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[Home](#) > [Learning Circuits](#) > [2002](#) > [Blended Learning Models](#)
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Blended Learning Models

By Purnima Valiathan

The term blended learning is used to describe a solution that combines several different delivery methods, such as collaboration software, Web-based courses, EPSS, and knowledge management practices. Blended learning also is used to describe learning that mixes various event-based activities, including face-to-face classrooms, live e-learning, and self-paced learning. Unfortunately, there's no single formula that guarantees learning, but here are some guidelines from NIIT on how to order your learning activities.

NIIT categorizes blended learning into three models:

- skill-driven learning, which combines self-paced learning with instructor or facilitator support to develop specific knowledge and skills
- attitude-driven learning, which mixes various events and delivery media to develop specific behaviors
- competency-driven learning, which blends performance support tools with knowledge management resources and mentoring to develop workplace competencies.

What are the key features of each approach? In which situations is an approach adopted? What blended techniques can be adopted to enhance learning?

	Why	How
Skill-Driven Model:	Learning specific knowledge and skills requires regular feedback and support from the trainer, facilitator, or peer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a group-learning plan that's self-paced but bound to a strict schedule • pad self-paced learning material with instructor-led overview and closing sessions • demonstrate procedures and processes through synchronous online learning labs or a traditional classroom setting • provide email support • design long-term projects
Attitude-Driven Model	Content that deals with developing new attitudes and behaviors requires peer-to-peer interaction and a risk-free environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hold synchronous Web-based meetings (Webinars) • assign group projects (to be completed offline) • conduct role-playing simulations
Competency-Driven Model	To capture and transfer tacit knowledge, learners must interact with and observe experts on the job.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assign mentors • develop a knowledge repository (LCMS/LMS)

Skill-driven model

Blended learning that's skill-driven mixes interaction with a facilitator through email, discussion forums, and face-to-face meetings with self-paced learning, such as Web-based courses and books. This type of approach is analogous to a chemical reaction, in which interaction with the instructor or facilitator acts as a catalyst to achieve the desired reaction—learning.

According to a 2000 survey by the Masie Center, 88 percent of learners and 91 percent of managers recommend that the trainer or facilitator be an active part of the online training program. Survey respondents placed a high value on having the trainer monitor progress and contact the learner, evaluate online project work, build and facilitate an online community for the course participants, and be available via email or

threaded discussion to respond to content questions. It's clear that combining self-paced learning with facilitator support keeps the learner from feeling isolated, which assists in the successful completion of the self-paced modules.

Indeed, this approach works best when people are learning content at the knowledge or application levels. Techniques to incorporate skill-driven blended learning include

- creating a tightly scheduled group learning plan
- using instructor-led overview and closing sessions
- using synchronous learning labs
- providing support to learners through email.

Skill-Driven Blended Learning Plan

	Technology-based techniques	Non-technology based techniques
Announcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LMS • email push 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flyer • mail • phone
Overview session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • Webinar 	traditional classroom
Self-paced learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based tutorial • e-books • EPSS • simulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • articles • books • job-aids • on-the-job training
Query resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • FAQ • instant messenger 	face-to-face meeting
Demonstration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web meeting • simulations 	traditional classroom
Practice	simulation	workbook assignment
Feedback	email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face-to-face meeting • print report
Closing session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • Webinar 	traditional classroom
Certification	Web-based test	print test

Behavior-driven model

This approach blends traditional classroom-based learning with online collaborative learning events. At times, the nature of the content, as well as the desired outcome (developing attitudes and behavior) necessitates the inclusion of collaborative learning that's facilitated through face-to-face sessions or technology-enabled collaborative events. Developers should use this approach to teach content that requires learners to try out new behaviors in a risk-free environment. For example, soft skill courses that require role playing a performance evaluation or negotiating with a customer should employ a behavior-driven approach. Activities that developers should incorporate into the overall learning experience include discussion forums, Webinars, group projects, and online debates that use chat modules.

Attitude-Driven Blended Learning Plan

	Technology-based	Non-technology based

	techniques	techniques
Announcement	LMS or email push	flyer, email, or phone
Overview session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • Webinar 	traditional classroom
Self-paced learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web-based tutorial • e-books • simulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • articles • books • workbooks with "if-then" decision tables
Query resolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • FAQ • instant messenger 	face-to-face meeting with expert
Assessment	simulations	print test
Collaborative session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinar • chat 	role-playing with peers
Practice	simulations	role-playing with peers
Feedback and closing session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • Webinar 	traditional classroom

Competency-driven model

The success of knowledge workers depends on how quickly employees make decisions in the work place. While part of the decision-making process is guided by common facts and working principles, people also need tacit knowledge that's often retained by experts. Learning that facilitates the transfer of tacit knowledge requires a competency-driven approach. Because people absorb tacit knowledge by observing and interacting with experts on the job, activities may include a blend of online performance support tools with live mentoring.

Competency Driven Blended Learning Plan

	Technology-based techniques	Non-technology based techniques
Assign guides or mentors	email	phone
Create a community	space on the Internet or intranet	study groups
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email • discussion forums • simulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face-to-face meetings • workshops • phone
Hold discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discussion forums • chat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • face-to-face meetings • workshops • phone

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Resolve queries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• email• instant messenger	face-to-face meeting
Capture learning	stories and data compiled in a knowledge repository (LMS/LCMS)	white papers

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