

Getting Started With Microlearning: The Basics

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INTRODUCTION

Microlearning is gaining ground as more organizations meet their employees' needs for performance development. Incorporating microlearning products and campaigns can be a win-win for organizations because it can fit to the workflow and be relatively low cost. Microlearning can fit a multitude of workplace scenarios—from daily safety huddles to weekly sales team planning meetings; from self-paced experiences focused on conflict resolution and organizational culture to curated and well-planned campaigns like how to write effective performance reviews or using AI as part of the workflow.

Microlearning can be used for information-based (e.g., facts or concepts) or context-based content (e.g., realistic or authentic scenarios). It can also be used as another option in your learning ecosystem, whether stand-alone training campaigns or complementary campaigns to a more robust training program. It's easy to get caught up in microlearning's potential for your organization. So how do you get started?

This checklist highlights basic points of consideration for leaders, managers, designers, and developers. For those who are “all of the above,” this gives you perspective on three key areas as you tackle this by yourself. Decide on the tradeoffs of each point against each role. You know your organization best!



GETTING STARTED

Whether you are initiating a pilot to try microlearning, using it currently, or just trying to figure it out, consider these points.

- **Is your L&D leadership ready?** Maybe that's you or someone you need to garner support from. L&D leadership must examine the opportunities and the barriers to adoption.
- **Is the L&D function ready?** Does the L&D function understand the term microlearning and its defined purpose and potential for the organization? Will policies or processes for training development need to be reviewed for fit or ability to guide? Do you know what skills may be helpful for your team to have?
- **Are you ready?** How do you view the term microlearning and are you ready to lead a microlearning initiative? How does microlearning tie to the performance goals of the organization? Is your perspective shared by your L&D team, stakeholders, and organization?
- **Are stakeholders ready?** Collaboration with stakeholders, whether internal to your L&D function or others you partner with across the organization, is key to success. Set expectations rather than letting the stakeholder(s) drive how it will be done. Bring them on board in parallel with getting the L&D function ready.
- **Is your organization ready?** Introducing microlearning to the organization may be similar or vastly different from how everyone usually engages with training and development experiences. It may be the first time employees self-determine when they access training. This is known as "pull" training vs. the more common "push" training. Consider if a learning culture shift is present and determine the level of change management to ensure success in implementation and adoption.

DETERMINING THE PRODUCT STARTING POINT

Should you create new microlearning products or convert an existing training curriculum to microlearning?

Advantages of creating a new microlearning from scratch

- **The content is current and targeted.** You can develop content specifically tailored for the microlearning format, addressing current needs, trends, and challenges and ensuring that the content is fresh and relevant.
- **It is intentionally designed** from the ground up to fit **microlearning design principles**. This can result in a more seamless and cohesive learning experience, with content naturally segmented into small, focused modules. Starting anew gives you the opportunity to incorporate innovative design elements, interactivity, and multimedia that are inherently suited for microlearning. This can enhance engagement and effectiveness.
- **The approach is flexible.** You can experiment with different instructional strategies, formats, and technologies. This allows you to tailor the microlearning experience to the specific needs and preferences of your target audience.
- **The learning objective (product) or objectives (campaign) are aligned.** This ensures a clear and direct connection between the learning material and the desired outcomes.

Disadvantages of creating a new microlearning from scratch

- **It can be resource intensive.** It requires time, effort, and resources, and may involve more upfront costs compared to repurposing existing content.
- **There is the potential for redundancy.** Maintenance and sustainment of redundant content in different delivery formats needs to be considered from a capacity standpoint.
- **There is the potential of a learning curve.** The organization may be implementing microlearning into the learning ecosystem for the first time. Both the L&D function and the organization itself may need time to adapt to using a new format, potentially leading to a learning curve and initial challenges in implementation.

Advantages of converting an existing training product into microlearning:

- **It can be cost-effective.** It leverages the investment made in developing the original training content.
- **It can be time efficient.** Existing foundational material allows for a more rapid deployment of microlearning campaigns or product.
- **It can preserve valuable content.** You can preserve, repurpose, and convert existing training content that is high-quality and valuable for a more contemporary learning experience.
- **It can lend consistency across training products.** You can ensure consistency in messaging and meet training standards, especially if the original training was well-structured and effective.

