

Practical Strategies for Building Truly Re-usable Learning Objects



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Building Truly Reusable Learning Objects

What is a reusable learning object (RLO)?

The IEEE Learning Technology Standards Committee defines a reusable learning object as “any entity, digital or non-digital, which can be used, reused or referenced during technology supported learning.”

According to William Horton, reusable learning objects are “reusable components we can combine whenever we need to teach someone, to communicate to someone, or even entertain someone.” (*Designing Knowledge Objects*)

A reusable learning object has the following characteristics:

- It addresses a specific learning objective.
- It combines information, practice, and assessment.
- It is generally 2 to 15 minutes long.
- It is a standalone component, which can be reused and combined with different learning objects.
- It is catalogued, so that it can be retrieved for reuse.
- It is stored in a database, learning content management system, or other electronic cataloguing system.

Reusing versus repurposing

Kim E. Ruyle and Peder Jacobsen explain the difference between reusing and repurposing learning objects in their valuable article, *Guided Discovery Teaching Methods and Reusable Learning Objects*.

Reuse – “Reusing an object means using it in its entirety without modification. When this is possible, development, maintenance, and storage dollars are saved because when the parent object is updated all the instances of use are also updated.”

Repurpose – “Repurposing breaks the link to the parent object, creates a copy, and allows for modification of the copied object. In this case, development dollars are saved, but maintenance and storage costs are increased because there is now a separate (modified) version of the parent object. Without a doubt, in the industry as a whole, there’s a lot more repurposing going on than true reuse.”

Building Truly Reusable Learning Objects

Planning checklist

Before you implement reusable learning objects, here are some issues to consider.

- ✓ Clearly define terms.
 - What does **reusable learning object (RLO)** mean in your organization?
 - How do you define **reuse** and **repurpose** to reflect the needs of your organization?
 - Is your definition straightforward enough to be easily implemented?
- ✓ Identify your audience.
 - Are you building courses for a number of distinct audiences?
 - What is the role and existing level of expertise of each audience?
 - What is the relationship between audiences?
 - Are some audiences a higher priority than others?
- ✓ Establish goals for reuse.
 - How much content will you reuse?
 - When will you reuse it?
 - Will you reuse content across audiences?
 - Will you repurpose content by modifying the original RLO in some way?
 - How will you track the relationship between the original RLO and the repurposed RLO?
- ✓ Plan how to store and categorize learning objects so that you can find them again.
- ✓ Set standards for the interface, interactions, and writing style, and communicate them.
- ✓ Establish rigorous quality assurance processes so that you won't reuse poor design, errors, or technical problems.
- ✓ Sell the benefits of reusable learning objects to your project team.
- ✓ Start small, then evaluate and refine your processes regularly.

Establishing standards

Standards for writing style

In addition to standards that you would adopt for any course, consider the following issues when designing reusable learning objects.

Cross-references

As Instructional Designers, we make use of cross-references to show the relationships between concepts. However, cross-references introduce obstacles to reuse.

You don't necessarily need to eliminate all cross-references, but you do need to think carefully about where you will use them and why. Consider the future implications of the following references:

- to other parts of the course
- to pages / screens within lessons
- to concepts that have been covered previously or will be addressed later

Tip: Your organization's definition of a reusable learning object plays an important role in the way you use cross-references.

References to specific audiences

If you plan to reuse learning objects for more than one audience, references to specific audiences can create obstacles to reuse.

However, in some situations, references to specific audiences are important. For example, in the financial services industry, individuals must be licensed to perform certain activities, such as selling mutual funds, securities, or life insurance. In these areas, it is critical to make specific mention of roles, even though this may prevent reuse.

Think carefully about when it is appropriate to refer to a specific audience.

Terminology

While minor differences in terminology are tolerable when they appear in different courses, they can create confusion when they are presented sequentially. Therefore, it's critical to:

- Establish standards for consistent terminology to be used across all courses.
- Make sure all course developers understand and use this terminology.

