

# Best Practices for Excellence in Distance Learning

Distance learning expanded rapidly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The effectiveness of a distance format is ultimately determined by the engagement and interest of the target audience as well as the skill with which information is delivered. It is important to have input from the many different types of participants in distance learning on everything from course development to classroom delivery to evaluation.

The following are principles for designing and delivering occupational health and safety training in a distance learning environment. They are recommendations for trainers and training organizations to consider prior to, during, and after the training and are consistent with best practices in adult learning and instructional excellence in occupational health and safety training. Read more at [www.cpwr.com/distance-learning-report](http://www.cpwr.com/distance-learning-report).

## 1 Preparing to Deliver Distance Learning Courses

One of the overarching principles for training excellence in the distance learning format is being prepared prior to the training session. Below are points to consider.

### Understand the Trainees' Needs

Gather information during the registration process by surveying the audience about what they would like to learn. Encouraging participation at the beginning through personal inquiry will more than likely lead to training that is more meaningful, relevant and useful to the audience, leading to enhanced safety at their workplace.

### Post All Course-Related Information

Before the course begins, trainers should post all course information online, including training objectives, course outlines, associated materials, and training agendas. Making this material available ahead of time improves trainee readiness.

### Practice, Practice, Practice!

As with in-person presentations, trainers are encouraged to conduct a practice session on the distance learning platform and, if possible, to demonstrate the presentation for an experienced trainer who can provide feedback. On top of this, familiarity with the virtual classroom application is crucial. Knowing how to use the features and tools of each platform will allow for a better experience for both the trainers and trainees.

### Conduct Trainer Coordination Meetings

The lead trainer should coordinate meetings (pre-training and following each training session) to manage the activities of the training team (lead trainer, co-trainer, technology assistant). These meetings clarify expectations and roles to assist trainers in honing the requisite skills to meet the needs of the learners in the distance learning environment.

## 2 Presenting the Training Course

Instructor knowledge and skill is a key driver of effective training in a distance learning format. The following tips can support the use of interactive training techniques that encourage active participation, knowledge sharing, and integration of relevant content that can be directly applied to the workplace.

### Encourage Participation

Instructors are encouraged to solicit regular interaction from the learners. The distance learning format allows for trainee participation. Several virtual classroom applications offer tools for interaction within their platform (polls, breakout sessions), while other education applications offer a more interactive user experience (Kahoot!, Quizlet). Although this may be unfamiliar technology for some, these tools allow the trainer to “read the room” and receive feedback from the audience in real time.

### Have a Co-Instructor Join

Having another instructor can be helpful with content delivery, answering any secondary questions in the chat dialogue box, or dealing with technical difficulties.

### Be Flexible and Open

Distance learning is still a relatively new format, so it is important to be adaptable. Trainers should create an open and flexible learning environment to accommodate the trainees' needs and make them feel respected and supported. Trainers should monitor the pace and content according to the trainees' level of understanding—using the participation tools is a great way to measure the group's understanding.

## 3 Following the Distance Learning Course

As with face-to-face instruction, evaluation and post-course interaction with trainers and trainees is a crucial part of conducting a successful course. In addition, the distance learning format provides additional opportunities for sharing up-to-date information and resources following training.

### Evaluation Allows for Improvement

Evaluate training to ensure quality improvement. Once completed, courses should be measured to assess effectiveness and learning outcomes. Evaluations should be completed by both trainers and trainees to better understand where improvements can be made.

### Share Resources and Information

It is important to continue sharing information and access to resources after the course has been completed. The online format of distance learning allows for efficient follow-up and resource distribution. Trainees can be given access to recordings of the online training, training-related information, and other relevant online resources. Helpful information can also be shared with trainers, such as the most current information on best practices and recommended new learning technologies and platforms.