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The Beginner's Guide to Creating an Online Training Program: Step 2 - Outline

Power operations and supercharge growth with online training

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Estimated read time: 10 minutes

Step 2: Outline

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Congratulations! If you're reading this, it means you've defined your target audience, your business goals and your success metrics. You're ready to move forward. The next step in the Beginner's Guide to Creating an Online Training Program is to outline your plans for building out your first training.

Now is the time to clearly lay out your content development approach to ensure everyone on your team is fully versed in the organizational structure, format and scope of content production.

This guide is the second of a five-part framework (Define > Outline > Build > Engage > Measure) for Online Training success, and will walk you through how to document your detailed content creation plan for an online Online Training program.

Let's begin by addressing content topics.

Content Topics: From Selection to Outline

Knowing what you want to teach and why you want to teach it is a critical part of creating a successful training. That's why the first part of your Outline process should focus on the content

first part of your Outline process should focus on the content topic; get that right, and the rest will be much easier.
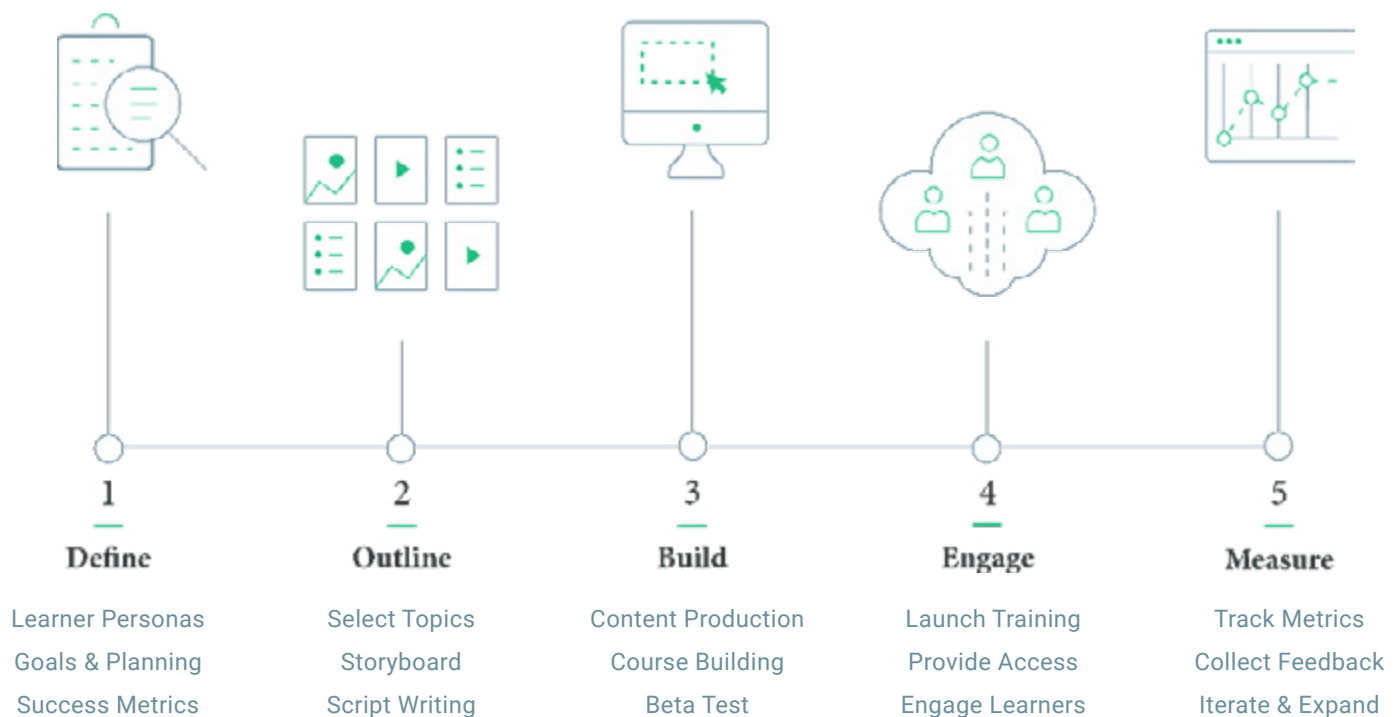
You'll notice this part of the guide is more extensive than the steps that follow for the same reason. Quality work here will allow for ease of execution when it comes time to write and design.

Selecting the topic to outline is a matter of choosing from the catalog of the training you plan to build. If you have a catalog of topics you'd like to cover, simply pick one and get started! If you don't have a catalog, now could be a great time to build one, pulling from the content you do already have.

Everyone has content, even if you have never called it that. Consider compiling everything you have gathered over the years — FAQs, customer support tickets, email feedback — to inform your topic creation process.

Also consider: what is most important to your audience? What do they need to learn? Choose a topic from your list and begin creating a course.

Start small. Create a course that will take users no longer than 30 to 60 minutes to complete. You can always add more later to expand the content, or you can link several courses together later to create a larger training about the given topic.

