

ONLINE COURSES PEOPLE WILL ENJOY

YES, IT IS POSSIBLE! 🙌



Magic in the Mastery

The mission of ClassLink's Learning Design (LD) Team is to make magic happen, one learning experience at a time. In dedication to this mission and to scale customer training options, the LD Team launched ClassLink Academy—an on-demand learning experience. ClassLink Academy courses integrate research-based tools, gamification, "Voices from the Field," and more!

ClassLink Academy is unique with the way courses go beyond teaching company products and focus on the process—even beyond ClassLink products. Much like this publication, ClassLink's online courses are infused with light humor and magical design strategies that led to great success. In fact, many users are surprised (and refreshed!) to discover the humorous, conversational approach that have become hallmarks of our online courses.

One more note before we dive in: At ClassLink, we believe the success of one contributes to the success of all. It's our sincere hope that this white paper offers you plenty of tools, tips, principles, and practical applications to help you enhance your organization's online learning and training offerings. Ready?! Let's make some learning magic happen!

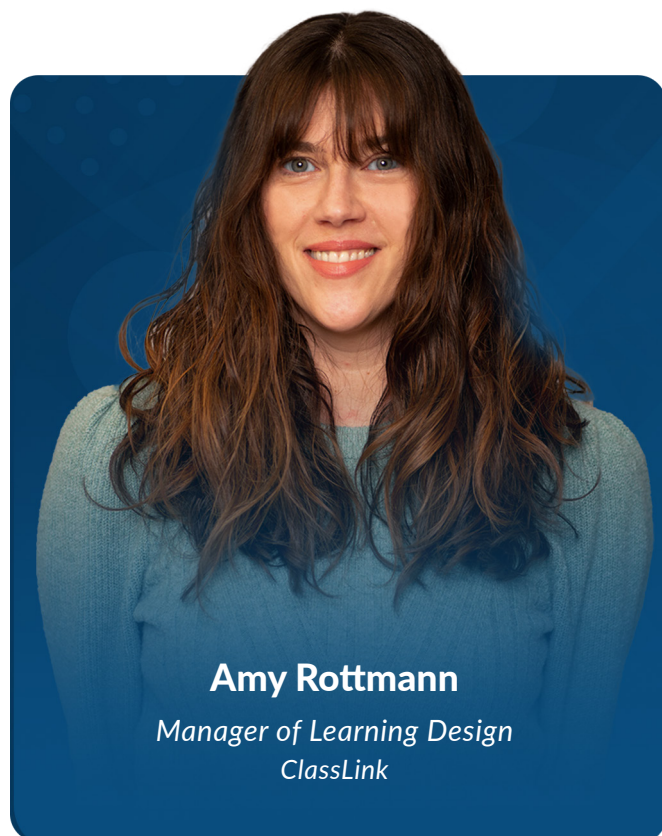


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INTRODUCTION

Success By Design

Just how popular is ClassLink Academy? In the last six months, logins and course completions have increased fourfold. (That's a 400% increase! 🥳) With almost 100 course options, there's no shortage of learning experiences that infuse the learner. The goal of each learning experience is for learners to find success.

Each course is rich with examples and illustrations that foster real-world connections and motivate learners. In addition, the professional graphics, instructional videos with expert Voice Over (VO) talent, and interactive content seamlessly heighten the learner's experience. And the icing on the e-learning cake? ClassLink Academy is available to every single customer free of charge, knocking down one more barrier to learner success.

The (Design) Road Less Traveled

Curriculum grounded in adult learning theories and multimedia principles is the common road travelled for creating effective online courses, but add in contributions from the learner to extend the learning experience well beyond simple product knowledge (a new road!). How does ClassLink do this? Each course offers learners the opportunity to share their tips for implementing ClassLink products and instructional practices in their day-to-day tasks and initiatives. Customer tips are then embedded into future courses as a "Voices From the Field" feature.

Just as important as customer tips, metrics are essential for success. One of our most valuable course-building assets is data, which is derived from course surveys. Data from the surveys shows that ClassLink Academy courses are easy to navigate, enhance learners technical understanding of ClassLink products, and offer real-world situations that can be applied immediately. Additionally, the LD Team learned the need to think smaller. As a result, something of a "micro" revolution began with a focus on micro-learning, micro-videos, micro-knowledge checks, and micro-course series!

What does this all mean? ClassLink's LD Team is taking an unconventional approach to strategically removing the barriers that have traditionally prevented learners from fully engaging with and benefiting from training content, and the results have been telling. For a team that consistently embraces unconventional course design approaches, it seems only fitting that ClassLink Academy has experienced the most exponential growth by going micro.

