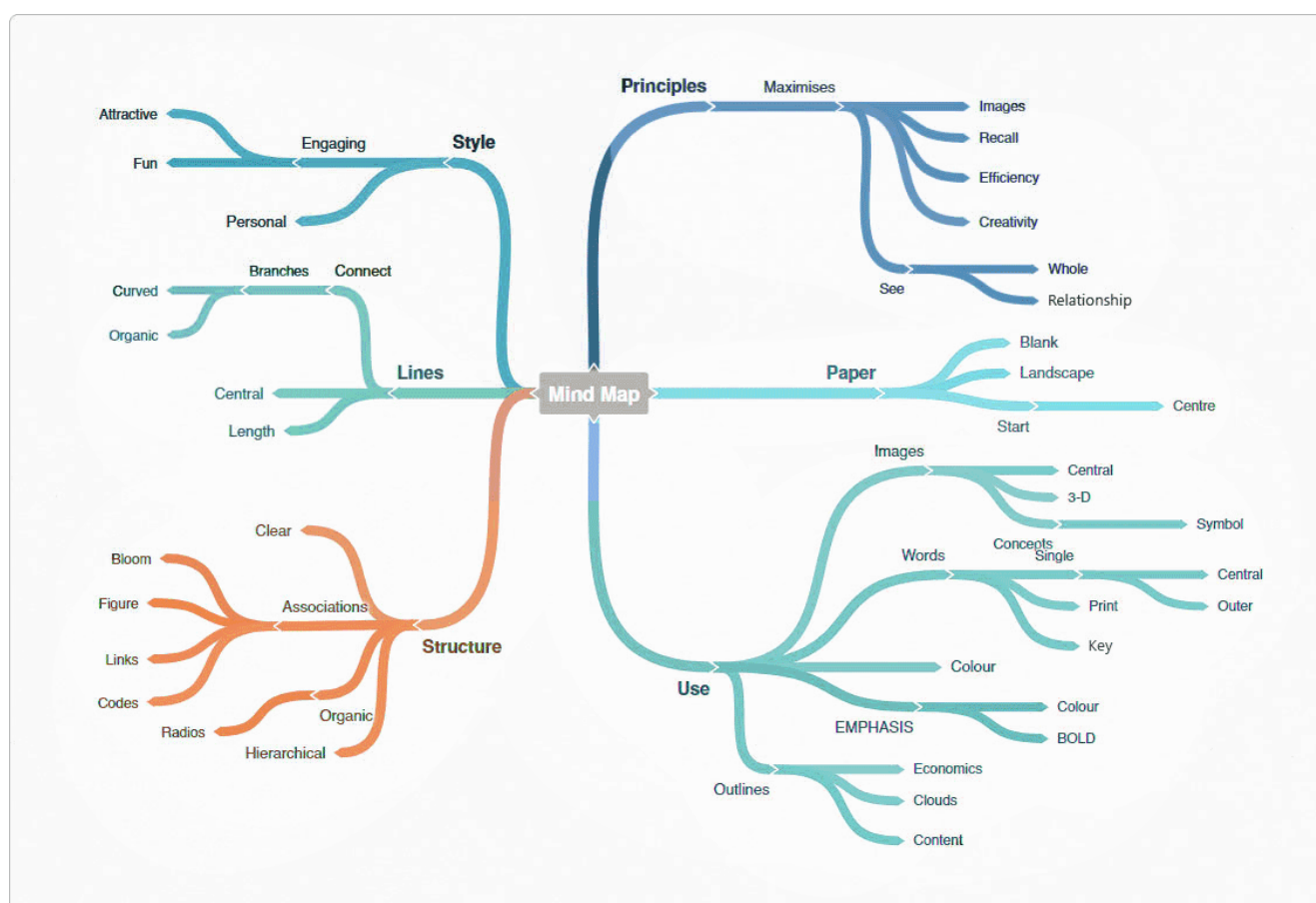
Key people. Find out who the core people are, who you bring questions to, who you get approval from.

Schedule. Define the schedule and timeline. Make sure you understand the timeline and have enough time for any unexpected issues.

Roadblocks. Give yourself enough Plan Bs.

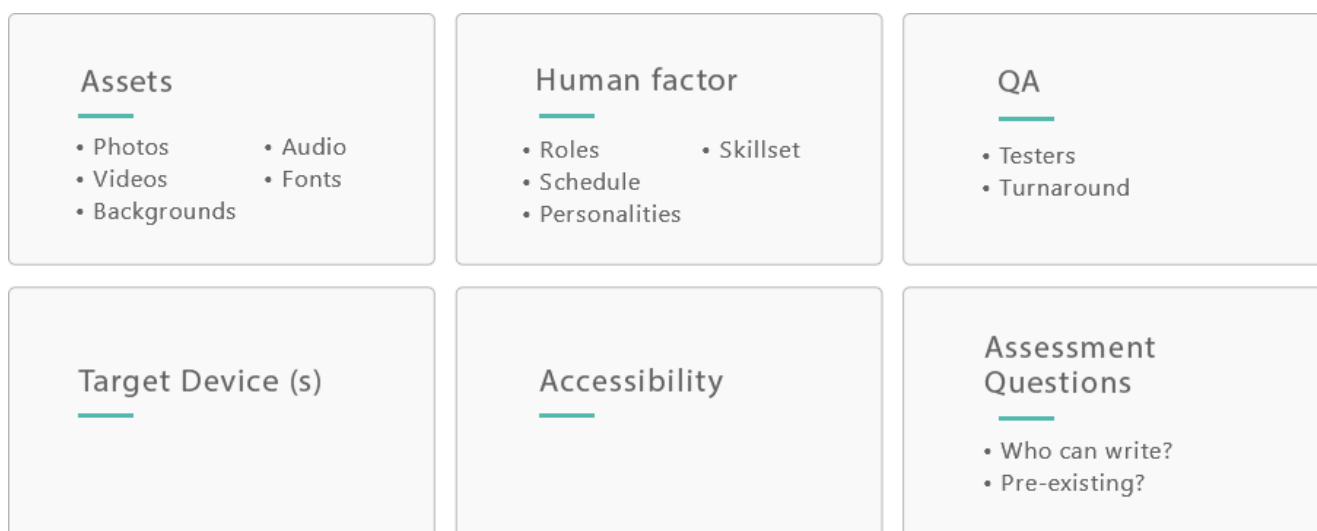
Useful tools

As you begin developing and planning, a mind map is a good tool to work with. It's a productive way to get in, see what's involved in the content, how it's branching out, and what you have to do with it. You can also bring it to your stakeholders to get their feedback and ideas.



Another useful thing to do is to get the client to sign off on a design document. That would be the colors, the fonts, the graphic resources, and how it's going to look. You may have a person on your team who usually handles that part of it. However, it's always good to have a resource to go back to.

Additional things to consider



Assets are very important, especially if you want to go from a level-one “page turner” to level two, more interactive and robust content. This includes things like photos, videos, backgrounds, audio narrations, etc.

Human factor. When working with other people, keep in mind that there are different roles, goals, personal perspectives, and even different schedules. Someone’s going on vacation, someone has to take a leave. Some personalities may, unfortunately, adversely affect your content creation as you go along. So be aware that it happens.

QA. It actually takes time to go through your content, document any bugs or issues, and to get it fixed.

Devices and accessibility. Understand what devices your learners will be looking at your content on. Make sure it’s accessible to your learners.

Also make sure you understand your **assessment questions**. Do you have people writing questions for you? Are you pulling from a centralized question bank? Where is it, and who has access to it? Know these answers before any questions come up.

Tips and tricks

Pitfalls to avoid

Less is more. Having a clean and simple screen for your learners is strongly suggested and highly necessary. So make sure you “use less” and are succinct in how you’re telling the story and communicating your ideas in an effective manner.

Less is more, except when you’re providing information. Allow learners to get more information. That can be as simple as creating links to resources or a list of glossary entries. Make sure your learners can dig deeper for a deeper learning experience.

Scope creep. This refers to anytime the scope of the project, or its schedule, continues to get bigger or extends for whatever reason. On a large scale, scope creep can kill a project, whereas minor creep just adds a couple of days to a project. Even though you can’t avoid it, make sure you have a contingency plan to deal with it.

Re-edits. This is a common issue. All you can do is to allow enough time in the planning process. Plus, plan out and reach an agreement with your team and stakeholders as to what happens if there are re-edits, and what

happens if the deadline needs to be pushed.

Another pitfall occurs when designers and testers aren't familiar with LMSs, or don't understand how SCORM or xAPI works. Clarify this before you start.

Time savers

As you look at your entire process plan, think about what's going to take the most time. Recording audio? Video? Re-edits? The earlier you can hammer out the scripts for those, the earlier you can hammer out some kind of framework to get those done. Sometimes having a compressed timeline means that anytime there's any delay, it blows the project out.

Establish your conventions early. What will be the names for files? What kind of version control will be used? At what point is something archived? You may end up creating versions 1 to 99, so at what point are versions 1 to 98 archived? Establish this in your team and identify this in a document.

2. SMEs, Stakeholders, & Roles: What You Should Know

Subject matter experts (SMEs)

There's no single definition for SMEs. The thing that sets them apart is their relevant expertise. In most cases, SMEs aren't someone from outside the project; usually, an SME is someone who has specific knowledge within the given focus. Sometimes instructional designers or developers are the SMEs. SMEs are extremely important for both the success of your content and its efficacy for learners.

Stakeholders

A stakeholder is any independent party that has an interest or concern in what you're doing. Many of us work in specific enterprise-level projects, or have clients and thus have multiple stakeholders; we have rules and policies, and people who make decisions and/or pay the bills.

There are always plenty of people bringing their concerns to the table (or bench). Some we're simply obliged to listen to, but many of them are actually important to the success of the project, and others have unique merit.

In any case, it's essential to realize that stakeholders are something you'll have to deal with, no matter what. What you have to do is to manage their expectations.

Managing expectations



"Plate Spinning" by Henrik Bothe CC BY-SA 4.0

Sometimes you may find yourself not only developing the content, but managing the entire project. Plus, whether or not managing the project is officially part of your job description, you may often find yourself divided between managing the project and actually doing the course.

It's a common challenge. Keep it in mind in the pre-planning stage, as

your particular methodology or roadmap will be the key in this situation. Even if you aren't a project manager, you still have to deal with various moving parts like SMEs or getting feedback from others.

A good practice is to make backup plans. Keeping a project schedule is wise, especially if you know your stakeholders have a lot of input which can actually help your course, but that's going to add time in the overall process. Add some padding into every phase of the project, because where people are involved, there's always the potential to spend a lot more time working things out.

