

Three Hacks to Maximize Learner Engagement in the Virtual Classroom

Reflecting on the past year and a half, I've come to realize just how different facilitating in a virtual classroom environment is, from a traditional classroom setting. I've been delivering training in both formats since 2014, but due to the pandemic that reached North America in 2020, I've spent countless hours delivering training solely in a virtual environment. If you're like me, and most of the world, you've likely transitioned to virtual classroom training as well. And I bet you've encountered more than one disengaged attendee.

Even though I've created interactive virtual classroom training, here's the reality: interactivity doesn't automatically lead to engagement. Additionally, finding new and innovative ways to combine virtual platform tools with instructional activities can be challenging to do on the fly. But fear not fellow instructors. I'm happy to share my three favorite hacks to maximize learner engagement in the virtual classroom.



Combine active tools with passive tools.

Active tools require action on behalf of the learner while passive tools require little to no interaction. For example, the chat pod is considered active, as learners are required to do something. They are interacting with the virtual platform. Content sharing, on the other hand, whether it's showing a PowerPoint slide or streaming a video, is an example of a passive tool. The learners are simply viewing content on the platform. They're not interacting with it, with each other, or with the facilitator. Ideally, we should use as many active tools as possible, without disregarding passive tools. The key is to combine the two! Consider combining the chat pod or a poll with a streaming video. In other words, give the learners something to do, or something to look for, as they watch that video.



Encourage simultaneous interaction

One of my favorite things about the virtual classroom is how simple it is to engage everyone at the same time. Unlike a traditional classroom setting, the instructor can ask all learners in the virtual classroom to simultaneously interact with the platform using one of the tools, without it being chaotic or time-consuming.

There are several virtual platform tools that are ideal for this type of interaction. For example, learners can comment in chat, respond to polls, break out into smaller groups, and even draw or enter text on the whiteboard. The facilitator can then comment on what is being shared and use the information to direct learners accordingly.



Include strategic consecutive interactions

Consecutive interaction takes place when learners are asked to give a verbal response or interact with the virtual platform in a sequential manner, one after another. Based on the principles of adult learning, we know that adult learners need to be heard. That's why allowing our learners to share experiences and voice their thoughts is so important. Breakout rooms are a great example of a tool to use for consecutive interactions. During breakout room activities, learners are asked to speak one at a time in small groups to work through a scenario, share a possible solution, complete a task, etc. Consecutive interactions can also be achieved with one large group.

Keep in mind, the virtual classroom is not a spontaneous environment. Each interaction needs to be carefully planned and should include a good balance of tools and techniques. When you build in strategic consecutive interactions, it helps promote a sense of community for your learners, and provides auditory variety.

So, there you have it! I've found each one of these approaches to be invaluable. Not only have they made my job as a virtual classroom facilitator easier, but I've also found my attendees are happier and more engaged, too. What are some of your favorite hacks to hold your learners' attention and maximize engagement in the virtual classroom?

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