Yet another way the LD Team goes against the grain is through their Learning and Development services. ClassLink partners with other Software as a Service (SaaS) companies to reimagine their customer training. Working collaboratively, ClassLink's LD team and vendor partners create tailored learning experiences to joint customers and beyond. As a result, companies are implementing research-based training into their own customer support with great success.

LESSONS LEARNED

There's an increasing trend for fully online learning experiences, so training can occur in an on-demand fashion. Like ClassLink, companies are eager to ensure those experiences support product understanding while remaining relevant to customers. But, what's the best way to engage learners?

ClassLink's Learning Design (LD) Team sought feedback from customers, and the results are in! For learners of all ages to experience optimal success, online learning design and delivery must rely on three essential components:



Content layout matters.

Learners want easy-to-navigate content that is efficient and straight-to-the-point.



Relevancy is essential.

Learners want real-world applications in addition to product information, so they can use their new knowledge quickly and practically.



Captivation is vital.

Learners want intentional and professional multimedia experiences to master and retain the content.



CONTENT LAYOUT MATTERS

Take the question out of navigation

Picture this: it's pitch black outside and you're driving to a new destination when you hear "reconnecting" from your GPS. Then "Recalculating" without any navigation information. Yikes, you're lost in uncharted territory!

Clear, intuitive navigation is just as important in online learning as it is in driving. Learners, and especially adult learners, need courses that are easy to follow and meet them where they are in their individual learning processes. In fact, ClassLink customers overwhelmingly comment on how ClassLink Academy content flows and builds upon itself, making their journey through ClassLink products and processes direct and uncomplicated. What does this look like in practice?

- Friendly explanation of how to navigation ClassLink Academy and courses
- Concise headings and subheading that clearly articulate the content
- Clickable menus that speed up navigation and aid quick reference
- Balanced graphic and text components that avoid information overload
- Clear directives on how to interact with the content and move through a course
- Consistent navigation, language, and formatting where the content changes but structure stays the same across all courses
- Iconography that distinguishes categorized areas or sections of content

"I love the ease of navigation and the ability to go back and review content."

- Carolyn Buffaloe



Embrace micro-learning

Many people are familiar with the phrase, “Don’t beat around the bush.” ClassLink’s research supports this idea: learners overwhelmingly want concise and straight-to-the-point courses. Micro-courses provide just that! ClassLink Academy micro-courses are 5-20 minutes in length and focus on a single outcome. ClassLink customers love how micro-courses are straight to the point (insert loud crowd applause). Additionally, the hyper-focused content increases learner retention and serves as an easy-to-access refresher when needed.

Micro-course design creates a culture of learning that:

- Leverages content repositories, where content can stand alone or integrate into a more extensive learning experience
- Provides curriculum updates in tandem with product changes
- Offers cost-effective training options
- Increases learner engagement
- Caters to on-the-go learning
- Supports diverse learning needs, including self-directed learning that empowers the learner
- Increases turnaround time in course distribution, offering a higher return on investment (ROI)



RELEVANCY IS ESSENTIAL

Follow the formula

Have you ever thought, “This training could have been an email?” Many companies create courses that mimic and mirror “quick start” guides typically found in online knowledge bases. ClassLink customers shared that they need (and crave!) learning experiences that are more than a simple “click this, select that” approach to learning. In other words, learners need to know the why just as much as they need to know the how. ClassLink's LD Team responded to these dual needs by developing a simple formula to guide course design:

Content = Benefits + How + Why

- What **benefits** do learners gain from the learning content?
- **How** is the content applied in real-world situations?
- **Why** does the step-by-step process need to be followed?

Implementing the content formula means teaching beyond the product. For example, a customer might need to use SFTP for data transfer with ClassLink's Roster Server. But, what if SFTP is a new acronym and concept for them? ClassLink Academy has them covered! A ClassLink Academy micro-course defines and explores the SFTP process in addition to the ClassLink product.

“Even though I have been using ClassLink this year - I still learned some new tricks.”

-Sherry Ann Adams

Add a human touch

Have you ever taken a course where the instructor was so formal that you felt disengaged? Or, watched a video in a course and became more confused? Few things take the joy out of learning quicker than removing the human touch from the process. Course designers can bring content to life through a simple rule: the person on the other side of the screen is a human who wants to experience the information.

People want learning experiences that make them feel connected to the content and that help them to easily relate its value to their own experience. Easier said than done, right? Not necessarily! ClassLink discovered some universal truths that help keep the person at the center of personalized learning.

TRUTH #1

Infuse content with meaning.

Integrate examples that positively and directly impact the learner's day-to-day activity, and watch the magic that happens to learner motivation and retention as a result. Training becomes meaningful when learners can see themselves in the content. For example, create case studies or situations that replicate real-life scenarios to help them connect to the content. This can be established by varying environments, genders, ethnicities, etc.

TRUTH #3

Paint a picture.