Your real role



What my mom think I do



What I think I do



What society thinks I do



What really I do

In fact, no matter what your role is, your real role is **being the learner's advocate**. No matter what your stakeholders say or what your content is, you're doing the best for your learner. No matter how you've planned each phase and given yourself leeway, remember that all the content is to be learner-centric.

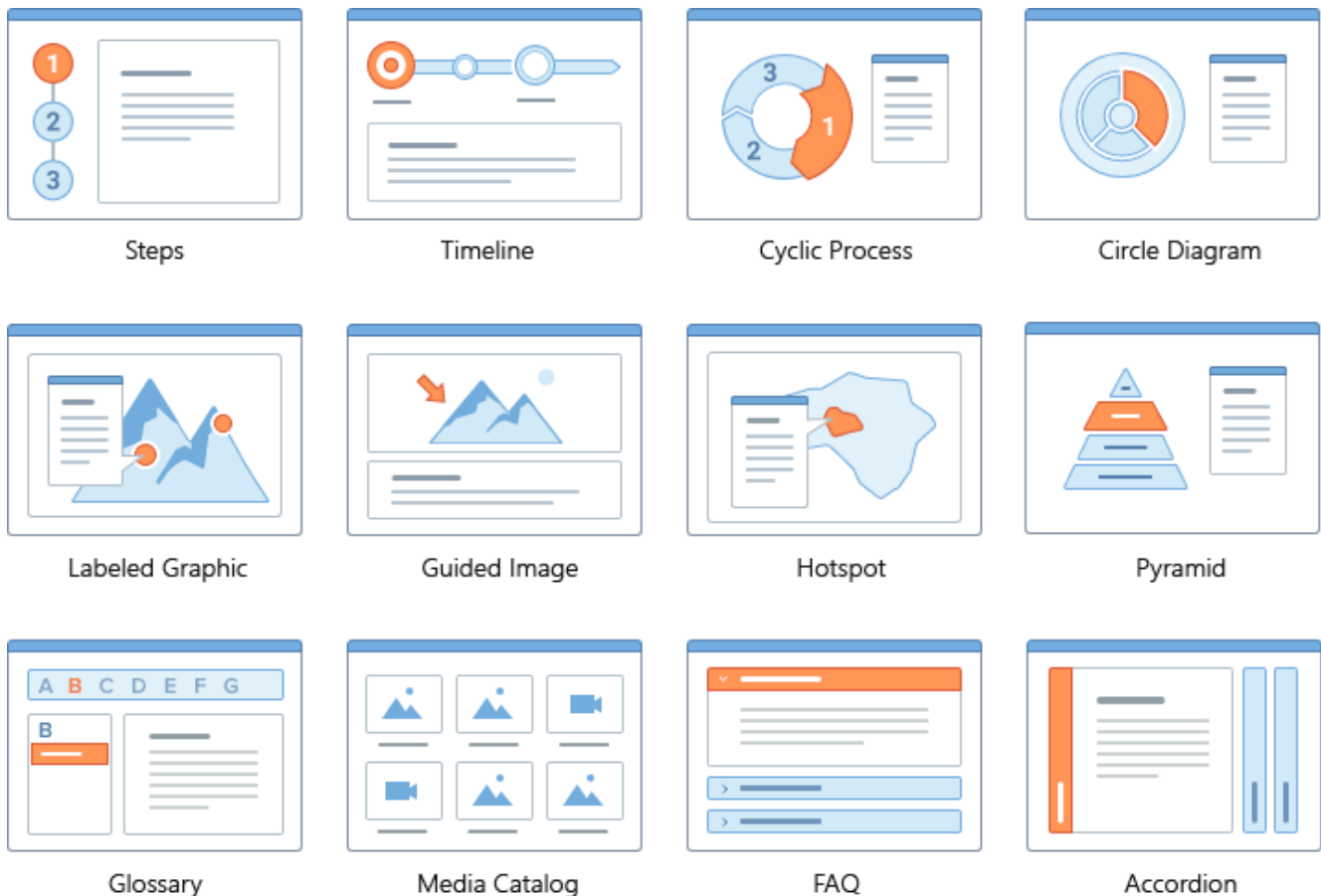
The point of being an advocate is that you understand who your learners are, how they learn, and what their preferences are. And you need to honestly tell yourself if you'd like to take your course or not. If you wouldn't, then maybe you need to redesign it or think about ways you can arouse some interest.

Success strategies

Many times, dealing with SMEs or other people who help to produce the content, your job is to distill it all down to the core message. So rather than presenting loads of information, one way to share the message is allowing learners to dig deeper. The idea is to distill the message into a broad concept and succinctly present it on a screen.

One easy way to provide additional information while still being concise is to create interactions in PowerPoint. You can express ideas visually in short animations or vignettes, making a simple page-turner, rather than having words and images on screen.

In [iSpring Suite](#), you can take advantage of 12 well-designed interactions to present complex concepts, diagrams, and catalogs, help learners digest material, and save you gobs of time.



You don't need to insert interactions all the time. Use interactions like seasoning in cooking. Let's say you love pepper and it's great with grilled meat, but too much is too much and it ruins the flavor, so use them responsibly.

Plus, capturing additional information from SMEs and allowing them to create their own video or audio really helps to boost the interest level. Allowing them to do that cuts down on the on-screen text and allows things to be more robust.

Whether you use just on-screen information or interactions, make sure that you do so as a learner advocate. Also, be on guard to make sure you aren't using too many cool things just to use them.

You are an SME

Most of us wear a lot of hats in our own projects, especially if we have various clients. It's very important that we regard our own knowledge and expertise to be equally as important as the ones we're pulling from. Make sure that you value your own information and guidance as well though, and understand that you're doing all this for the learners.

3. Copy! Writing Essentials for Authoring On-screen Content & Narration Scripts

On-screen text

When we create things for the screen, we need to provide information in a concise manner and clearly communicate our ideas to learners, as we have a very limited space for it. That's why the first rule of authoring on-screen text is to have your core information in a "less is more" style. So how much text should you actually put on screen? The short answer is not too much.

Many of you are familiar with the idea of chunking. Its basic function is taking a lot of content and compressing it down to bite-sized chunks, something that's easy to consume for the learners.

The main point when working with on-screen content is to gather all information from our SMEs and other sources, distill it down to its core concept, and provide that core concept to the learners.

But often we need to provide some additional information. And while you may have only a 140-character limit like on Twitter, you still may be able to support your information with audio, drill-down or would-you-like-to-learn-more information. So there's no need to fill the screen up with text.

Many of you may also be familiar with the mobile-first development process, meaning you design with the idea that the content will look good on all screens, even the smallest ones. The content needs to be visible, whether it's viewed on a tablet or a smartphone. However, that doesn't mean you should target all possible devices. Focus primarily on smaller screens and then go up.

Narration scripts

Most everybody knows the playful acronym K.I.S.S. – “keep it simple, stupid.” You really need to keep writing for speaking simple. For instance, you may have very concise medical or scientific information that needs to be consumed by your learners, and you may have the core aspects on screen; but your narration needs to be of a little more common language or at least easier for a narrator both to speak and be heard.

And speaking of different abbreviations, they can be big obstacles if you have tons of them in your script. Write them out and make sure the narrator understands their meaning.

Another important aspect that we sometimes forget when creating scripts and narrating is transitional phrasing. Some examples include “now that we... (have learned such and such, understand this, and etc.)”, “let's examine...”, or “let's shift gears...”. Sometimes things as simple as just using the right phrase to introduce a new topic or a sentence will help quite a bit.

I like to use Siri to record what I want to say, then copy the text into a doc and edit the language/grammar for a script.

**Carrie Cooper,
eLearner**

For some developers, it's a problem to convince SMEs to write a script for audio narration. The solution is just to tell them: "Ok, let's see what you have to say. Let's do it in a practice session." Have them sit down and talk, then play that recording for them and ask their true feelings. Many times we don't sound like we think we do. That's a great point when we show someone what they can create just on the fly: "That was good, but we can make it better with a script. Did you hear how many times you said Um?"

And lastly, as soon as we write a narration script and get feedback from others, often we have to rewrite scripts. It's important to include this in the pipeline. Rewrites happen, and sometimes re-recording happens for our narrators.

How much narration?

You don't need to narrate everything. Many of us have been inundated with death by PowerPoint, when you had someone presenting a slide and they read every single word on screen. Remember we were talking about being a learner advocate? You don't want to sit through that sort of training or presentation, so don't give that to your learners.

Common sense tells us to let the learners be able to turn a narration off or down. There's a delicate balance between creating narration that's easy

on the ears, something that can be heard, that supports and augments the information on screen, but also one that you can turn off and still get the full information.

Tips for speakers

Quiet place. Get to the quietest possible place. When you edit audio, you notice that there are a lot of noises that we don't hear. Make sure that ambient noise isn't a part of your learning, because no one wants to hear dogs barking in the background.

If you don't have a special recording studio, you can try to use different locations like a walk-in closet (clothing helps muffle some of the noise).

A good place to record is in a vehicle in a garage for a totally soundproof environment.

Randy Shuttleworth
eLearner

The same day. Try to get as much recording time as you can with you and your artist on the same day, because voices can change day to day, even from morning to afternoon.

I have advice: when recording, and you mess up, just pause, then start again. No need to stop and start recording. In editing, you search for the big pause indicated by the sound bars, and you can edit it out.

Laura Stark
eLearner

If you have a re-recording at a later date and your voice doesn't seem the same, there are some tips to fix that. Firstly, the interspersing of time between the two recordings sometimes helps. Plus, there are many ways to edit your audio to adjust the sound levels, and if you have good audio people, lean on them for some help to make it sound the same. In any case, just do your best to sound not too loud or too soft compared to the previous recording.

Another tip I got to make editing easier is to clap or snap your fingers to make a blip in the audio file; helps to make it easy to find the place you want to edit or remove.

Fern Kushner
eLearner

Good mic. Use a good quality external microphone. Pretest it and adjust it to get the clearest audio possible.

For our company, we have found having a quality microphone is the biggest help. It makes the clearest sound and picks up fantastic audio. Recordings we used in the past with just computer audio weren't the best quality.

Alexandria Jarrett
e-Learner

Interjecting energy. Interjecting energy sometimes can be done in the script, but remember the benefits of getting a voice-over artist. You can get someone with a voice that sounds really good, that is comfortable, puts people at ease, and allows them to receptively get information.

If you create audio on your own, do some recordings and let someone else listen to it and say if it sounds exciting enough. Some of us can be quite monotonous, so chopping a long speech into short chunks and providing an on-screen graphic to support that can add some excitement.

