

# THE **e**LEARNING DEVELOPERS' JOURNAL

Strategies and Techniques for Designers,  
Developers, and Managers of eLearning

JOURNAL™

## THIS WEEK — DESIGN TECHNIQUES

### e-Learning Reloaded: Helping Learners Succeed Online

BY RUSS MCNALLY

One of my favorite movies is the first film in *The Matrix* trilogy, starring Keanu Reeves. I must have seen this movie at least 15 times. It was released in 1999 and has completely transformed how Hollywood makes movies. In 2003, the second and third segments were released in the US: *The Matrix Reloaded* and *The Matrix Revolutions*. The reason I love the first movie is because it portrays a world where computers are so powerful that they attend to our every need, including providing us with power to learn anything we want by simply connecting directly to a computer

and downloading everything we need to know in seconds. I think I relate so much with this aspect of the movie because it represents a perfect learning system that I wish I could create.

In the movie, Keanu Reeves' character, Neo, discovers how the world as he knows it is not real but is instead a virtual reality created by a sinister computer network, called The Matrix, that is using humans as its source of power. Neo, the hero of the movie, has been chosen to free the human race from the control of The Matrix. During the movie he is often

referred to as "The One." Throughout the course of the movie Neo utilizes powerful e-Learning programs to gain knowledge of all of the skills and information he needs to become "The One" who saves the world. My favorite scene demonstrates the ultimate e-Learning program.

#### Scene

The camera pans the walls of the small, dark room. Neo is sitting alone on a hard steel bed. He is rubbing his head and contemplating his future and that of

*Continued on next page*

*We don't yet have a way to download skills and knowledge directly into learners' brains. Even if we did, learners would still have to have the motivation to apply what they had learned. As it is, we must help learners develop habits and discipline to acquire the new skills and knowledge. Read this article to acquire three new tools that will help you "reload" your online learners today!*

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**The eLearning Developers' Journal** is published weekly  
by **The eLearning Guild**, 525 College Avenue, Suite  
215, Santa Rosa, CA 95404. Phone: 707.566.8990.  
**The eLearning Guild** is an operating unit of Focuszone  
Media, Inc., 1030 Beatrice Street, Eagan, MN 55121.

**The Journal** is included as part of **Guild** membership.  
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tioners can share their knowledge, expertise  
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betterment of the industry.

As in any profession, there are many differ-  
ent perspectives about the best strategies,  
techniques and tools one can employ to accom-  
plish a specific objective. This **Journal** will share  
these different perspectives and does not posi-  
tion any one as "the right way," but rather we  
position each article as "one of the right ways"  
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## DESIGN *Techniques*

the entire world, which he has recently  
discovered is under control of the Matrix.  
A man enters. He is Neo's trainer, Tank,  
and his job is to provide Neo with the  
tools and motivation Neo needs to suc-  
ceed both online and in the not-so-real  
world of The Matrix.

**Tank:** *I'm fairly excited to see what  
you're capable of... it's a very exciting time.  
We got a lot to do. Now, we're supposed to  
start with these operation programs first,  
that's very boring. How about we start with  
something a little more fun. How about  
combat training?*

**Neo:** *Jujitsu? I'm going to learn Jujitsu?*

The screen flashes to a close-up of a  
very high-tech computer system that is  
being operated by Tank. Neo is now  
strapped into a pilot's chair that has  
wires and pieces of small electrodes  
attached to it. The look on his face is one  
of doubt and apprehension (perhaps  
because he has never tried e-Learning  
and is not familiar with its benefits). The  
online combat training begins and Neo's  
body tenses as his mind is inundated  
with images, audio, text, animations and  
video clips.