Building Truly Reusable Learning Objects

Interface standards

Some learning object standards advocate that learning objects must be independent of interface standards. If your methodology is not independent of the interface, then it's important to use consistent interface standards for all reusable learning objects. The use of templates is a good strategy.

Again, this is already a principle of good course design; it just becomes more critical when learning objects are reused in different contexts.

Selling the benefits of reusable learning objects

Like all change, introducing reusable learning objects may create anxiety and conflict. RLOs are controversial, particularly when the concepts appear to contradict some of the principles of design.

When introducing reusable learning objects to your team, it's important to acknowledge the potential limitations, while stressing the benefits to Instructional Designers.

Benefits include the following:

- Streamlined update and maintenance processes.
- More consistent, cohesive content across courses.
- Increased sharing of ideas and content among Instructional Designers and project teams.
- Ability to devote more resources to designing creative and engaging learning objects that can be reused across courses.

Building Truly Reusable Learning Objects

References

Introduction to reusable learning objects

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Reusable learning object issues

Josh Hartnett. "Where have all the Legos gone? Why reusable learning objects haven't caught on." *Online Learning Magazine*, February 2002. This article can also be found at the Blue Missile web site at:
http://www.bluemissile.com/articles/instruct_legos.htm

Edward Welsch. "SCORM: Clarity or Calamity?" *Online Learning Magazine*, Summer 2002. This article can be found online at
http://www.onlinelearningmag.com/onlinelearning/magazine/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1526769

Building Truly Reusable Learning Objects

Norm Friesen. "Three Objections to Learning Objects." Athabasca University - <http://phenom.educ.ualberta.ca/~nfriesen/>

LEGO

LEGO EXPLORE Games Builder - part of the official LEGO site, where you can build virtual LEGO structures.

<http://www.lego.com/eng/explore/games/builder/default.asp>

Identifying Obstacles to Reuse

Each screen sample represents one reusable learning object. All samples are courtesy of The Canadian Institute of Financial Planning.

For Sample 1:

- Identify any obstacles to reuse.
- Suggest an alternative.

The screenshot shows an e-learning interface with a green header bar containing navigation icons for GLOSSARY, RESOURCES, SUPPORT, PRINTING, TAKE NOTES, and EXIT. The main content area is titled "Components of an Insurance Policy" and contains the following text:

An insurance policy typically consists of 10 to 30 pages of information. As you examine a number of different policies you will recognize that they follow a similar format.

Each component is described on the following pages.

To the right of the text is a stack of four document icons representing different components of a policy:

- Amendments or Riders**
- The Application**
- Insuring Agreement**
 - Policy Provisions
 - Policy Limitations
- Face Page**
 - Schedule of Benefits
 - Policy Specifications
 - Premium Schedule

On the left side, there is a navigation pane with a tree view showing the following structure:

- Unit 2: Individual Life Insurance
- Unit 3: Individual Disability Insurance
- Unit 4: Group Insurance
- Unit 5: The Life Insurance Contract
 - The Contract
 - Principles of Legal Differences: Standard vs. Non-Standard
 - Void vs. Voidable Contract
 - Exercise: Standard vs. Non-Standard
 - Components of an Insurance Policy**
 - Definitions of the Key Terms
 - Exercise: Parts of a Policy
 - Policy vs. Contract
 - Reflection
 - Review
 - Policy Provisions and Beneficiaries
 - Review
 - Assessment
- Unit 6: Non-insurance Investments
- Unit 7: Insurance Investments

At the bottom of the interface, there is a search bar and navigation buttons for BACK and NEXT.

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Identifying Obstacles to Reuse

We repurposed the exercise shown in Sample 2A for use in another course.

SAMPLE 2A

Exercise: Income Funds

How do bond fund managers diversify their portfolios?

- a They purchase bonds with different maturities.
- b They purchase bonds that are indexed to inflation.
- c They purchase bonds usually from one issuer.
- d They purchase bonds that mature in less than 1 year.