Moisturized lips. Believe or not, simple things like lip balm, chapstick, and water are essential things. When lips get dry, they begin sticking together, and when the mouth gets dry, it begins not forming words correctly.

Scripts in projects. There's a small joke: scripts are either in scope or out of scope. So remember as you try to do your script writing, rewrites and re-records happen. Sometimes you may have things that are out of your control like having a lot of translations and content, typographical errors, etc.

If you don't plan it, you quickly get scope creep, either because of the on-screen content or the text part of the narration. These can also include things like closed captions that you need to reformat in some cases, especially if you use spacing and pausing for transcripts, or any other assisting technology.

Make sure you create your texts or narration scripts early in the development process to reserve time for reedits.

4. Action! Tips & Tricks for Audio/Video Narration & Editing

Pro or DIY?

Whether you're thinking of doing your own voiceover or hiring a talent, try to choose one who is experienced in the field of content that you are working on. For instance, if you've ever created eLearning content for US air traffic controllers, you surely noticed there are a lot of acronyms and phrasing that needs to be used. Having someone already steeped in that information definitely helps.



It makes sense to consider getting a VO artist, especially when you need a voice with character; someone with good inflection, who sounds welcoming, or conveys excitement in their narration. Of course, this depends on your budget as well.

To decide if you should use a VO talent or do it yourself is always a challenge. However, here's a piece of advice: whatever your budget can allow and whatever your audience responds well to, go for that.

Audio Equipment & Recording Basics

There's a [guide on the iSpring blog](#) on how to choose the best equipment, and the basics of what to look for.



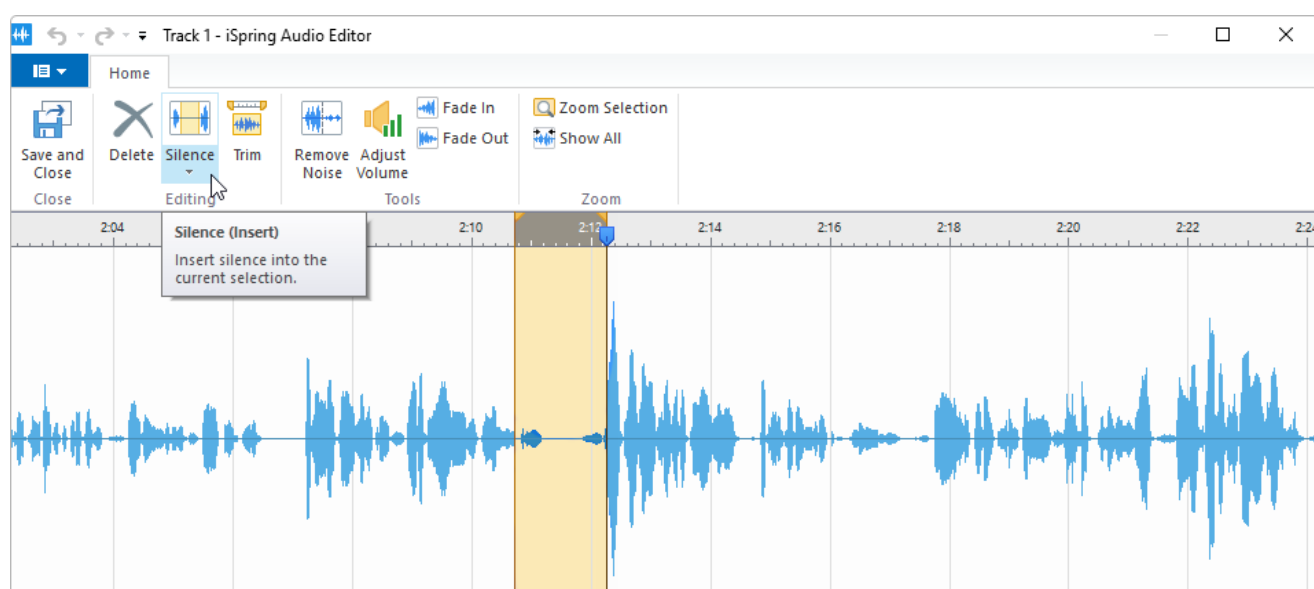
However, many of us may not have a wide choice and only have a headset mic. In this case, try to do your best when you do get ready to record. In the previous chapter, we discussed some tips and tricks for narrators. They include lip moisturizing, reading the script aloud in front of someone, and finding a quiet place for recording.

A lot of recordings have been done in walk-in closets because

clothing reduces the noise and muffles the echo. Plus, there are some other ambient noises that you might not be aware of: try to stay away from electrical equipment or fluorescent lights, as they can have a hum that can be picked up by your microphone.

And if you have your microphone on a desk or any other surface, the vibration from the desk itself (or whatever the surface is) can also be picked up, so attempt to get a microphone that's either free-standing or free-hanging, or use a microphone stand to reduce vibration. They also make some equipment where you can put the microphone in the stand, and it actually suspends it from vibration.

Editing Audio With iSpring



There are many ways to record a narration audio in [iSpring Suite](#) and many ways to edit it: we can record or import audio, trim it, synchronize our timings with the audio slide by slide, and we can also adjust volume and remove noise, and even silence a whole section.

How to remove noise. There are two ways we can eliminate different unwanted sounds like mouth smacking: we can adjust the volume all the way down (maybe do that a couple of times), or we could add silence.

We need to pay attention to areas in between the main speaking parts.

They may include breaths or something like that. We can use **Silence** for the areas where there's no actual speaking, or grab the whole section and trim it in order to have more concise timing. There's also an option to partially reduce the volume for all the parts of the recording to match them up a little bit better.

Importing, Recording & Editing Video With iSpring

If you're going to give a video lecture, there are a lot of things to consider. Many of you will probably use built-in or external webcams. Just like with microphones, the rule of thumb is to always try and get the best quality available. On the [iSpring blog](#), there's a lot of great tips and tricks on how to pick a camera if you're going to create video lectures.

Just like with audio, iSpring allows to import a video with the **Video** button in the **Manage Narration** section.

With iSpring Suite, you can record your screen, webcam, or both and enhance videos with annotations, transitions, and intro slides. Any video

can be timed with slide content.

Same with audio, iSpring allows to remove background noise, trim some parts, adjust the volume, synchronize it with slides, etc. You can find a blogpost on the [iSpring website](#) on how to edit a video.

Physical Environment

If you have an external webcam or camera, there are some other considerations you need to keep in mind. The first one is to have the best



light possible in the area where you plan to capture your video. Whether it's steady ambient light like indirect sunlight, or artificial, make sure everything looks good.

The second thing to consider is a backdrop. It always makes sense to have a good backdrop behind you in order to avoid unwanted distractions. But if you're capturing it with an external cam, you can consider something like a green screen.

Where To Add Audio and Video

You can add audio and video in many places: inside each question of a quiz, on slides, and branching to different videos depending on whether someone has gotten a specific score in the quiz or the answer was false.

You can also apply different presentation modes. Make your video take up the larger part of your screen while your presentation takes up the small part of the screen, and vice versa. If you wish, you can make the video and the slides take up equal parts of the screen; that depends on the player and layout you choose.

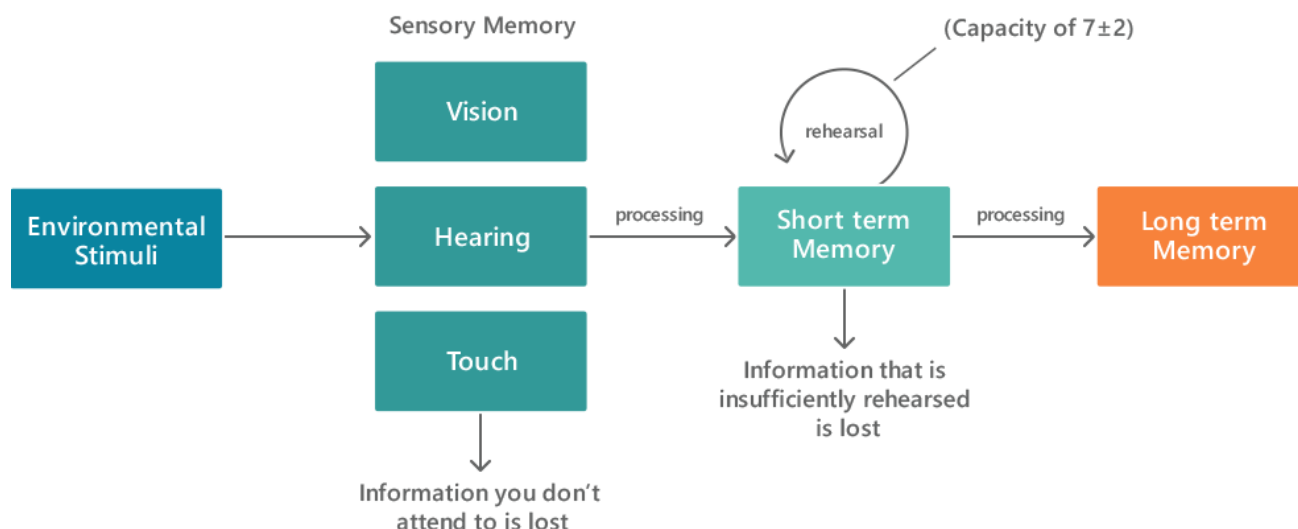
5. Inquiring Minds: Creating Enhanced Learner Assessments

2b or not 2b?

Are knowledge checks necessary? In many cases, the purpose of knowledge checks is to support and augment learning, so we need something to stick in our learners' heads.

At the same time, quizzes shouldn't be regarded by the learners as some kind of punishment. That goes back to the idea of being an advocate for your learners, and the concept that you yourself would be interested in the material.

There's a [great article by Art Kohn](#) that talks about the whys and whens of assessment. It contains some really good information about how the mind works and the different ways we receive and process information. In this article, there is a three-stage model:



In the flowchart above, there's a formula in the top right corner about a capacity of seven plus or minus two. That means doing things seven times (more or less) helps learners retain the information.

We receive incoming information as environmental stimuli into our minds. These stimuli can be received from our various senses like vision, hearing or touch. There's usually some information that we don't retain, but some of it we process, and it goes into short-term memory.

In our short-term memory, we can rehearse that information. When we rehearse it, we process it into our long-term memory, and if there's something that isn't processed, it'll be lost. So there's a lot of opportunities both to lose and retain different memories.

Taking this into consideration, we can conclude that testing immediately helps to develop our short-term memory for various learning. Coming back later may help us see what has been processed beyond the short-term and pass the information to the long-term memory. That's why assessment is helpful for long-term learning success.