**Tank:** *How about some more?*

**Neo:** *Heck yes.*

The screen pans to Neo who is con-  
nected to the computer via a short cable  
through a hole at the base of his neck.  
The cable is attached directly to his brain  
and the electronic impulses are sent from  
the computer directly to the cerebral cor-  
tex. This is the ultimate e-Learning pro-  
gram. Meanwhile, Tank is monitoring his  
progress and continually checking to  
make sure he is meeting his combat  
training goals. Tank is Neo's contact with  
the real world. That human contact and  
support will help him succeed. Toward  
the end of the training session, Neo's  
mentor, Morpheus, enters the training  
room to observe his progress. Suddenly  
Neo looks up and his eyes flash open  
and he speaks in a soft whisper.

**Neo:** *I know Kung Fu.*

**Morpheus:** *Show me.*

Neo and Morpheus are now in a tradi-  
tional Japanese Dojo and Neo is able to  
apply what he has learned in the virtual  
world by fighting his mentor Morpheus.  
An intense Hong Kong-style karate fight  
ensues. The scene ends with Neo feeling  
a great sense of satisfaction that he has  
met the goals of his e-Learning program.  
This success will help him to reach his  
long-term goal to become "The One" who  
saves the world.

*Disclaimer:* Do not attempt to strap

your e-Learners to their chairs and attach  
a computer to *their* cerebral cortexes.  
This will not improve your course success  
rates.

### Real world

Imagine a world where learning was  
this easy and the technology was so  
advanced that all we needed to do to  
learn anything was simply plug ourselves  
into a computer and download the neces-  
sary knowledge into our long term memo-  
ry. Well, as you already probably know,  
we are not quite there yet. If only we had  
the 60-million-dollar budget that the  
Wachowski brothers (writers and directors  
of *The Matrix*) had to make the original  
movie. Unfortunately the reality is we  
don't, but we do have some very power-  
ful tools available to us to help our  
employees and students learn. Alone,  
however, even this technology is not  
enough. Once we leave the science fic-  
tion world of *The Matrix*, the truth is it  
takes a lot of self-motivation on the  
part of the e-Learner to actually make  
e-Learning work.

To truly be successful online, and to  
actually motivate themselves to learn,  
learners need to:

- 1) Have a clear understanding of the  
benefits their online training program  
will have on their career; and,
- 2) Follow the e-Learning study tips  
outlined in this article.

### Realities of e-Learning

The American Society for Training and  
Development (ASTD) and The MASIE  
Foundation found in their study (June  
2001) that the average start rate for  
voluntary courses is around 32%, much  
lower than the average for mandatory  
courses which have an average start  
rate of 69%. These statistics have been  
reported before in **The Journal**, but I think  
it is good to revisit them because, since  
that study in 2001, we have seen a lot  
of improvements in the technology and  
usability on the e-Learning sites available  
to us. As an industry we are slowly see-  
ing e-Learning programs be more and  
more successful. However, in my experi-  
ence we are still having problems getting  
the completion rates for our voluntary  
programs to a level where management  
is happy with the company's return on  
investment.

### The human factor

We have found at AIG that keeping in  
contact with our e-Learners has definitely

improved our success rates. A similar trend in which online universities like The University of Phoenix keep their class sizes very small in order to keep the human connection between the teacher and the students very strong has also been reported in **The Journal**. This has led to success rates similar to that of AIG at around 65%. To me, this illustrates the point that once you introduce the human factor into the e-Learning training program, some learners who normally would have dropped out of the course are encouraged to complete it. In these situations the e-Trainer can make a big difference in the e-Learner's ability to succeed. There are many reasons why some people succeed and some don't. In most situations, the reasons why some learners are successful have very little to do with the trainer and the bells and whistles available on the e-Learning site. The truth is success comes from within the students themselves and their desire to learn.

### **What can you do to help your learners succeed online?**

What happens if the e-Learning site you are using has all of the necessary tools to effectively promote learning, but you lack the necessary time and human resources to adequately contact your learners to motivate and check their progress?

If a student really wants to be successful they must become the best learner they can be, by becoming their own personal motivator and trainer. Don't get me wrong — not all e-Learning programs are created equal. Some have been designed to promote learning in far superior ways to others. However, just because you build it, buy it or rent it, does not mean your employees will use it — and there is nothing that says just because they use it, that they will actually learn from it. This is most evident in voluntary e-Learning programs where there is no external pressure or motivation for the learner to succeed.