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Sample 2B shows the repurposed version. What have we changed?

SAMPLE 2B

Exercise: Income Funds

How do bond fund managers diversify their portfolios?

- a they purchase bonds with different maturities
- b they purchase bonds indexed to inflation
- c they purchase only federal government bonds
- d they purchase bonds that have maturities of less than 1 year

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Identifying Obstacles to Reuse

The multi-part case study shown in Sample 3A and Sample 3B required modification before we could reuse it. Why? How could we avoid this?

SAMPLE 3A
Case Study: Yasmin Fattah - Part One

Yasmin Fattah is a 36-year-old accountant with Talisman Energy Inc. Her annual income from her employer is \$50,000. During tax season, Yasmin prepares tax returns for her friends and earns an extra \$2,000. Each year, Yasmin ensures that she puts away money for her retirement. She contributes \$4,000 to an RRSP. Yasmin's two-year-old son, Rajeev, is in daycare 4 days a week, which costs her \$300 per month. Every Friday, her mother looks after Rajeev for free.

Type your answers in the spaces provided, and then click Submit.

1. What is Yasmin's total income for the year?
2. What is Yasmin's taxable income for the year?

SAMPLE 3B
Case Study: Yasmin Fattah - Part Two

Let's look at Yasmin Fattah's situation again. Earlier, you calculated that her total income is \$52,000 and her taxable income is 39,400.

Assuming, no surtaxes and the following tax rates:

Level of taxable income	Federal tax	Provincial tax
Up to \$30,004	17%	6.37%
\$30,005 to \$60,009	25%	9.62%
Over \$60,009	29%	11.16%

Type your answers in the spaces provided, and then click Submit.

What is Yasmin's total federal tax payable?

What is Yasmin's total provincial tax payable?

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Identifying Obstacles to Reuse

For Sample 4:

- Identify any obstacles to reuse.
- Suggest an alternative.

The screenshot displays an eLearning interface. On the left, a green-bordered box labeled 'SAMPLE 4' highlights a portion of the navigation menu. The menu includes items such as 'Beneficiary', 'Underwriting and Ir...', 'The Policyowner /', 'Exercise: Basic Ter...', 'The Contract', 'Exercise: More Ter...', 'Premiums', 'Rated Policies', 'Policy Year and Att...', 'Cost to the Insur...', 'Proceeds of Insur...', 'Exercise: Premiums', 'Reflection', 'Review', 'Term Life Insurance', 'Permanent Life Insura...', 'Universal Life and Tern...', 'Supplementary Benefi...', 'Advanced Case Studie...', 'Review', 'Assessment', and 'Unit 3: Individual Disabilit...'. The main content area is titled 'Proceeds of Insurance' and contains the following text:

The proceeds of insurance may fall into one of two categories:

- Death benefit proceeds are payable to the policy beneficiary in the event of the death of the life insured while the policy is in force.
- Cash surrender value proceeds are payable to the policyowner in the event of cancellation of the policy.

Death benefits are almost always received by the beneficiary free of tax, while the payout of the cash surrender value may result in the reporting of income to the policyowner for the year of surrender, depending on the circumstances. The taxation of the surrender of a life insurance policy will be discussed in Unit 9: Taxation. Details of insurance contracts are discussed in full in Unit 5: The Life Insurance Contract.

The interface also features a top navigation bar with icons for GLOSSARY, RESOURCES, SUPPORT, PRINTING, TAKE NOTES, and EXIT. At the bottom, there is a search bar and navigation buttons for BACK and NEXT.

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Identifying Obstacles to Reuse

Samples 5A, 5B, and 5C have a similar obstacle to reuse. Would you modify them? If so, how?

SAMPLE 5A

What is the Rule?

Industry regulators seek to protect the investing public. To that end, it is a mutual fund dealer's responsibility to see that you, the mutual fund salesperson, gather the necessary information to ensure that clients are well served by investments that suit their individual financial needs.

