

## Website Critique: An Overview of Five Online Courses

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper critiques five online courses using ADDIE reference. It evaluates these courses based on ten factors that influence the ISD process: design layout, course structure, presentation of objectives, content/delivery development, editorial and visual consistency, technical specifications, screen navigation, learning assessment, and interactivity. It concludes with the criteria used to rank these courses and provides a total quality score for each.

### ANALYSIS

#### ELEMENTK

ElementK is a pioneer of e-learning offering hundreds of courses in information technology, computer basics, and other subject areas. *Course:* An Instructor-Led course by Element K in Excel 2000- Level 1 [http://forum.elementk.com/frame\\_layout.asp?forumID=1429](http://forum.elementk.com/frame_layout.asp?forumID=1429)

- **Design Layout:** This course is organized into three fields: a main classroom where announcements are displayed, a discussion area for group collaboration, and a toolbar for course navigation. Additional options include title bar, menu bar, and help features. Miniature icons represent each individual present in the classroom. Discussion threads are displayed with a plus (+) or minus (–) sign.
- **Structure of Course:** The course is outlined into four lessons, each with skill development through activities and exercises. The lessons follow the same format: a brief introduction of topic, a field trip exercise, visitation of websites, demonstrations of skill, quizzes, and follow up answers.
- **Presentation of Objectives:** A course syllabus is presented in the introduction discussion thread. Objectives are descriptive and measurable and clearly identify the actions of participant.
- **Content/Delivery Development:** Content is developed as a web-based training course, complete with a feedback mechanism, chatroom feature, and bulletin board system, to encourage student cooperation with other students and instructor.
- **Editorial/Visual Consistency:** Presentation of course material is text based with hyperlinks.
- **Technical Specifications:** Software requirements are needed in order to fully participates in this class. These include Windows 95 or Windows 98, and Microsoft Office 2000. Suggested downloads are provided.
- **Screen Navigation:** Course navigation is easy to follow but limited space is provided to read or work from. The navigation tools are straightforward except that there are distracting pop ups that resemble error commands. These pop up distractions happen every time the mouse is drug over the title bar and remind the learner where they want to go.

- **Learning Assessment:** An overall course evaluation is not provided; however each lesson has a quiz with follow up answers. Lessons are “ designed for mastery learning, where the lesson begins with an explanation and is explained and demonstrated. Learners practice the skill and continue until they master it (Carliner, 2002, p92).
- **Interaction:** Interaction is broken down in three distinct ways: student/student interaction, student/teacher interaction, and student/content or resource interaction. Discussion threads are made available to each student.

*Course:* A self- study course by Element K in PowerPoint 2000 [This course requires you to download the latest version of Shockwave but provides a hyperlink to do so prior to taking the class] <http://www.elementk.com/e-learning/htm/freecourses.asp>

- **Design Layout:** The design of this course resembled a PowerPoint program even if the student does not have the MS software application. It is organized with interactive options for users to control the content displayed. Forward and backward buttons navigate screen changes.
- **Structure of course:** This course is organized so that the student learns the basic skills necessary to create a PowerPoint presentation. It is structured informally “(that is, not leading to any formal qualification), self-directed, and piecemeal (broken into small chunks of learning). It is driven as much by short term and is determined by the task/skill at hand” (Bates, 2000, p. 12).”
- **Presentation of Objectives:** Objectives for this course are not easily defined or clearly stated. At the start of the course, guidelines are displayed that suggest student will learn how to create and edit slides, use PowerPoint tools, and incorporated clip art and WordArt, but these statements serve more as a description of the course than objectives.
- **Content/Delivery Development:** Computer based instruction is used to deliver a tutorial on PowerPoint with drill and practice exercises as learning tools. The instruction is developed in a random, nonsequential way, as well as in a linear way (Seels & Glasgow, 1998).
- **Editorial/Visual Consistency:** An audio track guides learning by narrating the scripted track displayed in text. Both presentation features are optional to turn on or off. The writing style is clear and involves the learner in the learning process. Learner observes the materials presented and actively perform the task in the demonstration software.
- **Technical Specifications:** The transmission of audio may be slow for users who connect to a network through dial-up lines.
- **Screen Navigation:** A step by step, point and click, procedure provides interaction with course content; however, there is no flexibility for the student to stray from course content. Learners can only access one section of the screen at a time.
- **Learning Assessment:** This tutorial presents assessments throughout the course and when the student does not perform a task correctly, the computer illustrates how it is done.
- **Interaction:** Learning is student centered where student interacts with course content. The computer asks a question, the student responds, and the answers are displayed as either correct or incorrect.

## SKILLSOFT

An e-Learning companies with a large library of multi-media e-Learning content ranging from interactive courses to learning simulations to the full digitized content of the latest books reports and journals.

