



Rapid Guide
How to **Design** Rapid E-learning **Blends**



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In 20 minutes you will:

- Know how rapid blends are different from traditional blended learning
- Have a three step process for rapid blends to apply
- Have a series of examples to work with.

What is a rapid blend?

Blended learning is a term that you're more than likely already familiar with. It simply means the combination of one or more learning delivery methods to provide a coherent learner experience. Simple blend examples include:

- E-learning modules covering basic content, followed up with workshops for advanced content
- Virtual classroom session to introduce new content, followed up with e-learning updates
- Masterclass for senior managers followed by local cascade sessions.

Rapid blended learning is at its core the same as traditional blended learning, with a few key differences.

1. There will always be a rapid e-learning component

Blended learning can in principle be designed without any e-learning component, e.g. a classroom session followed up with phone calls to check in a week later. In practice it's very rare not to have e-learning within a blend.

For rapid blended learning, because rapid e-learning is at its core, there will always be a rapid e-learning component within the blend.

2. Speed of delivery is critical

The dual promise of rapid e-learning is: speed to market and cost control. It's critical that in creating a blend, neither of these benefits is undermined by a complicated blended solution that slows down development or complicates the launch.

3. Cost must be kept down

In line with the point above, it's critical that a blended solution does not add so much to the development and delivery costs as to weaken the cost argument for rapid e-learning.

Keeping these drivers in mind will help to ensure your rapid blends stay focused.

Rapid blends: a three-step process

To develop effective rapid blends, apply the following three-step process:

① Consider audience's minimum need

② Synchronous or asynchronous

③ Use channels that already work

1. Consider your audience: what's the minimum they need?

Less is more in rapid e-learning. The same is true of rapid blends.

It's likely that you already have a brief to, say, communicate the information around a new product, and have decided that a 20 minute rapid e-learning module is required to convey the key features, benefits, and price information.

The question to ask to determine if a blended approach is required is: What more do they need to know?

Rapid e-learning should be rapid in two senses: development cycle and learner time. It's supposed to be a quick hit, of no more than 20-30 minutes in duration. Adding components to create a blend that does not deliver critical information at the point of need will take longer and cost more to develop and deliver, and use learner time which of course has its own costs.

What might your target audience need?

While rapid e-learning should be your first choice, there are target audience needs that could be addressed in alternative routes.

Target audience need	Possible blend components
To explain basic facts and information	Rapid e-learning module
To practise application of process/skill	Rapid e-learning simulations/quiz, which could be developed in an authoring tool Virtual classroom session (could use WebEx or DimDim) Workshop
To understand context	Rapid e-learning module Virtual classroom session live or recorded Phone calls / audio/ podcasts
To ask questions	Rapid e-learning with FAQ components Survey Online polls Webinar
To get updates when things change	Rapid e-learning modules RSS feeds

Be very strict in the business case for any component beyond the core rapid e-learning modules. Run through this checklist of questions for any learner need that appears to require a non e-learning approach:

- What is the added value of the additional blend component?
- Is there a way to address this using rapid e-learning modules that's effective to the same degree?
- Will this be the most complicated component to develop?
- Is this beneficial for the majority or the minority of the target audience?
- Are there additional delivery costs that need to be included for the proposed additional component?

The answers to these questions should help you to determine whether the solution actually requires additional components beyond the rapid e-learning.



Rapid angle: Complex blend in a big hurry? Think twice...

Most rapid e-learning does not require a blended component. The point of the rapid e-learning module is to deliver key information quickly to a time-pressured target audience. If you find that a complex blend emerges as a requirement during your definition phase, you should question if the solution can actually be implemented using a rapid e-learning approach at all.

2. Determine synchronous or asynchronous

Blended components come in two varieties:

- **Synchronous:** real-time communication, e.g. virtual classroom, webinars, phone calls, workshops
- **Asynchronous:** delayed communication, e.g. rapid e-learning modules, email, discussion boards, podcasts, recorded sessions.

In your decision to add a blend component to your rapid e-learning, it's important to first consider whether you should go down a synchronous or asynchronous route. Use the following table to help with your decision.