The key issue, to me, is to focus on what the learner can do to ensure his or her own success. *By providing your employees and students with the tips outlined here, you will help them help themselves succeed online.*

In my experience, you can maximize your learners' ability to succeed online by 1) identifying their dominant learning styles, and by 2) providing them with eight tips from highly effective e-Learners.

**TABLE 1** *Learning style quiz*

**Instructions:** Read the left column and then draw a circle in the question box that best suits you for that specific situation. When you are finished, the column with the most answers is your dominant learning style.

When	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic/tactile
Spelling a word	Do you try to visualize the word you are spelling before writing it down?	Do you try to say the word out loud, carefully saying each syllable?	Do you type or write the word first and then check to see if it is correct?
Conversing	Is it hard to concentrate if you listen for too long?	Do you like listening more than talking?	Do you use your hands a lot when speaking?
Concentrating	If your desk is messy, do you find it difficult to stay focused?	If it is noisy, do you find it difficult to stay focused?	If there is a lot of movement around your desk, do you find it difficult to stay focused?
Meeting someone for the second time	Are you bad at remembering the person's name but good at remembering their faces?	Are you bad at remembering the person's face but good at remembering their name?	Are you best at remembering what you and the other person actually did together?
Contacting people	Do you prefer to talk to people in person?	Do you like to have conversations on the phone?	Do you like to talk and walk or do some kind of activity while talking?
Reading	When you are reading, do you often pause and think about or imagine what is happening in the story?	Do you prefer audio books or listening to conversations? Do you often read out loud?	Do you prefer to watch movies or do sports or some other kind of activity?
Assembling something	Do you actually enjoy reading the directions and looking at the illustrations before assembling something?	Do you prefer to have someone read the directions to you?	Do you try to do it yourself and not look at the directions?
Getting help with a computer application	Do you look for pictures or diagrams in the instruction booklet or in the help section?	Do you ask for help?	Do you keep trying to get it working over and over again or try it on your co-worker's computer?

Adapted from Colin Rose (1987). *Accelerated Learning*.

## Different learning styles

How many of you know what your most dominant learning style is? Good. Next question... How many of your learners do? Hmm... Just as I suspected... a lot fewer. Let's start by looking at the three different learning styles and how you can use them as a tool to help your learners become more effective e-Learners.

### Identifying your learners' learning styles

If your learners don't already know what kind of learner they are, then I recommend that they take The learning style quiz in Table 1 on page 3, which has been adapted from Colin Rose's 1987 book, *Accelerated Learning*.

What kind of learner are you? Circle your answer.

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinesthetic/tactile

### Maximizing your learners' potential for success

After your learners have figured out what kind of learner they are, they should try some of the strategies listed in Table 2, below, to help them learn more effectively online.

## Eight tips for highly effective e-Learners

In order to become successful e-Learners, your learners can do many things to improve their chances. The eight tips outlined in this section have helped many of our employees to become much more effective online learners.

### Tip 1: Set clear and attainable goals

In order to improve their ability to succeed online, your employees need to learn how to set goals that inspire them, as well as to find out what learning techniques work for them. Goals are simply tools to help us succeed. We measure our goals to help keep ourselves motivated. In the end, success is used to help us expand and grow in our personal and professional lives.

Without clear goals and objectives, your employees will lack the necessary inspiration to spend time studying, away from their families and doing things they enjoy like watching TV.

To illustrate this point I am going to tell you about one of my learners, Ryoya. Ryoya was chosen by his company to visit their head office in the USA to learn about the operations there and then come back to Japan and apply the lessons he learned to the operations here. The problem was that he lacked the

English skills and confidence to do this. As a result, he set himself three very clear and attainable goals to focus on in the six months following his selection. By doing this, Ryoya motivated himself to stay on track and to continue studying online in conjunction with his classroom-based training until he reached the goals. By setting clear goals and continually using these to motivate himself, Ryoya was able to achieve his objectives.