*Course:* A simulated elearning course in Building Relationships for Continued Success. [Skillssoft demos are set up to use NetPlay(tm) online (a browser-playable delivery approach) which is optimized around a high-speed web connections. The response time as you move from page-to-page will depend on the connection speed you are using.] [http://www.skillssoft.com/demo/lessons\\_demo\\_sales\\_customer.htm](http://www.skillssoft.com/demo/lessons_demo_sales_customer.htm)

- **Design Layout:** The course is colorful and displays text, graphics, and interchange. A navigation bar provides various options such as: audio on/off, course menu, basic text format, and help button.
- **Structure of course:** The course starts off by offering ideas on how to build customer relations, introduce new ways to use the consultative selling role, and explores strategies for long-term relationship opportunities.
- **Presentation of Objectives:** According to Seels & Glasgow (1998) the statements describing course objectives use verbs that are imprecise (i.e become and recognize). It is not clear how learning will be evaluated. However, the objectives stated use subject/verb/object sentence structures which “say what the student is to do to what (i.e. become familiar with the importance of the implementation and transition stages of long-term client relationships) (p.66).
- **Content/Delivery Development:** There are four lessons and each one has an accelerated path option. Pre-assessments are provided for the learner to either “test out” of subject areas they already know or to a show pre and post assessment comparison. This course “retains and analyzes progress records and uses information to adapt future instructional sequence (Seels & Glasgow, 1998, p. 116).
- **Editorial/Visual Consistency:** There are audio and text features, along with a reference sections where the user can click on additional link to access and print information related to the course. Job aids and hyperlinks are also available for additional reference tools. The course is designed with a special feature, that when the user logs off and back on, the page is bookmark.
- **Technical Specifications:** Audio capacity is needed to view all pages in the course. Processing and loading times are slow depending on connectivity but user is able to turn these features off and still preview graphics and text.
- **Screen Navigation:** This course is very user friendly with access to do the same thing many ways (course menu, assessments, and accelerated path). The online communication experience for this course is “image oriented, (computer display like a TV screen), interactive, (between computer and learners), immediate (response time to answers), and intimate, (tracked information is adapted to learners needs) (Carliner, 2002, p. 132).
- **Learning Assessment:** Although it is challenging to assess affective behaviors such as “successful client relationships,” the course features question/answer tests after each session. These assessments are automatically scored, evaluated and recorded for mastery. “Online assessments are characterized by timely and efficient feedback to students (Dereshiwsky, 2001)
- **Interaction:** Again, learner interaction is with course content, however, this e-learning method includes “role playing” where the learner focuses on skills that are applied to a particular task or in a particular context.

## EDUSYSTEM

An integrated Internet-based learning environment developed by MT-System Ltd. It is a “complete and comprehensive system that covers the entire learning process including the communication of new information, online consultations, group working, the tracking of students' activity, self- and tutor controlled tests and online exam sessions.” *Course:* Introduction to Cosmology  
<http://www.mtsystem.hu/edusystem/en/class/demo1/edemo1.htm>

- **Design Layout:** This course is laid out into three frames, similar to that of a basic web page format. The main working area has a large amount of white space, boring to read but great to work from, and hyperlinks provide access to additional screens.
- **Structure of Course:** The course structure is organized in a textbook fashion, representing a virtual book, which consists of fourteen chapters with text and graphics. The learner can download the whole class curriculum in Adobe Acrobat for offline reading, as well as download video clips using RealPlayer to view online lectures.
- **Presentation of Objectives:** Objectives for this class are not clearly stated and it is unclear if “the process of identifying behaviors associated with goals or the process of stating those behaviors can be observed or measured (Burge & Roberts, 1998, p. 39).”
- **Content/Delivery Development:** This course introduces cosmology- the study of the origin and evolution of the Universe. Basic concepts in modern cosmology are provided in an online textbook format. There was a section for online discussion but the file was unknown, and therefore, inaccessible to download.
- **Editorial/Visual Consistency:** The consistency of this course is primarily text-based. It had a great deal of white space, few visuals or graphics, but many hyperlinks to other pages in the website. “Print materials is used to present written discourse on abstract knowledge and verbal information (Seels & Glasgow, 1998, p. 113).
- **Technical Specifications:** Technical specifications were not stated prior to the course; however, RealPlayer G2 was needed for video clips. Additional software programs were also needed but the data source was not found.
- **Screen Navigation:** This website had many broken links such as for support access, course calendar, catalog, etc. Other features were unclear as to why they were there or how to use them (i.e. display feature); however, the course provided a search command to find various words or phrases within the website and textbook.
- **Learning Assessment:** The course consisted of a practice test, a timed exam and group project. None of these were accessible to preview as a sample.
- **Interaction:** The student interacted with course content in a text-based environment only.

## BBC ONLINE LEARNING CLASSES

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) provides a wealth of educational programs that are offered online. *Course:* Complete Guide on How to be a Gardner <http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/htbg/index.shtml>

- **Design Layout:** Course layout is similar to a website with hundreds of options and hyperlinks to choose from. The design encourages and permits learners to explore topics in depth and from many points of view, as well as offers examples and alternatives. Each page contains graphics, flashing text, moving script, interactive content, and visual guides.