Factor	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Speed to develop	Rapid: just preparation time required for any live session	More effort involved than preparation for live sessions
Cost to develop	Very low, simple preparation for virtual classroom or short workshop	Should be low if tools are available
Cost to deliver	High as they require facilitator time and coordination efforts Consider use of tools like DimDim for low cost virtual delivery	Should be very low additional delivery costs once launched
When to use	When human contact and live explanation is absolutely critical to achieving goals	When it's business as usual, mature audience who don't need detailed context and explanation
Examples	A fifteen minute group session to solve a problem posed at the end of the rapid e-learning module A face to face workshop to cover the advanced content Online chat sessions, either one to one or small group, to answer learner questions.	Rapid e-learning stand alone modules A discussion forum where learners post questions A podcast from a subject matter expert explaining the top five mistakes in positioning a certain product.

As you can see, there are trade-offs in deciding whether a synchronous or asynchronous component is required for your rapid blend. That's why it's important to make an informed choice and weigh up the costs and benefits of both before committing in your rapid definition stage.



Rapid angle: Synchronous by exception

Synchronous components are usually virtual classroom sessions or live workshops. They can be very effective in providing context, enabling users to ask questions, collaborative problem solving or skills' practice. However, they require coordination (inviting learners, managing numbers) and facilitation. If your organisation does not have a virtual meeting tool, you will need to buy or rent the facility. They tend to increase complexity and delivery overheads for these reasons – not including learner time and opportunity cost.

Before you add a synchronous component to your blend, be absolutely sure you cannot address the requirement using asynchronous methods.

One option is to run one synchronous session with a pilot group and record it, both to test its effectiveness and also determine if its content can be converted into an FAQ, rapid e-learning or included as a learning object based on the recorded session. Keep the cost down by considering the use of tools like Yugma (<http://www.yugma.com/>) or DimDim (<http://www.dimdim.com/>) for this.

3. Keep it simple, use channels that already work

Good advice at all times, but absolutely crucial during rapid blend development. If the blend becomes too complex, providing too many options and components to the learner, it's likely you've lost focus on the rapid element from a learner perspective. A rapid blend should really have no more than three distinct components as an absolute maximum.

Since speed to market is a key driver for rapid e-learning, your rapid blend must encounter no barriers during launch. A common barrier is new technology. Rapid blends are not the place to innovate with delivery formats that are unfamiliar to your target audience. Instead, use paths of least resistance and information delivery channels that people are already comfortable with in your organisation.

It can be useful, when considering a rapid blend approach to list the methods in which your target audience currently receive information. Then determine if that channel can be used in the blend, either to support your learners or deliver key information. That list might include:

- Intranet
- Email
- Phone
- SMS
- Virtual meeting/virtual classroom
- E-learning
- Podcasts.

During the rapid definition phase determine what's on the list for your target audience.

Use the channels that are 'already on' in your blend, rather than creating new methods of communicating. Innovation in a rapid timeline is not advisable.



Rapid angle: Lo-fi blends are fine

Blended learning does not have to be complicated and in rapid blends you don't have time for much complexity.

An e-learning module that is supported by a few pages of FAQs on a website may be perfectly sufficient for your audience needs. Or an e-learning module followed by an SMS message summarising the key points to your learners may be all you need. Keep it simple, and keep communications in the channels people are used to, and your audience will appreciate it.



Rapid angle: Make the most of Moodle

One key aspect of any blend is to ensure that there's a simple, single means of accessing all the blend components for your learners.

Moodle, the open source LMS, is a great tool for enabling this. Moodle easily handles rapid e-learning modules, recorded audio or video, RSS feeds, as well as word documents, .pdfs and most other components you'd want to consider for a blend, including quite sophisticated learner tracking and reporting.

You can set Moodle up with a calendar function and run weekly/monthly sessions for cohorts of learners, getting them involved via discussion forums, setting assignments, even polling their views on key questions and topics. Moodle also has synchronous facilities in terms of chat rooms.

