**BLENDED LEARNING**

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**What Is Blended Learning? Examples, Types, and More**

The question of whether blended learning is effective concerns training professionals as much as those who wonder if blended scotch is a good thing. As with scotch, the answer depends on the balance. So, what is blended learning, what do we blend, in what proportions, and why has it been drawing so much attention over the past 10 years?

**What Is Blended Learning?**

Blended learning is a learning approach that combines instructor-led brick-and-mortar classroom training and online learning activities.

This strategy doesn’t overlook the benefits of face-to-face training with a teacher; rather, it incorporates digital tools to enhance the learning experience and topic comprehension.

Picture a scenario in which a teacher sends out a video link for students to watch at home, and then students email their reviews to that teacher, setting the stage for an engaging classroom discussion. This is just one example of how it works. Now let’s look at some other examples.

**Examples of blended learning**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Some examples of how to blend | | |
| **Activity** | **Face-to-face approach** | **To make it blended…** |
| Learners work on projects in groups. | Learners meet in a classroom to collaborate and contribute to the project. | Learners use channels in messengers, online communities, and task managers to plan their work and control the flow. They also use file-sharing services (e.g., Google Docs) to collaborate and share feedback on the project. |
| Learners practice foreign language conversation in pairs or small groups. | Learners are divided into groups during a lesson and discuss a particular topic. | In addition to classroom discussions, learners use online services for text and voice chat (e.g., Discord). |
| Assessment. | Learners write essays and take mid-term and final exams. | Learners’ progress is evaluated by their activity statistics; they take online quizzes and tests, submit digital items, and take part in peer reviews. |

**What Is the Difference Between Hybrid and Blended Learning?**

In addition to blended learning, there is also hybrid learning. These two educational approaches are frequently confused as being interchangeable. While they both involve a blend of methods, there is a significant difference between them.

In **hybrid learning**, an instructor provides educational materials to students, some of whom are physically present in the classroom, while the rest participate remotely. With this approach, the educator simultaneously teaches both on-site and remote students using video conferencing technologies and software.

As it comes from the definition of **blended learning**, this approach, in contrast, merges traditional in-person instruction with online educational strategies. It allows students to attend a lecture in a classroom setting and then complete an online quiz, either on-site or at home.

Think of a hybrid car and a blender. A hybrid car combines two types of fuel, just as hybrid learning combines two types of learning environments. A blender, on the other hand, mixes together whatever you put in it, and similarly, blended learning combines multiple types of learning content.

**Benefits of Blended Learning**

Now that you’re familiar with the meaning of blended learning, it’s crucial to understand its potential benefits. Below, we explore the numerous advantages it offers to both learners (students or employees) and organizations (schools, universities, or businesses):

* Safer learning setting
* Engaging educational experience
* Self-guided learning
* Enhanced learner engagement
* Stronger comprehension
* Comprehensive analytics

Let’s take a closer look at each of them in turn.

**Benefits of blended learning for learners**

**Safer learning setting**. If 2020 taught us anything, it’s that gathering in one place with lots of people can have its complications, and only interacting with them through a screen can be pretty tough. The blended learning method makes things safer by reducing the time we spend together in person, yet it still gives us the chance to communicate live.

**Engaging educational experience**. Theoretical content can be tough to get through, and let’s be honest, sometimes it’s extremely boring. Sitting and listening to a lecture for hours is one thing, but learning the same material through interactive clicks, engaging in simulated conversations, or playing through game-like courses is a completely different experience. Gaining new knowledge can be fun, and blended learning provides lots of tools to make it so.

**Self-guided learning**. Having the flexibility to tailor and manage one’s own learning journey is crucial, particularly for adult learners. After all, learning is just one aspect of a person’s life, and often not the most critical one. Between work, family, hobbies, and social life, people juggle numerous responsibilities, and education should facilitate, not hinder, this balance. Blended learning offers a solution by providing round-the-clock access to courses, so learners can engage with materials whenever they want to and have space in their schedule.

**Benefits of blended learning for organizations**

**Enhanced learner engagement**. No business or institution wants to force its employees or students to learn, because it’s not effective. To truly enhance learning outcomes, it’s essential to actively involve learners in the educational process. [A study conducted in 2019](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330588983_Does_Blended_Learning_Enhance_Student_Engagement_Evidence_from_Higher_Education) supports this, demonstrating that blended learning boosts learner engagement significantly. This approach offers varied opportunities and uses digital tools, making the learning experience more dynamic and accessible.

**Stronger comprehension**. One of the most popular blended learning models, called the “[flipped classroom](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/blended-learning-a-primer#flipped)”, helps students understand and retain the material better. In this model, students study all theoretical materials alone at their own pace, then use class time to practice what they’ve learned with hands-on activities. This allows them to get the most out of their learning experience.