Dos and Don'ts of Quiz Authoring

There's a fantastic article by the industry leader Patti Shank called [Avoiding Assessment Mistakes That Compromise Competence and Quality](#), which talks about some of the dos and don'ts from her experience, and how to avoid assessment mistakes.

Patti Shank points out some serious mistakes in assessments:

1. Given only cursory attention
2. Not integrated properly in the entire process (sometimes they're not given the proper amount of time)
3. Wrong type of question
4. Not relevant enough (meaning the question is sort of right, but it doesn't drill down into the information you want to share with your learners)
5. Poorly written (bad semantics or grammar mistakes)

Early in the course, we talked about defining what the content is, who your learners are, and what you want to disseminate to your learners. Now, make sure your quiz questions also support that information, so take your time when formulating the questions and develop them correctly.

Develop your questions before the rest of your learning. Many of us make the common mistake of developing them after or concurrently with other eLearning.

Getting Started with iSpring QuizMaker

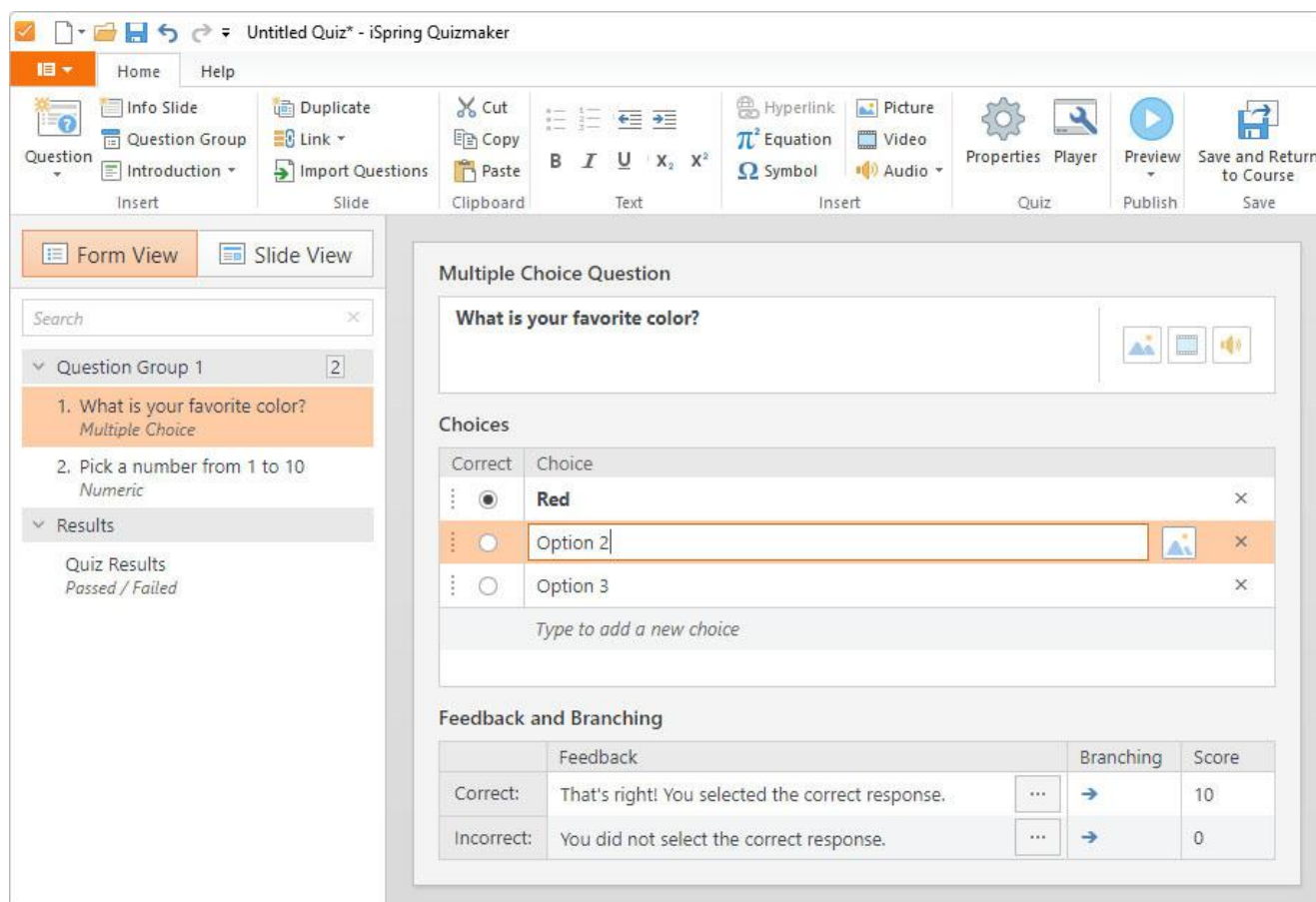
Enough of the theoretical stuff; let's go ahead and start creating some quizzes. Let's look at some of the most common question types:

- multiple choice
- true/false
- open-ended
- fill in the blank
- matching
- definition

These are only the and most common question types. Naturally, there's a whole lot more options to choose from in [iSpring Suite](#), including a drag-and-drop, a hotspot (which is where you insert an image and specify certain areas to click on) and sequences (where you need to drag words into the proper order).

When you create a quiz, you're given a blank canvas; a starting place where you have an intro slide, a place to add questions, and then a results slide. This can all be adjusted and edited.

Let's take a multiple choice question as an example. Write down your question; for instance, "*What is your favorite color?*" Then add the answers and the distractors, and choose which one is correct.



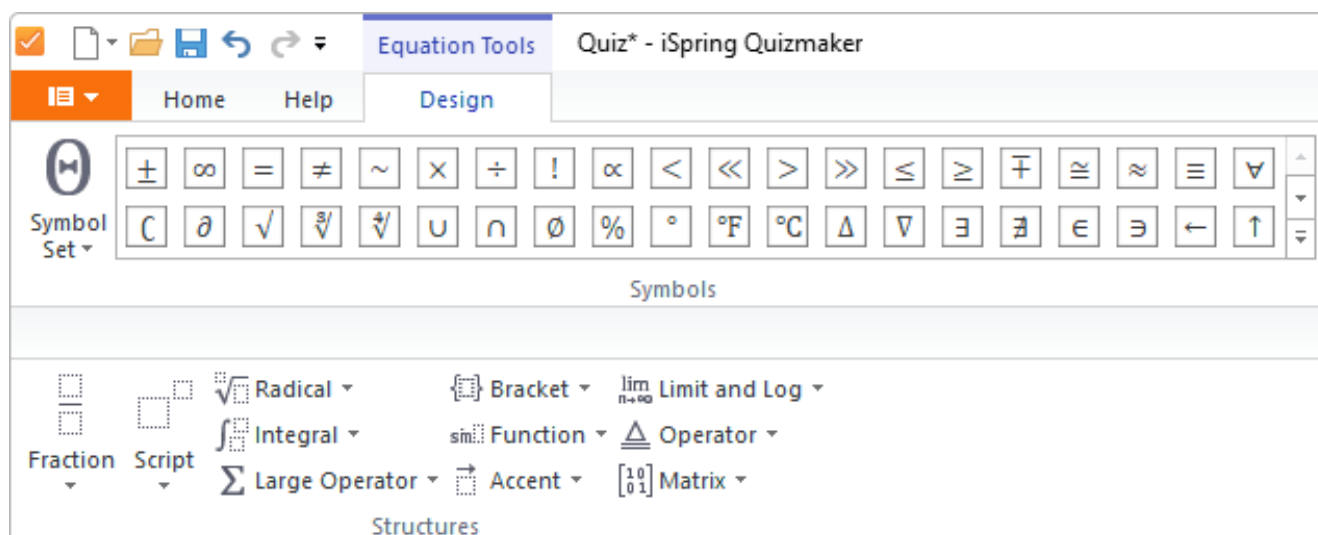
You can preview this particular question to get an idea of what it'll look like in the final product.

Quiz Enhancements

Now let's go ahead and talk about some enhancements you can use with [iSpring](#) to make your quizzes even more fun and interactive.

Math and physics

If you're making math or physics questions, there's a special editor built into iSpring, so you can put formulas right in. Gone are the days of inserting special ASCII characters or ALT text: the internal editor contains all the symbols you need.



Interactive feedback and branching

Branching creates a non-linear scenario in your quiz which leads to the next question depending on the learner's answer. For example, they might get it wrong and need some more information, or maybe you want to give them specific feedback if they got some of it right. You can do this in a couple of different ways.

- The first one is using the iSpring **Presentation Explorer**. For instance, you can control where the learners will go before and after the quiz. That's useful when you want learners to drill down into additional information, or add some refreshers for people who are falling behind.
- You can also provide feedback inside the quiz itself. Depending on whether someone gives a right or wrong answer, they can go to the next question by default, or you can forward them to a specific place in your quiz.

Form View **Slide View**

Search

Question Group 1 5

1. What is your favorite color?[equ...
Multiple Choice
2. The moon is made of green che...
True/False
3. How fun is it to create Quizzes
Multiple Response
4. Fill in the blank fields below
Drag the Words
5. Match the following items:
True/False

Results

Quiz Results
Passed / Failed

True/False Question

Match the following items:

Choices

Correct	Choice
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	True
<input type="radio"/>	False

Feedback and Branching

	Feedback			
Correct:	That's right! You selected the correct...	...	→	10
Incorrect:	You did not select the correct response.	...	→	0

Context Menu:

- Next Slide
- ✗ Finish Quiz
- Question Group 1
- Beginning of Group
- 1. What is your favorite color?
- 2. The moon is made of green chese
- 3. How fun is it to create Quizzes
- 4. Fill in the blank fields below