If you're going to have a blend with a wide range of synchronous components, it's well worth considering moodle. Kineo Open Source has developed many versions of Moodle and can support the use of Moodle in any blend design. Find out more at www.kineoopensource.com

Examples of rapid blends that work

Here are some examples of simple blends that are quick and easy to construct, and play to the requirements and typical communication channels of their target audiences.



Case study 1: Rapid blend for a call centre

Target audience: call centre customer service agents

Traits: very used to hearing taped calls as examples, technically savvy

Topic: change in compliance requirements due to new product set

Rapid blend: E-learning + audio updates

Core do's and don'ts are addressed through series of rapid e-learning modules combining screen capture and quiz questions.

Two new audio files uploaded every Monday for four weeks following e-learning launch to call centre intranet capturing real examples of good and bad calls based on new compliance regulations.

Learners can listen at their desks or download to MP3 players.

Comment: Here the fact that the target audience is comfortable listening to example calls is used to full advantage, providing a range of calls on an ongoing basis as examples to the audience. It could have been extended to include expert commentary on the calls as part of the MP3s.



Case study 2: Rapid blend for mobile sales team

Target audience: geographically dispersed sales team

Traits: technically savvy, use Blackberry E-mail Phones and wi-fi on the road, competitive in nature

Topic: training on new product set

Rapid blend: Email + e-learning + email

Email with five challenging product questions sent to team with challenge: who can respond quickest with correct answers? Email explains that e-learning can help you with understanding the new product.

Features and benefits of new product addressed through rapid e-learning breeze presentations with links to more detailed product data sheets (.pdfs on company intranet.)

Email sent announcing winner of rapid quiz within 24 hours.

Comment: Here, email works as an opener and closer of the blend, helping to focus a busy audience on completion of e-learning as a tool to help address challenges. The mobile audience benefits from use of email as their preferred method of communications.



Case study: Rapid blend for line managers

Target audience: line manager population for global organisation

Traits: self-starters and autonomous but like to talk through region specific issues, use Virtual Meeting Centre (e.g. WebEx or DimDim) for virtual classroom sessions

Topic: coaching poor performers

Rapid blend: Email + virtual classroom sessions

Basics of how to identify poor performance, coaching options, do's and don'ts covered in e-learning. E-learning ends with three case studies of poor performance and asks the learner to consider how they would handle the situation as pre-cursor to virtual classroom sessions.

Virtual classroom sessions run on a regional basis to address legal and policy variations in each region, and to walk through the three case studies

Virtual classroom sessions are 90 minutes, five timeslots are offered (0900-1030 Monday to Friday of Week 3 after launch). Sessions are recorded and added to the managers' area of the intranet for reference.

Comment: In this case, a synchronous session was called for to handle local specifics and deal with the sensitivities and challenges of the topic, recognising that the target audience preferred to talk through challenging issues. There's a cost implication but it is identified upfront. The planning of the virtual sessions is devolved to SMEs in each region, who also develop the case studies.

Key actions



How to **Design** Rapid E-learning **Blends**:

- Blend by exception in rapid e-learning
- Know your audience and what will work for them
- Decide if synchronous or asynchronous is right
- Keep it simple and use what works already.

Take it further

What do you want to do?	Check out these resources
Find out how to support learners once you've launched your rapid blend	Rapid Guide: How to Use a Learning Community for Support
How the blend might work for a specific topic area	Induction Template Product Knowledge Template Soft Skills and Templates Procedural Knowledge Templates
How to incorporate an effective synchronous component	Rapid Guide: How to Design a Webinar for Rapid E-learning
Find out how Kineo designed a world-class blend for BP	Check out our BP case study at http://www.kineo.com/case-studies/bp-blended-learning-2.html
Find out how to rapidly support and sustain performance	Rapid Guide: How to Use a Learning Community for Support How to Sustain Performance from Rapid E-learning
Get help costing and scoping your blends	Rapid Guides: Rapid E-learning Return on Investment Tool How to Scope Content for Rapid E-learning

All these and more are available at Kineo's Rapid E-learning Store:

www.rapidelearningstore.com with many samplers available at <http://www.kineo.com/elearning-reports.html>

For more information on Kineo's rapid e-learning services:

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