A picture can say a thousand words, and emojis can relay emotional intent when connected to writing. At the forefront of the trend is the emoji, that quirky little picture used to convey emotion and intention in an otherwise flat digital conversation. In online learning, emojis can help increase understanding, aid organization, and serve to grab and focus the learner's attention. For example, a warning emoji ⚠️ can earmark a piece of essential information. A wink emoji 😉 can add a bit of levity to a tedious or complex concept. When used consistently, emojis can create patterns that help learners to identify specific types of information in your course content.

TRUTH #2

Bring on the (selective) cheese.

Conversational language with a light touch of humor thoughtfully placed throughout can keep learners engaged. But keep in mind that there is a fine line with the trajectory of a course's tone of voice. Light-hearted humor is engaging, but sarcasm is off-putting and should never find its way into course content. Also, while light-hearted humor is a great way to engage learners, be mindful that it does not distract from the purpose of the course—the content.

TRUTH #4

Approach course content with a coaching mentality.

Coaching isn't all whistle blowing. When done mindfully and with positive intent, coaching enhances the sense of community, which is vital to increasing learner confidence. How do you coach in an online course? One way is to ensure the course unpacks information by defining and clarifying relevant terms and acronyms. Another way is to show vulnerability. When adding content and associated examples, acknowledge that mistakes may happen. Then, offer encouragement by reinforcing that those mistakes are rarely irreversible.

"I like the positive, upbeat way the course was presented with examples that you can understand and try in real-time."

-Suzanne Stripling

Take a solution-based approach

Do you ever wish you could tell the future? Imagine the power companies would have if they could prevent seasons of increased Help Desk tickets. You know those times: 857,000 support tickets arrive in half a millisecond, all of which are asking for the same support. ClassLink's LD Team discovered how to magically address those same support tickets through courses. ClassLink found that customers are hungry for courses that provide troubleshooting solutions before the trouble begins. This form of fortune-telling helps eliminate stress and increase customers' confidence in using products. Courses with experiential situations are essential because customers want strategies to replicate successes and prevent future trouble. How can companies predict the future? In four notable ways.

Call on customers. ClassLink Academy has a "Voices From The Field" feature that invites our customers to contribute to the course content. How? They provide first-hand testimonials and examples of how they implement ClassLink products. The collaborative feature is popular because it brings the real-world application learners crave.

Teach all variables. Learning experiences should provide multiple avenues for completing a given task. Each approach should offer abundant, workable examples fully supported by the ever-important "why."

Let people play. Software simulations help boost learner confidence as they practice in a low-stakes environment. Since mistakes are inevitable (and even encouraged) in the learning process, simulated "sandbox" environments help to take intimidation out of the equation and flatten the learning curve. Simulations offer customers hands-on experience where they can "play" in a safe environment.

Do some data farming. Invoke customer feedback through in-course and end-of-course surveys. Survey questions should focus on ways a company can integrate customer input for product and course enhancement. Additionally, questions can (and should) encourage learners to share common hurdles or challenges, which can then be used to create new curriculum topics and foster greater ownership.



"Because of ClassLink Academy, I can change my domain URL. I understand password reset capability. I'm more confident in explaining the password locker key."

-Christa Castelli

CAPTIVATION IS VITAL

Amplify the experience with visuals

Have you ever taken an online course with a person talking to a camera—no images, no slide deck, just them talking? Yep, nap time! Or, ever seen a slide deck with huge images and the text so small bifocals won't even help? Effective graphics and text choices can turn a course into a learning experience. To make this happen, begin with clear, professional, and purposeful visuals that enhance a learner's ability to comprehend the material. But, how? In four compelling, easily achievable ways.

Balance visuals and text. Visuals should support and enhance content without being distracting. The text and image size ratio should work in tandem, but the amount of text should be as succinct as possible without sacrificing meaning. When it comes to course design, less is (almost always) more!

Use inclusive graphics. Select inclusive graphics that display diversity and represent different perspectives. This approach allows learners to see themselves in the content. Thoughtful graphics are an ideal way to enhance a sense of community and to help the learner personally connect to the content.

Capitalize on real estate. Images should be zoomed in as much as possible to direct the learner's focus to applicable tools, buttons, and graphics. ClassLink's LD Team uses a technique affectionately called "squishy-squish" to cut, crop, and remove white space or visual noise from screenshots. How you choose to "squishy-squish" and prep images is not as important as why; learners deserve well-designed, thoughtful visuals as much as they deserve well-designed, thoughtful written content.

Highlight and frame essential elements. The human eye naturally scans things from top-down and left-to-right. For maximum benefit, visuals should flow accordingly. Adding purposeful spotlights to images draws the eye to essential image details that, in turn, reinforce the content. If an image shows a workflow that does not follow the eye's natural path, add numbered or lettered step markers to demonstrate the processes visually.