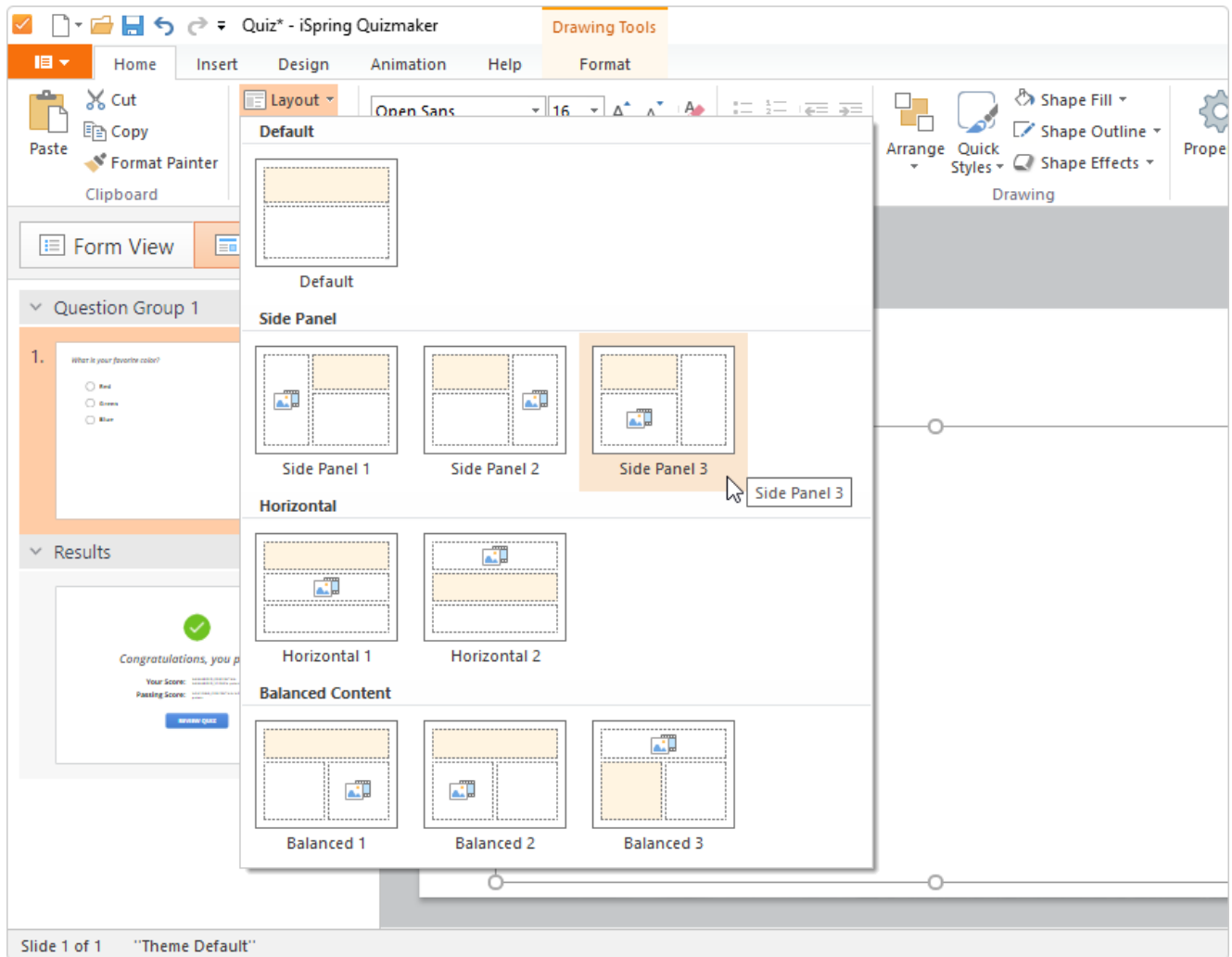
Audio & Video

You might not want to add audio and video to every single question; the main point is to capture the learners' attention, and give them access to different channels of information, rather than just staring at question after question. You can add media to the questions themselves, to the answers, in the feedback, or you can incorporate it into a branching scenario with info slides.

Quiz Design

With the **Slide View** mode, you can fine-tune the look and feel of the quiz, just like designing slides in PowerPoint. In the Slide View, you can

also change the layout of a question. Those of you that are familiar with PowerPoint obviously know that you can use the layout to add various built-in functionality to your slides. And you can adjust every single thing in the layout manually.



And again, no matter what kind of enhancements you use – whether it's images, audio, or video – make sure that they supplement the questions and the entire learning process itself.

Sharing Is Caring

Even if you author all the questions yourself, we really recommend that you send your questions to peers, colleagues, or someone else to quality test the product. That way you'll make sure you have concise and well-written questions that make sense and are error-free.

There's a great method for sharing and collaborating on quizzes, and that's **Importing** and **Exporting** quiz questions. With this option, you can import an Excel spreadsheet which contains an editable pool of questions. Just download the [MS Excel template](#) from the iSpring website. This lets you start collaborating right away, because most people are familiar with Excel spreadsheets.

You can also email the quiz to someone so they can view it as a learner. This is a great way to get feedback, either from the learners themselves, or from a group of test subjects, to ensure that you're creating questions that perfectly supplement your learning content.

6. Attention Please! Creating Interactive & Immersive Content

Understanding Interactivity in eLearning

There are two terms that we often use as synonyms: interactivity and engagement.

Interactivity means learners are interacting with content or environment: they're clicking on something, they're revealing something, they're watching a video. Engagement is more about the intrinsic value of all of the content. What does all that interactivity do? Is there any interest from the learners?

The overarching goal is to create interactive content that engages learners, helps to make information stick within learners' memory, and encourage communication.

Another thing that's important for engagement is making sure that the learners are allowed to branch off and use their own methodology and ways through the content.

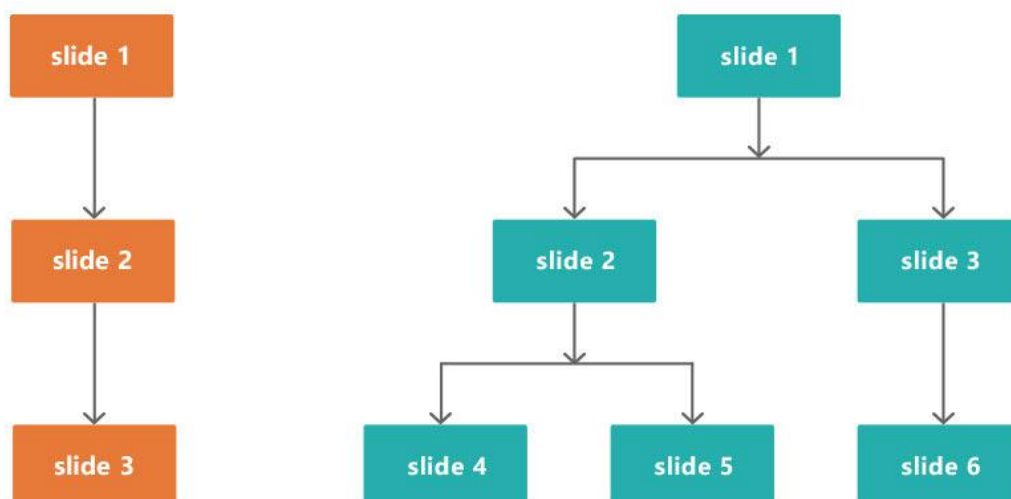
Why Branching

You've probably heard about the [Choose Your Own Adventure](#) gamebooks first published in 1979. It was an interactive, multiple-choice, multiple-ending fiction series for children. The reader assumes the role of a key character and is able to make choices that determine the plot's twists.



Choose Your Own Adventure gamebooks

We've already discussed level one and level two eLearning content. Level one eLearning is what we jokingly called page-turners: the information is presented as a plain text, a page after a page or a slide after a slide. So being our learners' advocates, we need to make sure that learner experience is the utmost goal. That's why we need something engaging and fun like Choose Your Own Adventure branching rather than a linear page turner with no control and no intrinsic value.







































Page turner vs branching mindset shift

When we create branching, we need to provide several outcomes in order to make each experience fresh and feel like it's unique. The whole idea is to make the experience robust from the perspective of being an advocate for the learners.

How To Create Branching With iSpring

One of the ways to create branching with [iSpring](#) is to use the **iSpring Presentation Explorer**. Depending on what you'd like to do, you could forward learners to different slides, different quizzes, or to a whole new section if the learner needs to review the information.

Slide Properties									
Save & Close		Hide Slide		Promote Demote		On-Click Auto		Slide Duration: 00:22.97	
Save		Display Slides		Nesting Level		Advance Slide		Navigation	
Branching		Lock		Presenter		Layout		Playlist	
Advanced									
#	Title	Advance	Branching	Lock	Presenter	Layout	Playlist	Object	
1	 Space shuttle program	10.2s  	Default		None 	No Change 	None		Add
2	 What is the space shuttle program?	22.9s  	Default		None 	No Change 	None		Add
3	 Early history of the program	50.0s  	Default		None 	No Change 	None		Add
4	 Space shuttle and its missions	22.9s  	Default		None 	No Change 	None		Add
5	 Shuttle description	31.8s  	Default		None 	No Change 	None		Add
6	 List of flights	43.8s  	Default		None 	No Change 	None		Add

Presentation Explorer capabilities

The other way to implement branched scenarios is to explore the capabilities of the **iSpring TalkMaster** component. It allows you to create graded conversation simulations to assess learner skills in realistic situations.

In iSpring TalkMaster, dialogue scenarios are arranged in a tree structure. You build a dialog scene by scene and add et reply options. Each reply can lead to different outcomes. For example, we can say that the first answer was good and that it made the character happy. You can take advantage of a built-in collection of characters with different emotions or create your own character.



As you publish, everything is responsive and looks great on all devices. You can also make it ready for your LMS or LRS.

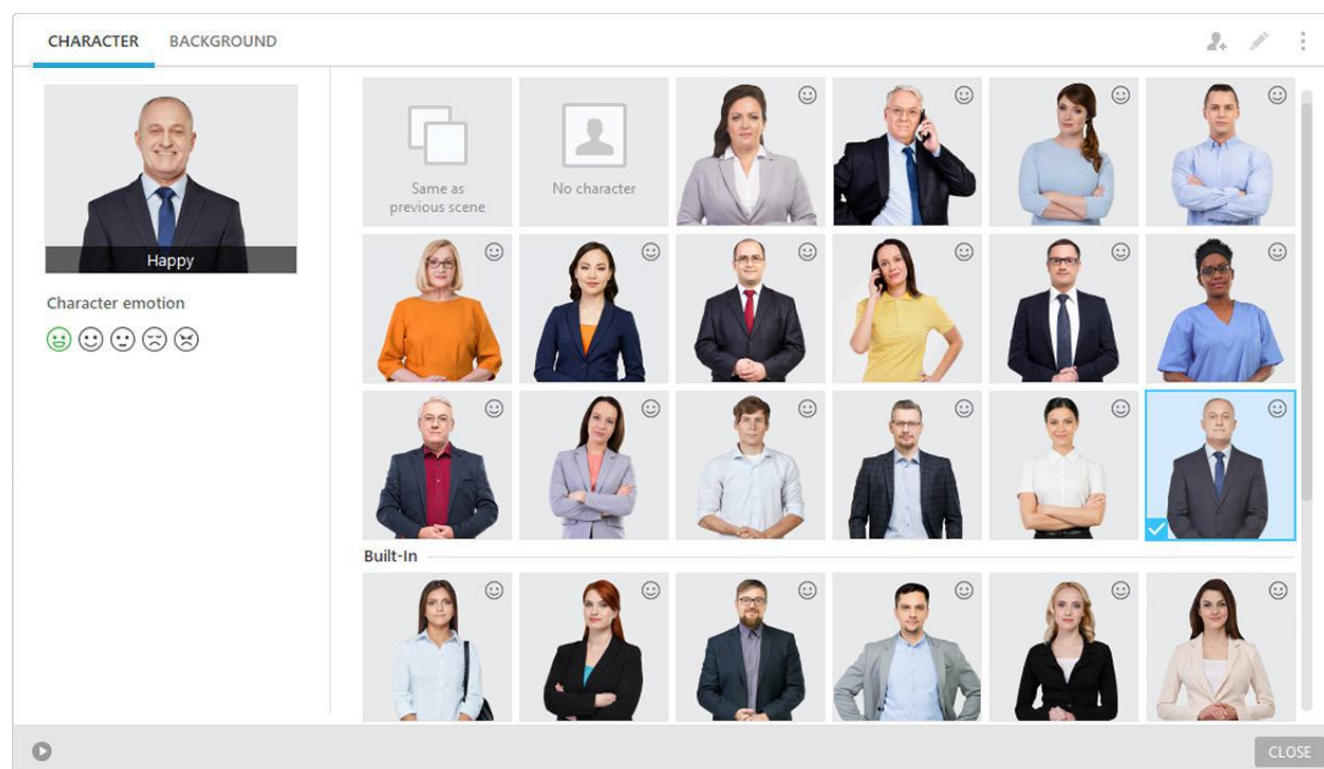
Note, this doesn't have to be just talk simulations. The idea here is that we're creating our own "e-adventure." [This](#) particular example is an interactive FAQ built by Michael with [iSpring Suite](#).

