

Micro Learning

Today's workers use personal and business networks for much of the information they consume. With almost instant access to information, how employees learn has changed. However, the vast majority of formal training still is delivered along conventional linear models that mirror traditional educational practices. An alternative approach to these long-established techniques is called micro learning, also known as Learning Bursts, Knowledge Objects or Learning Objects.

What is Micro Learning?

Micro learning reflects how learners leverage the broadband speed of today's Internet to access information at the moment of need. Rather than (or in addition to) chunking content into longer modules or lessons, micro learning is built around bite-sized nuggets of content. Easily digested, sometimes presented in a multi-media format and always focused for quick understanding, these nuggets allow learners to assimilate knowledge more quickly than listening to or reading a lengthy explanation of the same information. Micro learning objects often create relevance with the inclusion of a brief story or a related infographic. Micro learning is a strategy that reflects the shortened attention span and requirement of rapid information of today's learner. Micro learning can be summarized as "just enough information, delivered when I need it, to where I need it."

Principles of Micro Learning

Short bursts of content	Targets a key point
Highly engaging	Action/activity based
Covers one learning objective	Faster to develop and consume
On demand access	Locate quickly and learn in the moment of need

Micro learning (individually referred to as micro learning objects) is characterized by small, specific bursts of content targeting a single key point. These micro learning objects can be assigned to learners via an LMS (pushed) or organized and catalogued for just-in-time retrieval (pulled) – or optimally used in both of these ways. They are best implemented along with a plan for additional reinforcement over time. Meta-tagging for retrieval and use of an LMS for tracking are best practices of a micro learning strategy. Micro learning is particularly useful when considering instructional strategies such as spaced repetition and distributed practice. It is appropriate to the needs of today's learners who require easily-consumable content.

Many different methods, strategies, and techniques are used in micro learning. It can be as simple as a step-action-table job aid or media rich such as a whiteboard style video with audio. It can be extended to include any combination of components such as mini-expert lectures, infographic job aids, on-the-job/real world performance tasks, or social media activities. Most often, micro learning is thought of as self-paced eLearning; however, it can be used in instructor-led environments as well. Content in existing Instructor-Led Training (ILT), web-based courses, webinars, and even training manuals can be redesigned and converted into micro learning.

Benefits of Micro Learning to an Organization

The key benefits of implementing micro learning in an organization include:

- Content can be easily updated, managed, and maintained because each unit is small and discrete.
- Development time for a small chunk of learning is shorter than traditional training.
- When properly tagged with meta-data, micro learning modules can be stored and searched, making them easy to catalog and access.
- On-demand availability makes micro learning objects reusable assets.
- Smaller units of instruction allow for more innovative options for blended learning.



Key Points

Traditional Classroom Training	Traditional eLearning	Micro Learning
Structured and linear	Structured and linear	Flexible and blended
Instructor-driven	Instructional Designer-driven	Learner-driven
Longer production period required	Longer production period required	Faster to produce
Maintenance must be planned for in advance	Maintenance must be planned for in advance	Easy to update
Synchronous	Asynchronous	Asynchronous, On-demand, or Just-In-Time
Time and location-based	Flexible time and location, but laptop required	Flexible and conducive to mobile delivery

To summarize, micro learning is a learning strategy that reflects modern learner sensibilities and delivers content in a short, focused, and effective way. This concept is not brand new and the transition to this type of training has been in process for many years. That said, today's learner expectations combined with improvements in technology (particular mobile technology) are bringing it back into focus as a significant learning trend.