The basis for gathering this information is what is known as the Know Your Client rule. It is the single most important rule you must remember when selling mutual funds. It helps you in the following ways:

- It makes you feel comfortable that the investment recommendations you are providing are appropriate for the investor.
- It allows you to support your actions if disputes arise.

What type of information should you acquire?

Following is a list of information to obtain for Know Your Client:

- age
- annual income and net worth
- occupation
- risk tolerance
- investment objectives
- investment knowledge and experience

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SAMPLE 5B

Insurance Products

As a mutual fund salesperson, you should be aware of the features of various insurance products. This course discusses three types of insurance products:

- Life Insurance Products

Most life insurance products fall into three categories: term life insurance, permanent life insurance, and universal life insurance.

- Annuities
- Segregated Funds

Please be aware that your mutual fund license does not entitle you to sell these products. Contact your compliance department for information on the necessary licensing requirements.

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Identifying Obstacles to Reuse

SAMPLE 5C

GLOSSARY RESOURCES SUPPORT PRINTING TAKE NOTES EXIT

The Risk of Investing in Financial Assets

Risk is a fact of life when investing in financial assets. As a mutual fund salesperson, you must be able to explain to your clients the various types of risks involved in your recommendations. These include the following:

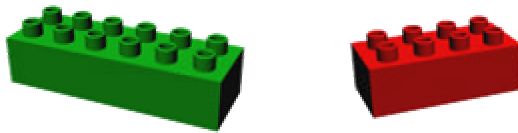
Market risk	The possibility that your investment may lose value because an entire financial market drops in value or because of some event in the economic, political, or social environment. For example, in the 1990s issuers of Canadian bonds had to offer high interest rates due to the political risks associated with the threat of Quebec's separation from Canada.
Business risk	The possibility that the issuer of the financial instrument may not be able to meet their debt obligations, or the stock of the company will not be profitable.
Interest rate risk	Risk associated with variations in interest rates. For example, when interest rates increase, bond prices drop and vice versa. Interest rates also affect stock prices since high interest rates make stock investing less attractive, while low interest rates tend to increase demand for stocks.

SEARCH

BACK NEXT

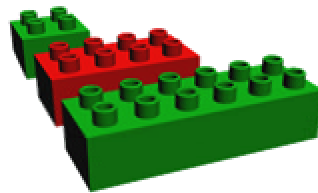
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Practical Strategies for Building Truly Reusable Learning Objects



Agenda

- Background, terminology
- Recognizing potential problems in reuse
- Planning and designing for reuse: lessons learned



But not:
Tools, technology, SCORM



Your experiences with reusable learning objects

- Are you using reusable learning objects?
- Are you planning to implement reusable learning objects in the future?
- Are RLOs a good idea?
- Do you have reservations?



How do you define “reusable learning object”?



What is a reusable learning object?

“any entity, digital or non-digital, which can be **used, reused, or referenced** during technology supported learning”

IEEE Learning Technology Standards Committee

“Reusable components we can combine whenever we need to teach **someone**, to communicate to **someone**, or even entertain **someone**.”

William Horton, *Designing Knowledge Objects*

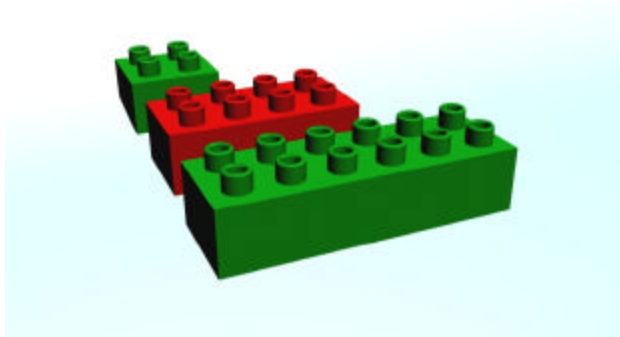


A reusable learning object

- ✓ may address a specific learning objective
- ✓ may combine information, practice, and assessment
- ✓ is 2 to 15 minutes long (generally)
- ✓ can be reused with different learning objects in different contexts
- ✓ is stored in a database, learning content management system, or other electronic cataloguing system, where it can be retrieved