**Comprehensive analytics**. How long did it take a learner to complete a quiz? How many attempts did they make? Do they have any expiring tasks? You might be able to answer these questions in a traditional classroom setting, but think about the time and effort required to gather this data for each student or employee. With blended learning, this isn’t a concern. You won’t spend a single minute on it because a [learning management system](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/what-is-lms) handles all the tracking for you. Based on learner progress and results, you’ll be able to see their strengths and areas for improvement, whether they’re ready to advance, if they need to review certain materials, and much more.

**Disadvantages of Blended Learning**

Now that we’ve explored the reasons to embrace blended learning, it’s important to consider the other side too. Let’s dive into the drawbacks of this training method:

* New skill set for teachers/instructors
* Plagiarism
* Increased expenses

Let’s look at each of these aspects more closely.

**New skill set for teachers/instructors**. Blended learning requires specific tech skills, as instructors need to develop online modules, distribute them to learners, track their progress, and so much more. The complexity of some digital tools can be daunting, and not every educator may be eager or available to dedicate the time and effort needed to become proficient with new tech.

Besides, this shift to digital means teachers who aren’t used to online platforms might assign too much work, thinking, “It’s not a lot, and students have more free time at home without classroom restrictions.” This mindset can cause students to feel overwhelmed.

**Plagiarism**. The more eLearning content you create, the greater the risk of plagiarism. For example, an instructor might unknowingly use a copyrighted image to illustrate a point in their course. If this occurs, it’s the institution or company that might face legal consequences.

**Increased expenses**. Adopting eLearning involves investing in eLearning software. Traditional classroom settings demand expenditures for utilities such as lighting and heating, as well as for necessary equipment. When switching to a blended learning approach, you’re combining these costs.

However, these disadvantages will not become an issue if you use these tips:

1. Select user-friendly eLearning platforms.
2. Clarify the nuances of digital learning to your teachers or instructors.
3. Identify your learning needs, budget accordingly, and choose tools that address both aspects.

**Blended Learning Models**

One of the most challenging aspects of implementing blended learning is that the technique is extremely flexible. The variety of strategies, tools, and the need to balance everything can leave even seasoned learning professionals feeling overwhelmed and perplexed.

We would like to highlight six principal blended learning models here:

**1. Face-to-face driver model**

This model blends traditional classroom teaching with online learning tools. It’s like having a regular class where the teacher is the central figure, but digital tools are employed as supplementary resources to deepen understanding, provide additional practice, or introduce innovative instructional methods.

The seamless integration of technology not only supports a range of learning styles but also prepares students for the digital literacy required in the modern world.

**2. Online driver model**

This model is the opposite of brick-and-mortar studying, as it relies entirely on digital delivery of the training. It combines both [synchronous training](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/what-is-synchronous-learning) (live webinars, peer-to-peer training sessions, etc.) and [asynchronous training](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/asynchronous-learning) (self-paced study of eCourses). With the online driver model, there’s usually no need for live face-to-face meetings, but they can be arranged if necessary.

In this approach, students primarily engage with their courses through online platforms, accessing lessons, assignments, and resources from anywhere that has an internet connection. The physical classroom and teacher take on a supportive role, stepping in to provide additional help or clarification as needed.

**3. Rotation model**

This model is a dynamic approach that allows students to rotate through different learning stations on a set schedule. These stations can include a variety of learning methods, such as direct instruction from a teacher, group projects, individual online learning, and hands-on activities.

The rotation model offers a structured yet flexible way of learning, catering to the diverse needs and learning styles of students within the same classroom. It combines the benefits of face-to-face teaching with the personalized and engaging aspects of digital learning effectively.

**4. Flipped classroom**

This model reimagines the traditional educational structure by reversing the roles of classroom and home learning activities. In this innovative approach, students are first introduced to new content at home, typically through video lectures or reading assignments. In this way, they free up classroom time for interactive activities such as discussions, projects, and hands-on exercises. This shift allows for a deeper, more practical engagement with the material during school hours, as students apply what they’ve learned under the guidance of their teacher.

**5. Flex model**

The flex model represents a learner-centered approach, where instruction is primarily delivered online, allowing students to control the pace and path of their learning. This model is characterized by a flexible learning environment in which students typically work on customized online platforms, with face-to-face support available from teachers as needed. Teachers act more as coaches, providing guidance and support rather than direct instruction.

**6. Individual rotation model**

Unlike the more generalized rotation models that move all students through a fixed set of learning stations or activities, the individual rotation model allows students to rotate through stations or activities according to a personalized schedule set by a teacher. This schedule is based on the student’s learning progress, needs, and preferences, ensuring that each student engages only with the material that is relevant to them.