"I loved the diverse representation of staff members in the videos. I also appreciate the hints during quiz time."

-Amber Pagan

Short and sweet (and sometimes silly)

Who wants to watch a 15-minute training video? These days, nobody! With the growth in TikTok popularity, even the 5-minute training videos are a thing of the past. Viewers want informative videos that are 30 minutes or less with a little hint of humor added. How realistic is a super-shortened video that doesn't sacrifice information? Believe it or not, it's more realistic than you might think.

Micro-step the process. Research shows people learn best when information is presented in tiny chunks and when it builds off other information (scaffolding, in ed-speak). Think of it this way; each short video is laser focused on one step in a larger process. The laser focused videos increase self-directed learning and provide easy access if the learner wants or needs to relearn specific steps.

Attract learners with humor.

Many people wouldn't choose to watch a video on API connectors. Still, sometimes it's necessary to impart less-than-exciting topics to learners. Infuse a little humor and completely change the information-sharing game while increasing engagement.

Give a (literal) voice to content. The use of professional Voice Over talent elevates learning experiences by offering another sensory avenue for learners to internalize information and make connections. Using the same narrator throughout your courses creates a culture of comfort, trust, and authority through vocal consistency, which is a vital component of learning design. As you consider who will provide narration for your videos, think about the overall tone you want to impart, keeping in mind that every piece of learning content reflects and communicates your company's mission, vision, and values. As a general rule, videos walking through more than five steps of a process should incorporate voiceover narration.

“The information was given in short videos instead of long drawn-out videos that...kept my interest.”

-Latoya Nelson



There's safety in self-assessments

Do you get sweaty palms and heart palpitations when you have to take a test? Test anxiety is real, no matter the learning platform. Informal, unscored knowledge checks can help alleviate test stress by providing low-risk ways to help learners assess their understanding of course concepts. Over time, ClassLink's LD Team discovered five key ways to create "heart-healthy" self-assessments.

Intentional questioning. Leave regurgitating for the birds, instead use meaningful questions that reinforce the intended outcome. Questions should provide opportunities for learners to practice and demonstrate content mastery.

Varied formats. Variety is the spice of life, and of assessments. Knowledge check formats can be varied by question types (e.g., true/false, multiple-choice, matching) and design (e.g., case studies, interactive graphics, simulations).

Immediate response. Did I pass or fail? That's never a question to leave unanswered. Immediate knowledge check results promote motivation, self-regulation, and self-efficiency, which results in higher levels of understanding. Immediate responses can be integrated into question feedback or through answer keys. Whichever knowledge check method you choose to incorporate, the goal should be to provide an instant response.

Meaningful feedback. Feedback should go beyond the correct answer and provide additional information related to the questions. One impactful way to do this is to add justifications for both correct and incorrect answers. If there are "trick" questions, provide context about what made the question particularly tricky.

Learner anonymity. The beauty of an unscored knowledge check is that it allows the learner to focus on comprehension and understanding instead of worrying about the outcome. Points-free knowledge checks also enable learners to celebrate small victories and to know when they need to review the content.

"The 'Knowledge Checks' let me know if I needed to review the material before moving on."

-Jeffrey Lepak



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

To paraphrase the beloved movie **Field of Dreams**: If you build it, they will learn. Let's take it a step further: If you ask, they will tell you. ClassLink customers did precisely that, and the Learning Design Team listened. ClassLink Academy now has courses and micro-courses with an intentional layout design, relevant content, and worthwhile experiences. ClassLink's Learning Design Team is proud of the dramatic transformation in ClassLink Academy through the help of our customers and the powerful data they provided. ClassLink invites you to ask your learners how they prefer to learn. Then, lean into the data and watch the magic unfold in your online customer training. ClassLink truly wants your organization and your learners to feel the magic, too!

Call to Action

Are you ready to create some magical customer trainings? ClassLink's Learning Design Team wants to join forces with you! Let's collaborate together to provide learning experiences about your product within ClassLink Academy or in your own learning platform. Have we piqued your interest?

Great! Submit an inquiry to ClassLink's Learning Design Team at LearningDesignTeam@classlink.com.
(We can't wait to hear from you! 😊)



VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"The most memorable thing about this course is... that the verbiage along with coordinating screenshots made it very easy for me to recall situations that I had experienced previously and...have provided comfort for me to be able to work in the ClassLink Platform confidently."

-Kisha Hightower

"I like [that the content] mixed learning modalities and moved quickly while covering everything thoroughly."

-Emily Coppa

"The interactive key term matching was helpful and videos were short and to the point."

-Eric McEwan

"I enjoyed that the instructional videos were only a few seconds or minutes long. [They were] easy to follow and very informative."

-Ashlee Trzebiatowski



**ClassLink
Academy**