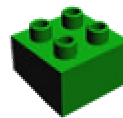


RLO as LEGO

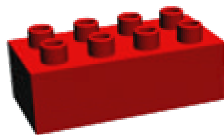


Granularity

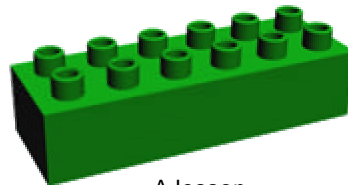
The granularity or size of your organization's RLO is an important consideration.



A media file



Content to meet one learning objective



A lesson



RLOs at the Canadian Institute for Financial Planning

- Large courses – 15 to 60 hours
- 4 separate yet related audiences:
 - Life insurance agents
 - Financial advisors
 - Mutual fund salespeople
 - Individuals
- Time sensitive information: maintenance is critical



Our RLO strategy



= 1 RLO
= 1 record

1 topic or screen

Combination of reuse and repurposing content.



Identifying obstacles to reuse

For each sample:

- Identify any obstacles to reuse
- Suggest an alternative

All samples are courtesy of the Canadian Institute for Financial Planning.



A screenshot of an eLearning interface. The title bar at the top reads "Components of an Insurance Policy". On the left is a navigation tree with a green background, listing units such as "Unit 1: Insurance Industry", "Unit 2: Individual Life Insurance", "Unit 3: Individual Disability", "Unit 4: Group Insurance", and "Unit 5: The Life Insurance Contract". The main content area on the right contains text: "An insurance policy typically consists of 10 to 30 pages of information. As you examine a number of different policies you will recognize that they follow a similar format. Each component is described on the following pages." To the right of the text are several overlapping document icons representing policy components: "Announcements or Riders", "The Application", "Insuring Agreement" (with sub-items "Policy Provisions" and "Policy Limitations"), and "Face Page" (with sub-items "Schedule of Benefits", "Policy Specifications", and "Premium Schedule"). The interface includes a top navigation bar with icons for Home, Resources, Support, Printing, and Help, and a bottom navigation bar with a search box and navigation arrows.

SAMPLE 1

Components of an Insurance Policy

An insurance policy typically consists of 10 to 30 pages of information. After examining a number of different policies you will recognize that they follow a similar format.

Each component is described on the following pages.

Amendments or Riders
The Application
Insuring Agreement
Policy Provisions
Policy Limitations
Face Page
Schedule of Benefits
Policy Specifications
Premium Schedule

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Exercise: Income Funds

How do bond fund managers diversify their portfolios?

a They purchase bonds with different maturities.

b They purchase bonds that are indexed to inflation.

c They purchase bonds usually from one issuer.

d They purchase bonds that mature in less than 1 year.

SAMPLE 2A

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The screenshot shows a digital interface for an exercise. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for GLOSSARY, RESOURCES, SUPPORT, PRINTING, TAKE NOTES, and EXIT. Below the navigation bar, the title "Exercise: Income Funds" is displayed. A large empty text box is positioned at the top of the question area. The question is: "How do bond fund managers diversify their portfolios?". There are four multiple-choice options, each with a letter in a green circle: a) they purchase bonds with different maturities; b) they purchase bonds indexed to inflation; c) they purchase only federal government bonds; d) they purchase bonds that have maturities of less than 1 year. To the right of the options, there is a green-bordered box labeled "SAMPLE 2B".