1	2	3	4	5
Define	**Outline**	**Build**	**Engage**	**Measure**
Learner Personas	Select Topics	Content Production	Launch Training	Track Metrics
Goals & Planning	Storyboard	Course Building	Provide Access	Collect Feedback
Success Metrics	Script Writing	Beta Test	Engage Learners	Iterate & Expand

For instance, what if you want to create a course about the first stage of onboarding, but know that later, the process will expand? You might need to create an onboarding overview course, plus courses on other stages of the process. Any good training automation software will give you the option to enroll users in specific training tracks. So for now, just focus on the course for the first stage of onboarding — or whatever content topic you've chosen.

Microlearning

Maintain that focus on the course even if you choose to use a microlearning approach. Microlearning is a type of learning process still gaining traction. In principle, the approach cuts content into highly digestible pieces for learners to consume, which can be delivered either as part of a larger training program or as standalone information.

The idea isn't coming from nowhere. From Miller's Law to more recent research on how the brain retains information over time, the field of neuropsychology has always impacted the way educators design and structure curriculums and courses.

But right now, neuropsychology is especially hot in training. Training Industry Magazine posits that a focus on neuroscience and the way the brain learns best will bring a paradigm shift to training delivery and design in 2016. Diving into microlearning is one way to stay on top of that trend.

Whichever topic and type of structure you select, know that it doesn't have to be perfect, or set in stone. Making mistakes while creating your first online Online Training program is normal, and often critical to success. That's why the creation process works best as an iterative one. You'll receive feedback from your learners and your team over time, which will help you improve the program and ensure it always caters to your learners' needs.

Defining Training Objectives

Whenever you're outlining a course, you should have a goal in mind. Ask yourself: By the end of this course, what will the learner be able to do?

> ## Not all training objectives are good ones. For an objective to be relevant, it needs to be actionable.

Not all training objectives are good ones. For an objective to be relevant, it needs to be actionable. "The learners will understand X and Y" is not a sound objective. "The learners will be able to apply X to do Y" is much better.

When constructing the objective, reflect on (or perform some more research on) the tools a developed, robust learning and training platform could offer. Milestones, for example, can help measure a learner's engagement and competency so you can accurately assess what knowledge they've gleaned from a training.

Creating a Topical Outline

Creating a topical outline is an important step in the guide, to help the content creation process along; not outlining your course will hamper it. You'll see the value of your outline as soon as you move forward to the next step!

Now is also an opportune time to start thinking about which

learning and training platform you will use to deliver and assess your content. By understanding the capabilities of the platform you select, you'll give yourself a leg up on proper training program planning and proper content development that fits the structure and functions of the platform. For example, you may want to find a platform with an option for creating a topical outline.

So, what should you include in a topical outline?

Split content into main topics and subtopics. If this guide were a training, for instance, a main topic might be "Content Topics," while a subtopic would be "Defining training objectives." If "onboarding" is your training topic, a main topic might be "using the app," and a subtopic "signing up," "setting up your profile" or "uploading photos."

When choosing your subtopics, bear in mind that each will be made into a training activity containing at least one piece of media, such as rich text, video, audio, or a presentation. Therefore, if there simply isn't enough content from which to create an activity (for instance, if signing up is a two-step process), your subtopic may need to be rethought.

In your outline, account for appropriate activity "chunking," such that a subtopic which could be explained by a three-minute video rather than a nine-page paper has a "video" activity. This split will be determined, again, by the way your learners learn best, so never lose sight of the personas you designed in the "Define" step of the guide.

Start Storyboarding

You've selected your training topic, defined your training objectives, and created a topical outline. Now you're ready to dig further into the specifics of your course outline, with a storyboard. (Note that knowing which training platform you'll be

working in and which authoring tools will be at your disposal can help inform your decisions about what type of media to include, and in what format.)

Start by illustrating each subtopic with a wireframe. You can use slideshow presentation tools to create your storyboard, with

each slide representing one subtopic. Simply mock out how each subtopic (activity) will display, and which pieces of media (text, images, videos) will go where. Include colors, sizes, font styles and anything else pertinent to the way your course will actually appear to the learner.

Write Your Content

Now you know where you'll place your content and to which topics and subtopics it will be applicable. It's time to write! Your choice of content delivery (rich text, audio or video) will dictate your writing process considerations.

For Rich Text:

Consider properly formatting your content as you write for easy

transfer into your training platform later.

For Audio Narration:

Write the content as a script. Some tips:

- Take a conversational approach to script writing
- Make note of when the narrator should pause or emphasize words
- Plan to have access to a quiet environment to record the script
- Ensure you have all the necessary audio recording and editing equipment at your disposal

For Video Content:

Write the script taking the previous points about audio recordings into account. Additionally, consider the following:

- Body language, attire, general appearance
- A recording area with proper and adequate lighting
- Necessary video recording and editing hardware and software
- Creating a screencast that records interaction on-screen along with your audio narration

Wrapping Up

The "Outline" step is crucial to the functions of the Beginner's Guide to Creating an Online Training Program, as the course creation process runs much more smoothly after you've constructed a solid backbone (your well-defined outline) on which to build it.

With your topic outline, storyboard and copy in hand, you're now ready to move onto part three of the guide: Build.

Request a demo to get an inside look at Northpass, a modern platform for helping tech-enabled companies streamline and scale partner, customer and workforce training programs.

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