Another technique that Ryoya used to keep himself motivated was to write his three goals on a piece of paper and tape them to his desk, so he could read them every day and stay focused. These goals acted as motivation and inspiration, and that helped him to follow through on what he started.

### Tip 2: Understand why the course is important to their future

If your employees do not see the positive effects their online training program will have on their future, then there is a good chance they won't study. For me, when I took my Macromedia Dreamweaver UltraDev course training, I was able to do it because I knew that I would be able to apply that knowledge to my own projects by creating database-driven student report pages for management. I also realized that this would make me more valuable to my company. This knowledge motivated me to study rather than watching *The Osbornes* on MTV.

### Tip 3: Tell other people about their online study goals

By doing this, your learners will be more successful because they will work hard to succeed in front of their peers and they will continually receive encouragement from them. If they don't do this, then their chances of success are lower because they are not receiving the external motivation that they may need to succeed. Whenever I take an online course I always tell my manager about it. That way I become responsible to her for completing the course.

### Tip 4: Understand and prepare themselves for the difficulties of studying online

It is important to note that there will be times when your employees want to give up and quit. There are times when their job and family commitments will make them feel like they don't have time to study. My student Taro felt the same way many times but he was able to overcome

TABLE 2 Learning style tips

Visual learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print out your online course notes and use a colored marker to underline key points to help you reinforce what you have studied.</li> <li>• Use the notes function on your e-Learning site while studying, or keep a study journal to write down key points.</li> <li>• Use an e-Learning program that has plenty of multimedia (e.g. videos and animation) and illustrations.</li> </ul>
Auditory learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize e-Learning in conjunction with a classroom-based program so you can take part in discussions.</li> <li>• Prepare mini-presentations for yourself or your class based on what you have been studying online.</li> <li>• Use an e-Learning program that has plenty of audio samples.</li> </ul>
Tactile/kinesthetic learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print out your online class notes and then go for a walk or go to the gym and then study.</li> <li>• Study in a comfortable environment like your study or at your office.</li> <li>• Listen to your favorite radio station or CD while studying.</li> </ul>

the desire to quit by talking to his manager about it and thinking about what would happen in six months if he didn't improve his skills. That's what your learners have to do. They need to understand that it is going to be difficult sometimes but that they can rely on their friends, co-workers and boss to help motivate them to succeed.

**Tip 5: Use the e-Learning tools available to them**

By spending time before starting their online course and learning how to use all of the tools that their course has to offer, your learners will maximize the benefits they receive from the learning experience. One of my learners said to me, "I think e-Learning is good but I can't improve my speaking skills." He is studying business English through GlobalEnglish.com. I said, "Have you tried 'Talk with the Teacher'?" "Talk with the Teacher" is a tool on GlobalEnglish where learners can have a conversation with a live teacher any time. His response was, "What's that?" He had been using the site for eight months and still didn't know about the site's most powerful tool. If he had taken the time to learn how to use the site's tools before starting the program, he would have had a much more enriched learning experience.

**Tip 6: Create a study schedule**

By doing this your learners will make studying on the Internet a regular part of their daily schedule and make it a habit. If your learners do something every day for three weeks, then there is a good chance that it will become a habit. e-Learners need to form good habits. An example of a good habit is studying on the Internet for 90 minutes three days a week from 7:00 to 8:30 AM, instead of watching TV. Many of my most successful learners study at the same time and on the same days, every week. One of them even wakes up at 4:30 AM three days a week to study online. He said that it was hard in the beginning, but now it has become a part of his regular schedule and he is used to it.

**Tip 7: Treat online study sessions as a part of regular job**

Online study sessions should not be put off, pushed back or canceled. Remember, learning is no longer a hobby. It is key to your learners' success in business and extremely important to their futures. If your learners do not view their

learning as a priority, then it will be easy to put off their studies because they are not viewed as important as their regular job.