The screenshot shows a digital interface for a case study. At the top, there is a navigation bar with icons for GLOSSARY, RESOURCES, SUPPORT, PRINTING, TAKE NOTES, and EXIT. Below the navigation bar, the title "Case Study: Yasmin Fattah - Part One" is displayed. On the left side, there is a navigation menu with a tree view showing the following structure: Home/Workshop, Unit 2: Mutual Fund Basics, Unit 3: Types of Mutual Funds, Unit 4: Economic Environments, Unit 5: Managing Mutual Funds, Unit 6: Taxation, Canadian Tax System, How Canadians and Total, Net, and Taxable Income are Calculated, Case Study: Yasmin Fattah, Deductions vs. OTC, Exercise: Tax Credit Surpluses, Income Tax Rates, Federal and Provincial Tax Rates, Case Study: Yasmin Fattah, Marginal Tax Rates, Case Study: Yasmin Fattah, Exercise: Canadian Inflation, Review, Mutual Funds and Tax, Personal Income Tax, Mutual Fund Corporations. In the center, there is a graphic of a notepad with a photo of Yasmin Fattah and the text "Yasmin Fattah Case Study". To the right of the graphic, there is a text box containing the case study information: "Yasmin Fattah is a 36-year-old accountant with Talsman Energy Inc. Her annual income from her employer is \$50,000. During tax season, Yasmin prepares tax returns for her friends and earns an extra \$2,000. Each year, Yasmin ensures that she puts away money for her retirement. She contributes \$4,000 to an RRSP. Yasmin's two-year-old son, Rajeev, is in daycare 4 days a week, which costs her \$300 per month. Every Friday, her mother looks after Rajeev for free." Below the text box, there is a prompt: "Type your answers in the spaces provided, and then click Submit." There are two numbered questions: "1. What is Yasmin's total income for the year?" with a text input field containing "0.00000.00" and "2. What is Yasmin's taxable income for the year?" with a text input field containing "0.00000.00". A green "SUBMIT" button is located below the second question. At the bottom of the interface, there is a search bar and navigation arrows.

SAMPLE 3B

Case Study: Yasmin Fattah - Part Two

Let's look at Yasmin Fattah's **situation again**. Earlier, you calculated that her total income is \$62,000 and her taxable income is 39,400.

Assuming, no surtaxes and the following tax rates:

Level of taxable income	Federal tax	Provincial tax
Up to \$30,004	17%	6.37%
\$30,005 to \$60,009	25%	9.62%
Over \$60,009	29%	11.10%

Type your answers in the spaces provided, and then click Submit.

What is Yasmin's total federal tax payable?

What is Yasmin's total provincial tax payable?

SUBMIT

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SAMPLE 4

Proceeds of Insurance

The proceeds of insurance may fall into one of two categories:

- Death benefit proceeds are payable to the policy beneficiary in the event of the death of the life insured while the policy is in force.
- Cash surrender value proceeds are payable to the policyowner in the event of cancellation of the policy.

Death benefits are almost always received by the beneficiary free of tax, while the payout of the cash surrender value may result in the reporting of income to the policyowner for the year of surrender, depending on the circumstances. The taxation of the surrender of a life insurance policy will be discussed in Unit 9: Taxation. Details of insurance contracts are discussed in full in Unit 5: The Life Insurance Contract.

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SAMPLE 5A

What is the Rule?

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SAMPLE 5B

Insurance Products

As a mutual fund salesperson, you should be aware of the features of various insurance products. This course discusses three types of insurance products:

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Most life insurance products fall into three categories: term life insurance, permanent life insurance, and universal life insurance.

- Annuities
- Segregated Funds

Please be aware that your mutual fund license does not entitle you to sell these products. Contact your compliance department for information on the necessary licensing requirements.

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Benefits of RLOs

- We saved time during development – using 30 – 40% reused or repurposed content.
- More consistent, cohesive content across courses.
- Increased sharing across project teams.
- More time to focus on developing creative, engaging RLOs.
- Simplified maintenance – we hope.



Planning and designing for reuse

- Clearly define terms: RLO, reuse, repurpose.
- Identify your audience.
- Establish goals for reuse.
- Plan how to categorize RLOs for reuse.
- Set standards and communicate them.
- Establish QA processes.
- Sell the benefits of RLOs.



And finally...

- Start small, then evaluate and refine processes.



Thank you

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