Disadvantages of converting an existing training product into microlearning:

- **Adapting the old training product may be a challenge.** Not all content may lend itself to the design principles of microlearning. Some materials may require significant adaptation to fit the shorter, more focused structure, potentially resulting in loss of depth.
- **The content may be outdated.** If the existing training content is outdated or no longer relevant, converting it into microlearning will not effectively address current learning or performance needs.
- **The process for conversion may be inefficient.** Converting content without careful consideration of how the organization defines microlearning and the use of microlearning design principles in conversion can lead to inefficiencies, with microlearning products lacking coherence or failing to engage learners effectively.

DESIGNING MICROLEARNING

Design an effective and engaging learning experience for your audience by focusing on the total solution all microlearning products in the campaign represent, versus each individual microlearning product.

Creating a brand new microlearning campaign or product:

- **Clearly define the specific learning objective for each product in the campaign.** Microlearning products commonly focus on one learning objective.
- **Break content into small, digestible chunks.** Each module should cover a specific concept or skill to maintain clarity and focus. Ensure that the content is relevant to the participants' needs and job roles.
- **Does the content demonstrate global equity?** Ensure that it is accessible to all participants. Consider regional colloquialisms, English as a second language, disabilities, technical jargon, accuracy of translation, font size, color contrast, and alternative text for images.
- **Is the content concise while eliciting action?** Write to engage participants in discerning, reflecting, and applying the content to real life. Can the participant take their experience and use it on the job?
- **Assess.** If the campaign goal is information-focused, develop brief assessments or quizzes within each microlearning product. If the goal is context-focused, allow participants to practice or perform to the goal of the campaign. Assessments may be evaluation-based activities through a mentor, coach/guide, direct supervisor, or through a checklist or rubric.

Converting an existing training product to a microlearning campaign or product:

- **What is appropriate?** Assess existing training content against the microlearning campaign goal to identify key concepts and skills that can be broken down into microlearning products. If learning objectives were established with the goal, use those to find relevant content. If learning objectives are not established, create them and then assess.
- **Sequence the content logically** to maintain the flow of information. Remove redundant or non-essential information, eliminating anything that does not directly contribute to the learning objective.

DEVELOPING MICROLEARNING

Developers bring the designer's solution to life. Developers must take authoring tools, delivery mechanisms, and assessment expectations into consideration.

- **Maximize technology.** Does your learning management system (LMS) assist with performance or just timestamp the acquisition of knowledge? Can an automated workflow that alerts a manager that an employee took a specific microlearning campaign on conflict resolution provide an opportunity to evaluate the employee through observation and a rubric? Use technology to align with goal achievement.
- **Is the visual design and use of media elements consistent** across all microlearning products in a campaign? This creates cohesion and a user-friendly learning experience. Given the brevity in microlearning products, images, charts, and infographics create impact and drive retention.
- **Are the activities and assessments relevant to work?** Develop work-related scenarios and provide opportunities for participants to gauge their application of all objectives in the campaign.
- **Does feedback happen immediately and over time?** Instant feedback can be used on assessments or activities within the products but it cannot inform the participant of their level of competency in application. Constructive feedback should happen as the participant demonstrates application through real-world situations and are evaluated against a checklist or rubric.
- **Will implementation require more resources?** Before full implementation, determine if the approach requires input or feedback from other parts of the organization such as IT, HR, marketing, or management. For example: An email campaign may require partnering with IT to gain insight into click open and click-through rates. Creating assessments that require observation and feedback from supervisors may necessitate additional training or onboarding.

CONCLUSION

Whether you're shaping your team's capabilities, managing their capacity, designing a solution, or developing a product, embrace the flexibility of microlearning to create a dynamic and impactful learning experience.

The decision to create a new microlearning campaign or convert an existing training curriculum or program depends on various factors including the nature of the content, budget considerations, time constraints, and the specific learning objectives. Weigh the advantages and disadvantages based on the unique context and goals of the training program, the capabilities and capacity of the L&D function, and the learning culture of your organization. Remember, these guidelines are meant to be helpful tools rather than strict rules.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robyn A. Defelice, PhD is an industry thought leader, author, and presenter with over 20 years in the L&D field. She is the co-author of *Microlearning: Short and Sweet* and has been researching How Long Does it Take to Develop Training for over a decade. Robyn's passion comes from working with L&D leadership and teams to get them to the decision-making table. She is fueled by her mission to empower L&D professionals at all levels of an organization. Her experience spans corporate to manufacturing, government to higher education, and non-profits to startups. Robyn's diverse experiences provide her clients with customized, yet pragmatic solutions.