How To Enhance Your Content

There are several ways you can customize and augment learning content, make it look visually appealing, and convey its meaning and importance.

Joining The iSpring Content Library

It's a collection of 50,000+ characters, locations, course templates, backgrounds, images, items, icons, buttons, and more. The library is expanded with new assets every 1-2 months.



Adjusting TalkMaster Scenes

You can add additional information in the areas marked in the image below. For instance, go into the properties and select a scene color, change the character's emotion, add an image, custom replies, and also any additional information including voiceovers.

Digging Into Advanced Possibilities

You can also push the interactivity a little further through the use of different web objects, assets, and external Javascript libraries. For example, BabylonJS allows you to see 3d objects or interact with 3d objects through the use of WebGL.

7. Practical Application: UI/UX Best Practices for eLearning

Basic Concepts for UI and UX

UI, or **user interface design**, is a complex and theory-driven science. To succeed with UI, you need to know your learners and their behavior: who uses it, how do they use it, and what are they going to see and do on screen. UI involves graphic design, but it's not correct to consider it as just graphic design. It's our goal to think about how these graphical things need to be integrated within the learning process.

UX, or **user experience design**, is also a robust and complex field of study. In contrast to UI, UX is more focused on functions: how does something do something on a screen? What do users feel? What is their experience?



In the picture, we can see a well-thought-out pathway made of concrete. However, it would probably be much better if that shortcut, where the person is walking, were the actual design. When we are focusing on user experience while developing content, it increases content credibility and authority.

9 General UI/UX Considerations

Plan. You need to have enough time not only to plan and design the UI/UX, but also to get information and feedback from your actual learners and stakeholders.

Ask “how?”. Like “How do learners get to the next page?”, “How do they open this tab?” or “How do they close this pop-up?”

Don’t assume. Don’t think you know what is best for a learner without asking the learner.

Consistency. Make sure that you create a cohesive design, and your content is consistent, so that the learners experience it in the same way each time along the course.

Navigation. Consider whether navigation is important, and how it can help to achieve the learning final goal.

Pay attention to daily life. Monitoring your own daily digital experiences and what’s around you is a great way to approach UX design.

Be responsive. Make sure you’ve thought about devices that are on the go - tablets or phones. Will content look and work good on them?

Use existing practices. Look for references on existing websites and apps, see how they’re put together, and borrow ideas that work for you.

The journey never ends. Stay up to date with the latest tech and UX trends.

The Nuts & Bolts of UI/UX in authoring tools

Font & Typography

Fewer is better. Try to use no more than 3 basic font types and styles.

Standard, not exotic. Prefer tried-and-true fonts such as Arial, Helvetica, and Verdana, as they're guaranteed to be displayed well on all devices.

Size: 12, 14, 16. 14 is good for main text, 16 for titles, and 12 for smaller texts if necessary. Avoid using smaller font sizes.

Infographics. Present important data with charts, graphs, and pictograms.

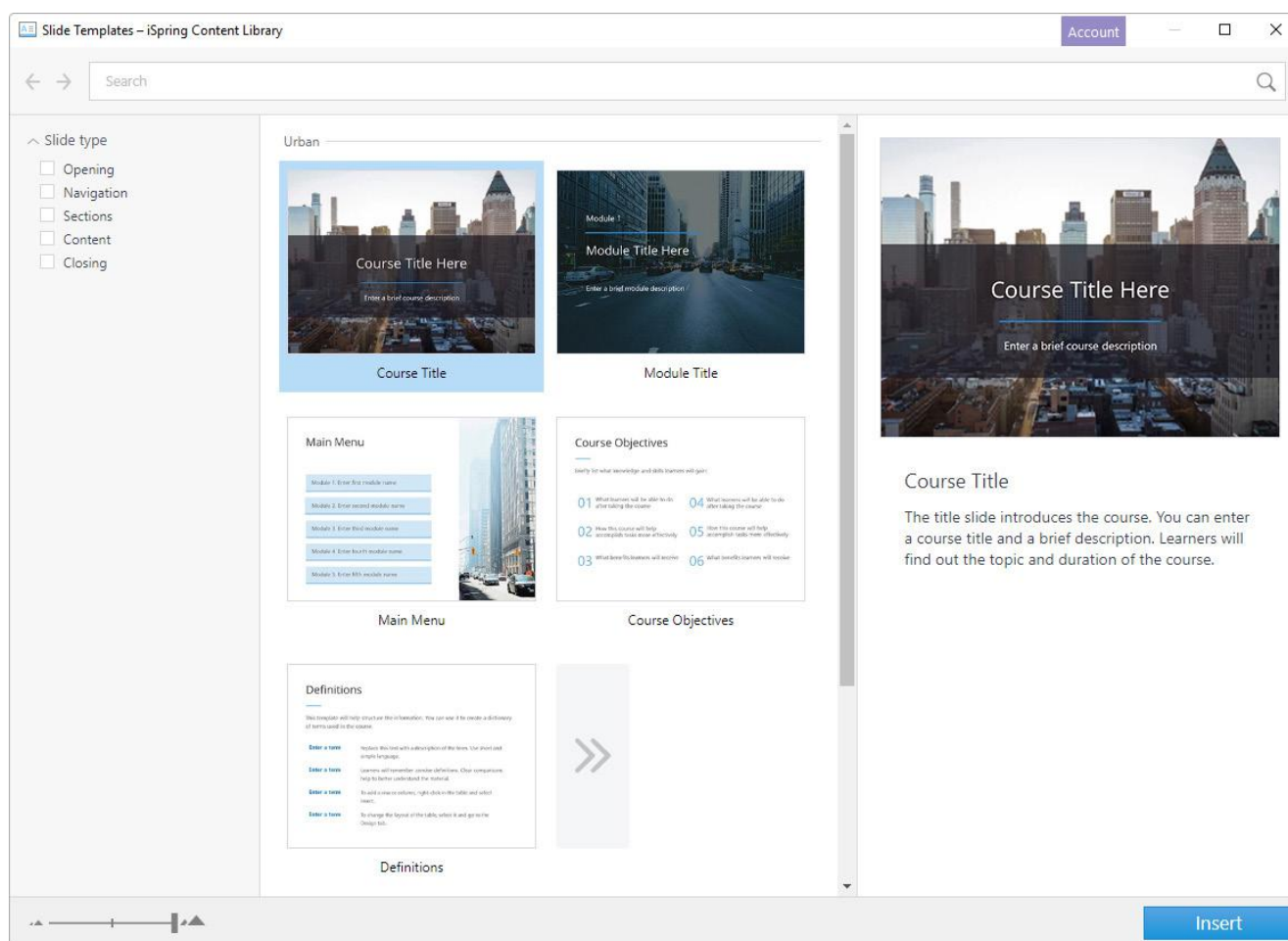
Text body. Use no more than 20-40% of on-screen space for texts. Turn on gridlines inside PowerPoint to get information on the percentage of space used.

Contrast. Highlight the most important elements of the slides.

Templates

The iSpring Content Library is a great starting point. There are plenty of professional course templates, including some that contain 40% text and

less. It also includes tons of characters, icons, and objects that you can apply in your project.



Customizing the Player

Customizing the course player for the user is a sort of finishing touch we'll put on, making sure that the experience for the learner is at its best. Think about whether you need to show a structure, notes, information about the speaker, etc. You can also customize colors for background, buttons, and text.

Think about what works best for your learners and make sure that if you choose a certain layout or customize something, there's a reason.

8. Touch Ups: Ensure Efficacy, Viability & Accessibility in Your Content

Accessibility requirements for eLearning

When talking about accessibility, there are 2 standards to consider: Section 508 and WCAG 2.0 (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines). Until recently, S508, a US federal government standard, was less stringent than WCAG 2.0. Since S508 received a major update, these two standards have become more or less equal.

The World Wide Web Consortium distinguishes three levels of WCAG accessibility: A, AA and AAA. Usually, what we aim for is the AA standard, to make sure the content is consumable, operable in general, and adapted for those who are visually or hearing impaired. [Here](#) you can find out how to meet WCAG 2.0 requirements.