My student Ryoya says, "My advice to anyone who is trying to learn online is that you need to view studying as a vital part of your job. I strongly believe that we have to plan our study goals, make a study schedule and make sure we follow our plan. This is how we succeed in our job; we set goals and make long and short-term plans to realize those goals. This is the key to success in business and learning online."

**Tip 8: Learn from others by participating in the online communities**

By participating in the online communities offered by their e-Learning vendor, your learners will be able to learn from other students and online tutors. For example, Element K offers a number of message boards for learners to use to

post questions and talk about problems they are having. This is a great way to interact with others who may have the answers your learners are looking for. I use this message board to ask questions about design issues. It is truly a very powerful learning tool. Some of the most useful information I learned regarding VBScript and Flash came from such online forums.

**Conclusion**

The most successful learners have motivation and a commitment to succeed that is fueled by having goals that have purpose and that inspire them to continue self-development. Those who lack these goals tend to fail not only at e-Learning but at other forms of learning as well. In addition to having motivation to succeed, many of my most successful learners have followed the tips outlined in this article to learn online. They must understand that e-Learning is a very pow-

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## SIDEBAR *Online course learner success form*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Online Course Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Course Starting Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Course Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

What are your dominant learning styles? 1) \_\_\_\_\_ 2) \_\_\_\_\_

What strategies are you going to use to help improve your learning for your personal learning style?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you think you can learn from taking this course?

\_\_\_\_\_

What are your goals for this online training course?

\_\_\_\_\_

What benefits will this course have on your job efficiency, career and/or financial situation?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who are you going to tell about your course and why you are taking it?

\_\_\_\_\_

What days are you going to study? What time are you going to study each day? Please fill in the calendar below:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Where are you planning to study? Choose the most comfortable place for you with the least distractions.

\_\_\_\_\_

What special tools does your e-Learning site have?

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you know how to use the Internet? *Circle: Yes/No*

If not, where and when are you going to learn about it?

\_\_\_\_\_

Who is paying for your online course? *Circle: You/Company*

Are you planning on participating in the online forums provided on your e-Learning site? *Circle: Yes/No*

I promise myself that I will treat my online study sessions as a regular part of my job and not cancel them. This training program is important to my career and personal growth.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

erful tool, but the technology is not enough on its own. It takes a lot of self-motivation on the part of your learners to actually make e-Learning work. To truly be successful online, learners need to 1) have a clear understanding of the benefits their online training program will have on their career and 2) they need to follow the e-Learning study tips outlined in this article.

To help you help your learners become more successful online, I have included an online course learner success form in the Sidebar on page 6, for you to give your learners before taking their next online program. I hope you find it as useful as we have!

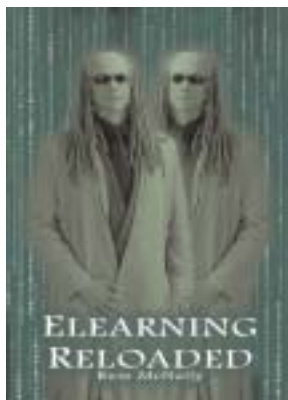


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Russell McNally has been designing web-based training solutions for corporations in Japan since 1997 and has been a corporate trainer for the past seven years. He has conducted training for such companies as Citibank, Motorola, Eli Lilly and GlaxoSmithKline. In 1999, Russ partly owned an Internet-based corporate



training provider that specialized in business English training for corporate customers in Japan. He was responsible for the design, development, implementation and management of the online business training that leveraged the latest web technologies and

design principles. Russ is currently working for AIG KK in Japan where he is in charge of designing, developing and managing their in-house online English language training program that produces engaging web-based solutions that include audio, video, and Flash content in an ASP environment. Russ has published a number of papers on language acquisition and also published two articles last summer in *The eLearning Developers' Journal*. He is currently working on a new book, *Empower Yourself with English: The Salaryman's 7 Steps-to-Success*.

Russ holds a Masters Degree in Education from Temple University, Japan. Contact Russell McNally at [mcnally@aig.co.jp](mailto:mcnally@aig.co.jp).

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