**What is the best model?**

Choosing the “best” blended learning model is not a one-size-fits-all scenario. For example, the Rotation model might be ideal for younger learners or subjects that benefit from hands-on activities, as it caters to various learning styles and keeps students engaged by way of variety. On the other hand, the Flex model might be better suited for older students or environments that aim to develop self-directed learning and critical thinking skills.

Besides, the effectiveness of a model can be influenced by technological infrastructure, teacher readiness, and student accessibility. For instance, in areas with limited internet access, models that employ a lot of online components might not be as effective as those that mostly involve in-person instruction. Similarly, the success of any blended learning model depends on the teachers’ ability to integrate technology into their teaching.

Ultimately, the “better” model is one that aligns with the learning goals, meets learners’ needs, and is supported by the resources and infrastructure that are available.

**How to Launch Blended Learning in 5 Steps**

Suppose you’ve concluded that blended learning is the ideal fit for your learning requirements. What’s the next step? Here’s a detailed, step-by-step guide on how to launch it in your organization:

**Step 1: Set blended learning goals**

Determine what goals and objectives you hope to fulfill through blended learning. For example, you might want learners to become more involved and independent in their education. Or you might wish to provide more collaborative opportunities for students or employees to develop their social skills.

**Step 2: Choose a blended learning model**

Based on the goals you set, choose the learning model that aligns most closely with your needs. You can opt for several types of blended learning, but be ready to maintain each one over time. Note that different models might require various tools and classroom designs.

**Step 3: Get the right tools to create and deliver content**

To launch the online part of blended learning, you’ll need special software. While every company and academic institution has unique requirements, two tools will be necessary for any of them: an authoring tool for creating online content and a learning management system for distributing this content and tracking learner progress and results. Let’s take a closer look at both:

**Authoring tool**

Given the flexible and customizable nature of blended learning, it’s important to have a tool that enables you to develop and update eLearning materials quickly. If you’re new to instructional design and want to create learning materials hassle-free, try [iSpring Suite](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/ispring-suite" \t "_blank). It works as a PowerPoint add-in, so the interface is probably familiar, and you can start creating content right away, with no special training.

With iSpring Suite you’ll be able to:

* Create engaging slide-based [online courses](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/how-to-create-online-course).
* Build interactive quizzes and tests with [14 types of questions](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/6-types-of-quiz-questions-to-use-in-your-e-courses).
* Record and edit [video tutorials](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/how-to-make-tutorial-video).
* Create [dialogue simulations](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/branching-scenarios).
* Enhance theoretical materials with ready-made interactions.

Here’s what a course made with iSpring Suite looks like:

Get a [14-day free trial](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/ispring-suite/trial) and start creating online courses for your blended learning projects right away.

**Learning management system (LMS)**

[Learning management systems (LMSs)](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/what-is-lms) are used to store training content, deliver it to learners, and generate reports that help you see how effective your training is. Some LMSs can only provide learners with assigned eCourses (also referred to as asynchronous learning), while other solutions allow conducting live online training sessions. Besides, there are some LMSs that enable you to plan and monitor offline session attendance. Such multifunctional LMSs are a perfect fit for blended learning.

**Also read:**[12 LMS Benefits For Recruiters, HR, Sales and Commercial Directors—Expert Opinion](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/blog/lms-benefits)

If you’re just getting started with eLearning, here are the key features to look for in an LMS that’s suitable for blended learning:

* Access to learning materials via any device
* Smooth integration with an authoring tool
* Convenient learner enrollment
* Both synchronous and asynchronous learning options
* Learner communication
* Gamification
* Detailed analytics on learner progress

The [iSpring Learn LMS](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/ispring-learn" \t "_blank) is an example of a platform that meets all the previously mentioned requirements. It provides all the features required to launch and manage blended learning, and it’s fairly simple to use. With just a couple of clicks, you can create your learning portal, upload training content, and add learners. Get a [30-day free trial](https://www.ispringsolutions.com/ispring-learn/get-free-trial) to check out its capabilities and features.

**Step 4: Redesign your learning environment**

Depending on the blended learning model you choose, you might need to redesign your classroom. Besides, make sure that the overall classroom design will motivate students to engage in learning and keep them positive.

**Step 5: Launch blended learning and be patient**

Let your learners in – you’re ready! Now, your task is to organize and maintain the learning process. And be patient. It will take at least a few weeks for blended learning to show some results.

**Bottom Line**

When we talk about digitalization, some big names like Amazon and Uber often come to mind, showing how tech can change the game by linking online and real-life experiences. Blended learning does something similar for education by mixing traditional classroom lessons with online learning. The key is finding a good mix of both.

Training at work has changed a lot, from early apprenticeships to today’s corporate learning programs, just like school learning has evolved. But it’s difficult to say for sure whether learning in person, online, or a mix of both is best. What really matters is focusing on what learners need. If you always put your learners first and adjust as you go, you’re on the right path to effective training.

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