PPT Accessibility

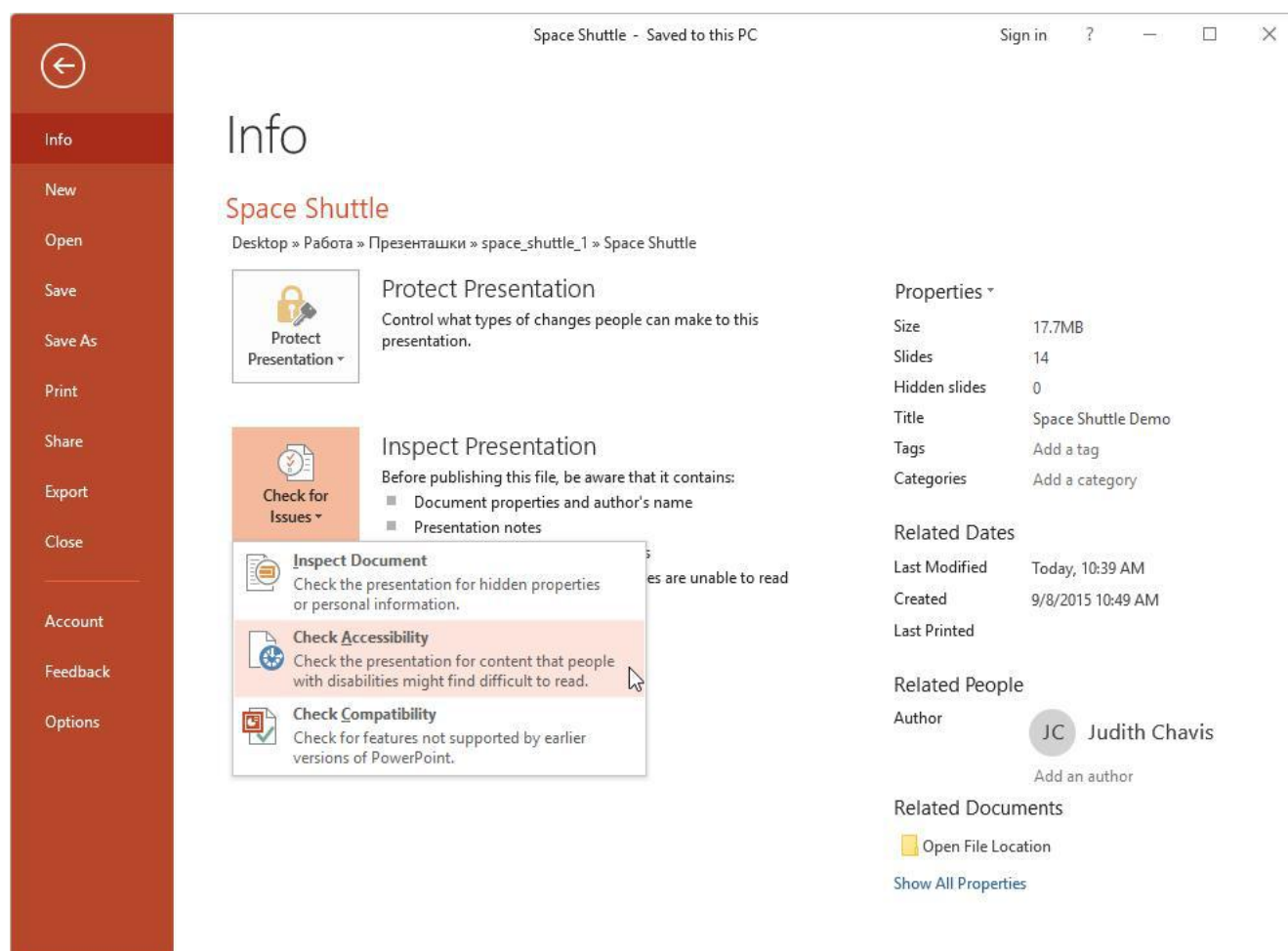
It's very convenient to prepare slides for your courses in PPT, since Microsoft itself offers ways to make your PowerPoint accessible for stakeholders, SMEs or learners. You can use alt text and built-in layouts for images. Make sure you adjust the tabbing or screen reading order in the selection

pane. Double-check your links for meaningful text or correct HTTP addresses and see if your font is large enough and readable. It's vital to pay attention to colors, slide structure (header, body text of a slide), built-in tables, attached videos, etc. Follow the [link](#) to see more Microsoft tips.

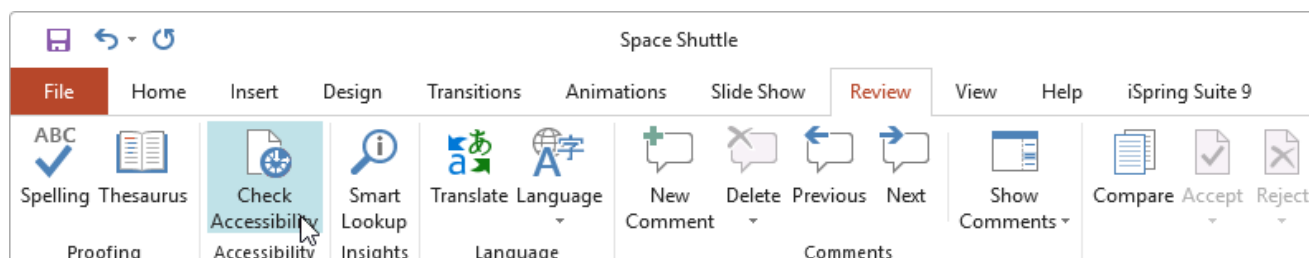
How to Check Accessibility Automatically

Microsoft also provides an Accessibility checker, which is built into PowerPoint.

Just click **File** → **Info** and select the **Check for Issues** button. In the drop-down list, select **Check Accessibility**.



If you use Office 365, checking accessibility is a few steps shorter: Simply go to the Review tab:



There are also a number of external tools for checking accessibility: for instance, Achecker, FAE (Functional Accessibility Evaluator), and WebAIM Color Contrast Checker. Some of them can be are just add-ins for Chrome or Mozilla Firefox. These are very robust tools that will allow you to see what's under the hood of HTML5 and other content solutions.

Accessible Text

When it comes to accessible on-screen text, we need to comply with the WCAG 2.0 color contrast ratio. An accessible text has to have a ratio of 4.5:1 for a normal text (ca.14 point) and 3:1 for a “large text”(18 point). A color contrast checker helps to define whether your text is viewable and “consumable” on the screen.

Accessible Video

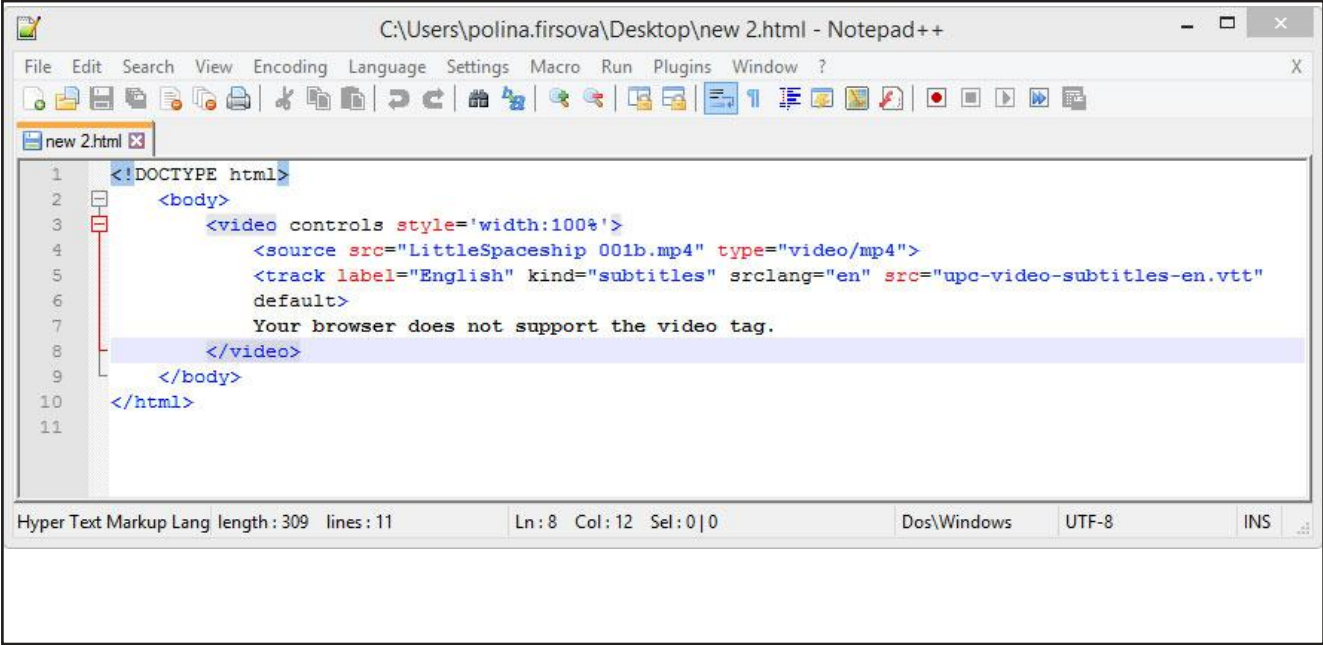
Closed and open captions, subtitles and descriptions are accessibility features that make video available for people who need a transcript of spoken text. It's also a way to include some non-speech elements which

are important for representation of a concept or idea. Let's focus today on closed captions (**CC**), which can be turned off/on, if desired.

Video Captions in iSpring Suite

Here's one way to make sure closed captions work in the iSpring player. You can do it with the help of HTML5 using the iSpring Web Object feature. Create an HTML file in any HTML editor. This file should include the video tag for the video you would like to attach (<source>) and a track. [Here](#) you can find more information about HTML files. ()

The track is especially important, since it handles the closed captions and redirects you to a WebVTT (Web Video Text Track) file. It implies the presence of a WebVTT file, which is a text-only file with timelines where you put your caption text that comes up on the screen. [HTML5 Video Caption Maker](#) will help you to create .VVT files and timelines.