- **Structure of Course:** The structure of the course is laid out in eight modules where the learner can explore topics and tips on gardening procedures. Each module is supported by a quiz.
- **Presentation of Objectives:** At the start of the class, learning goals were not clearly structured; however, each module was broken down into activities which provided step by step instructions for learner to follow.
- **Content/Delivery Development:** This course provides a lot of information on gardening in a two step process. First, the learner outlines basic conditions of gardening through an interactive process that explores lighting features and different soils. In part two of the course, the learner creates and customizes a garden through the “virtual gardening” feature.
- **Editorial/Visual Consistency:** It’s hard to get bored with this course because there are so many special effects (virtual bugs, scrolling text, moving graphics, and audio & music clips). All sections are organized creatively and both levels are presented in an eight-step process so that it’s easy to get familiar with course navigation.
- **Technical Specifications:** A service provider and Internet connection is really all that is needed to access this course, along with appropriate plugins. (FlashPlayer and RealPlayer) The virtual garden feature is slow on a dial up modem yet the course provides technical support and guidance on how to install the appropriate Macromedia for low-bandwidth animation and interactivity.
- **Screen Navigation:** Screen navigation makes this course fun and it’s easy to get lost in everything the course offers, but with the lack of objectives, it’s also hard to assess what the learner is expected to learn or how to organize a learning path.
- **Learning Assessment:** Each module is equipped with an online assessment that is scored automatically and provides feedback on incorrect answers. After the learner completes all eight quizzes and scores a 60 percent or more, they qualify to receive a certificate. They also can customize information, reference information relevant to their own garden, track progress, and store quiz results.
- **Interaction:** This online learning guide is high in student/content interaction. Additional support, which represents face to face interaction, is not available.

Criteria Used for Data Analysis

Five Point Scale: 1 being “needs considerable work and 5 being of “high quality”

<b>1.Element K: Excel 2000-Instructor-Led Course</b>	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL=33 N=3
Design Layout			X			3
Structure of course				X		4
Learning Process			X			3
Presentation of objectives				X		4
Content/Delivery				X		4
Editorial/ Visual consistency			X			3
Technical specifications				X		4
Screen navigation		X				2
Learning Assessment		X				2
Interaction				X		4

<b>2.Element K: Self- Study Tutorial PowerPoint 2000: Introduction:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL=27 N=3
Design Layout			X			3
Structure of course		X				2
Learning Process			X			3
Presentation of objectives		X				2
Content/Delivery			X			3
Editorial/ Visual consistency				X		4
Technical specifications			X			3
Screen navigation		X				2
Learning Assessment		X				2
Interaction			X			3

<b>3. SkillSoft- E-learning program Building relationships for Continued Success</b>	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL=35 N=4
Design Layout				X		4
Structure of course				X		4
Learning Process			X			3
Presentation of objectives			X			3
Content/Delivery				X		4
Editorial/ Visual consistency				X		4
Technical specifications			X			3
Screen navigation				X		4
Learning Assessment				X		4
Interaction			X			3

<b>4. EduSystem Introduction to Cosmology</b>	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL=22 N=2
Design Layout		X				2
Structure of course		X				2
Learning Process	X					1
Presentation of objectives	X					1
Content/Delivery			X			3
User friendliness		X				2
Editorial/ Visual consistency		X				2
Technical specifications		X				2
Screen navigation			X			3
Learning Assessment		X				2
Interaction		X				2

<b>5. BBC Online Learning Class How to Be a Gardener</b>	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL-40 N=4
Design Layout					X	5
Structure of course					X	5
Learning Process				X		4
Presentation of objectives			X			3
Content/Delivery				X		4
Editorial/ Visual consistency					X	5
Technical specifications			X			3
Screen navigation				X		4
Learning Assessment			X			3
Interaction				X		4

#### REFERENCES:

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Roberts, J. M., Brindley, J. E., & Spronk, B. (1998). *Learning on the information highway: A learner's guide to the technologies*. Montréal, Québec, Canada: Chenelière/McGraw-Hill.

Seels, B. & Glasgow, Z. (1998). *Making instructional design decisions: Second edition*. Prentice Hall: Columbus, Ohio, Chapter 1.

*Lealan - outstanding job on your online class critiques! I very much liked your evaluation criteria. You understand totally the factors that make an online course sound. Thanks for your effort. You earned an "A" on the assignment. - Inez*

Weigmann, K., Klapper, R., Strasser, T., Rickert, C., Technau, G. M., Jäckle, H., Janning, W.  
and Klämbt, C. (2003). FlyMove: a new way to look at development of *Drosophila*.

1. [Annex B: Detailed Criteria for Evaluating Educational Software](#) (PDF) .

... Detailed **Criteria for Evaluating. Educational Software**. In selecting **criteria for** this evaluation ... **software**. These were adapted slightly and. then **used** as a basis for detailed review ...

[imfundo.digitalbrain.com/imfundo/web/teach/edusoft/edupdf/...](http://imfundo.digitalbrain.com/imfundo/web/teach/edusoft/edupdf/...)

<http://www2.msstate.edu/~vmw3/weblinks.htm>