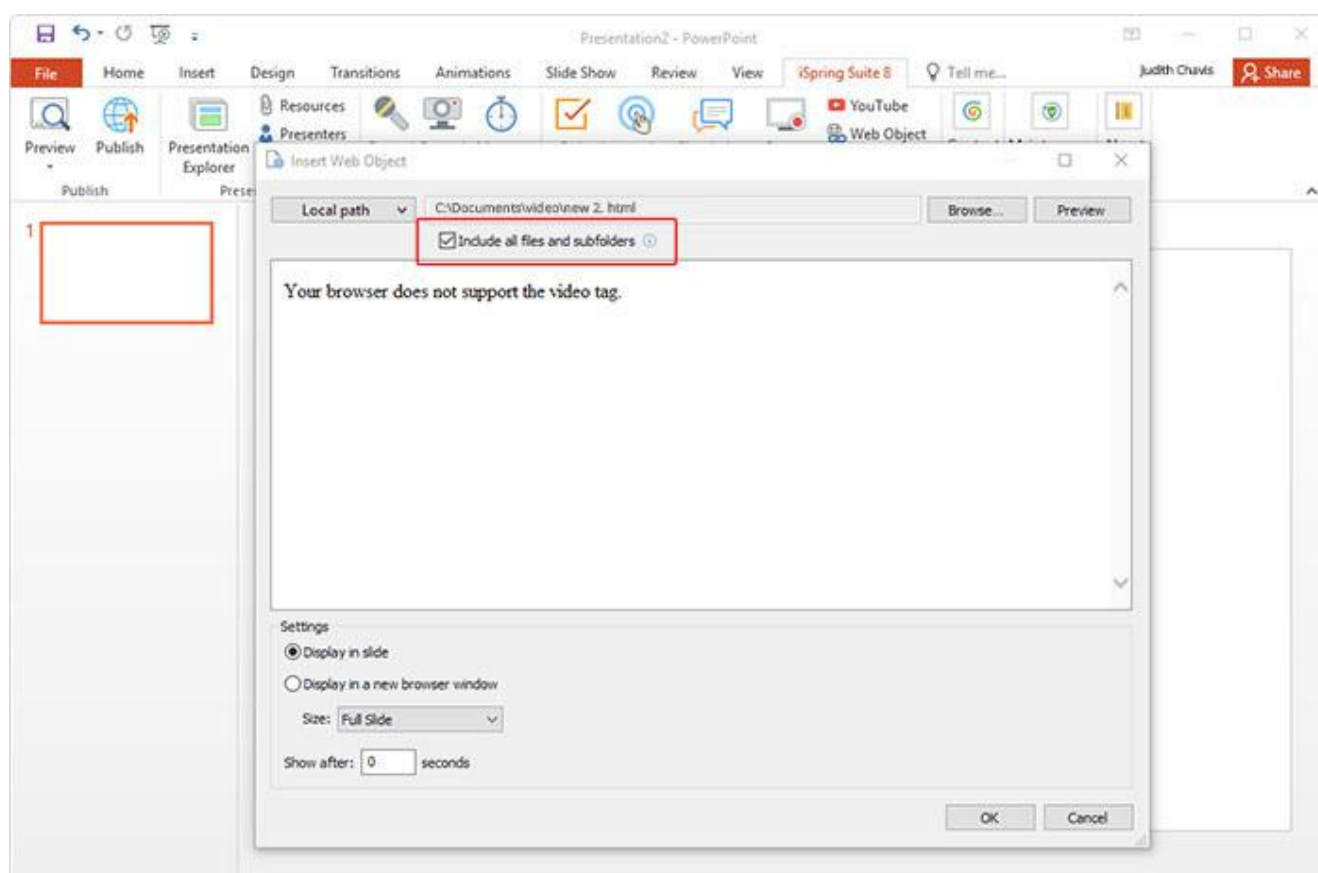


```
1 <!DOCTYPE html>
2 <body>
3   <video controls style='width:100%'>
4     <source src="LittleSpaceship 001b.mp4" type="video/mp4">
5     <track label="English" kind="subtitles" srclang="en" src="upc-video-subtitles-en.vtt"
6     default>
7     Your browser does not support the video tag.
8   </video>
9 </body>
10 </html>
11
```

Now, do as follows to attach your video with closed captions to the PowerPoint slide:

1. Insert the iSpring Web object on the slide: **iSpring Suite** → **Web Object**.
2. Choose a **Local path** and **Browse** to the folder with your video, HTML file, and VVT;
3. Make sure you check **Include all files and subfolders**. Choose one of the options: **Display in slide** or **Display in a new browser window**, then click OK.
4. Publish your video with added **CC** to the desired location.

When previewing, be aware that some browsers don't support HTML videos and closed captions, though they usually do.



How to Make Your Content Mobile Ready

The iOS functions are slightly different from Android or Windows Phone. For instance, in some cases, devices don't have an auto start, feature, even if you set video/audio to be played automatically when opening a slide. Make sure you test your content over and over again on each type of device as you publish.

As far as mobile readiness is concerned, you'd better think about how extensive the content you're providing is, and is it compressed to the level that learners can consume. Think over which links, buttons, or sensor areas will be used on different mobile devices.

9. Share Content: What Are Your Options?

Let's take a look at different ways to share your e-course with the world:

- **Publish to the Web.** You can upload a finished course to your website or blog, for example, to make it a part of a longread on a particular topic.
- **Publish to an LMS.** An LMS allows you to assign a course to your learners, adjust completion settings, and easily track learner performance through detailed reports. Make sure that you publish it in a format that your LMS supports (for example, SCORM, AICC, or xAPI).
- **Publish to a cloud sharing service.** A cloud service, for example, [iSpring Cloud](#), will help you share a course with SMEs or stakeholders to get their feedback. With iSpring Cloud, you can share it with a public link, by email, embed it on a web page, or share via social media. You can also set whether you want someone to download the source file.

Before you publish anything, make sure you've performed the pre-flight check: the navigation and branching are properly set up, all the texts are on their places, the course looks good on various devices, and so on.

No doubt, the additional pre-publishing testing will take time, that's why it's important to reserve it in the pipeline beforehand.

10. Summary: Final Thoughts, Tips & Examples of How to Push Content Further

Now, let's do a summary of what we've learned throughout this whole guide.

Steps to Take for Really Cool eLearning Content

Step 1: Make a plan

Before opening an authoring tool, create a detailed project roadmap and allow some padding at every stage. Along with the goals and objectives, don't forget to define who your learners are and what skills they should obtain during a course. Then check whether each course element serves the main goal and helps learners achieve it.

Step 2: Recognize the human factor

You have to deal with both SMEs and stakeholders and combine different roles within a project. On the one hand, you need to identify the SMEs involved in your project and what their expertise is. Don't be too shy – you can be an SME as well. On the other hand, you have to manage the expectations of the people who make the final decisions and pay the bills.

Step 3: Write a script

Less is more: Breaking your content into smaller parts makes it easier to understand and take in. Plus, it's much easier for learners to start learning when they aren't scared away by intimidating walls of text. We're our learners' advocates, remember?

Step 4: Record audio and video

First, decide if you need to invite a professional voice-over artist or if it's fine to record on your own. Hiring a professional makes sense when you need to convey certain emotions or character with the voice. Here are some simple but effective tricks for a better outcome:

- Get the best mic you can afford.
- Know your script. Read it out loud several times before recording.
- Find the quietest possible place: for example, a walk-in closet.
- Have a plain backdrop behind you if you record a video.
- Keep your mouth from being dry with water and a lip balm.

Step 5: Add quizzes

In many cases, it makes sense to develop test questions *before* focusing on the learning objectives. Thus you get the best of both worlds: integrating assessment in the entire process, and making sure that the questions are relevant and support the learning.

Step 6: Put in some interactivity

One of the ways to make each learning experience fresh is to use branching. You can forward learners to different slides, quizzes, or to a whole new section. Plus, interactive modules will help your learners digest complex content and stay engaged.

Step 7: Apply UI/UX best practices

A nice design isn't enough. Whatever kind of designer you are, you cannot know what is best for learners and stakeholders without asking for their feedback. A good practice is to collect feedback on early stage to see what will and won't help learners achieve the learning objectives and adjust course content and structure.

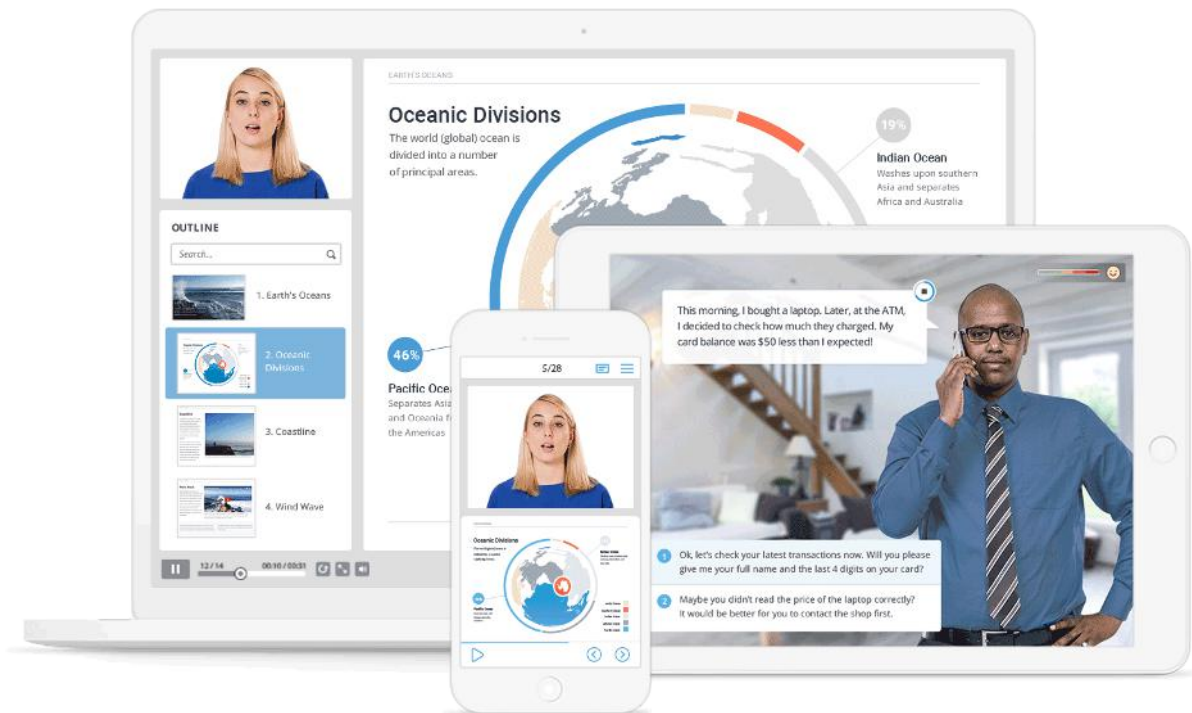
Step 8: Ensure accessibility

There are two standards of accessibility to consider: Section 508 and [WCAG 2.0](#) (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

To check accessibility automatically, you can use the Accessibility checker built into PowerPoint, or external services like Achecker, FAE (Functional Accessibility Evaluator), or WebAIM: Color Contrast Checker.

Step 9: Publish the course

Before publishing, be sure to check that formatting, language, and design are consistent and cohesive. Test navigation, branching, and design to ensure that everything works perfect on any device. And of course, spelling, grammar, and punctuation have to be fine.



iSpring Suite

Fully-Stocked eLearning Authoring Toolkit



Courses for All Devices

Turn PowerPoint presentations into mobile-ready courses.



Video Lectures

Easily create video narrations and synchronize them with your slides.



Interactive Assessments

Develop comprehensive tests with branching and flexible scoring.



Screen Recordings

Record and fine-tune training videos with the integrated screen recorder.



Dialogue Simulations

Build realistic dialogue simulations to train communication skills.



E-Learning Interactions

Present your e-Learning materials in the form of engaging interactions.

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