Selecting the Right E-learning Authoring Tool

Use the chart below to identify authoring tools that meet the learning, interactivity, and authoring expertise characteristics of your project.

PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS									
Type of Learning Needed*	Awareness	←	Understanding	→	Skill				
Level of Interactivity Desired*	Low (level 1)	Low-Medium	Medium (level 2)	Medium-High	High (level 3)				
Authoring Expertise Available*	Everyone	Novice ID	Intermediate ID, Media Developer	Experienced ID, Media Developer	Programmer	Tool Category*	Pros	Cons	
Tools									
PowerPoint	✓	✓				Formatting	• Good starting point for input to other tools. • Creates fairly sophisticated self-running presentations. • Can be exported to video.	• Lacks built-in interactive question functionality. • Not great at compressing content for Internet delivery.	
Camtasia Studio		✓	✓			Authoring	• Easy-to-learn tool for capturing and editing video.	• Not as well-suited to general purpose authoring as most other tools in this list.	
Articulate Studio		✓	✓			Authoring	• Easy to use for novice developers. • Good for synching on-screen content with audio. • Supports delivery to tablets.	• Includes fewer interactivity types than some of the other tools. • Responsive design for phones is limited to course player; content itself is not responsive.	
Articulate Rise		✓	✓			Authoring	• Full responsive design support for tablets, phones. • Delivers functionality similar to Adapt Framework without requiring a programmer.	• Includes fewer interactivity types than some of the other tools.	
Articulate Storyline			✓	✓		Authoring	• Good general-purpose tool. • Good for synching on-screen content with audio. • Good for courses with medium interactivity levels. • Supports delivery to tablets.	• Responsive design for phones is limited to course player; content itself is not responsive. • Developer has less control over bookmark size than with some of the other tools.	
Adobe Captivate			✓	✓		Authoring	• Good for software training. • Medium responsive design support for tablets, phones (including content area).	• Requires a longer learning curve than some of the other tools.	
Lectora Publisher			✓	✓		Authoring	• Good general-purpose tool. • Medium responsive design support for tablets, phones (including content area).	• Requires a longer learning curve than some of the other tools. • Less efficient at synching on-screen content with audio than some of the other tools.	
Adapt Framework				✓	✓	Scripting	• Free. • Full responsive design support for tablets, phones. • Similar functionality to Articulate Rise but allows programmer to customize further.	• Set-up requires experienced developers with programming background. • Includes fewer types of interactivity than some of the other tools.	
HTML 5 | JavaScript				✓	✓	Scripting	• Free. • Powerful; capable of reaching high levels of interactivity. • Full responsive design support for tablets, phones.	• Requires experienced developers with programming background. • Takes longer to develop course content than the other tools.	

* See page 2 for definitions of Project Characteristics and Tool Categories.

Definitions

Type of Learning Needed

Awareness: Learners will have the factual and conceptual framework that provides insight into the importance of the content and how it could be applied in the real world.

Understanding: Learners will have a limited ability to perform with cases similar to those encountered in the real world. Learners can explain why they are doing what they are doing, identify good examples of performance, and begin to approximate the performance.

Skill: Learners will have the ability to perform competently under a variety of conditions to the level expected for exemplary performance in the real world.

Level of Interactivity Desired

Low / Level 1: Learners have little, if any, interaction with the instruction other than "turning pages" and perhaps answering test questions at the end, or accessing additional nice-to-know content.

- Correct/incorrect feedback is provided for test items.
- Content is presented via text, graphics, and possibly audio.

Medium / Level 2: Learners must interact with content in a manner that encourages them to think about and remember what they are learning. Course reinforces learning by providing frequent opportunities to apply learning via questions to answer or simple simulated tasks.

- Learners determine order in which they advance through the instruction.
- Immediate evaluation and feedback are provided.
- Content may be presented using text, graphics, audio, video, and animation.

High / Level 3: Learners engage in accomplishing a task or solving a problem, typically based on a scenario or case study and often using real-world information. Learners control steps taken to solve the problem, within options established by the course.

- Individual responses may result in customized paths through the content.
- Includes tools such as explanation, demonstration, "lab" exercises (e.g., using simulations or application software), and skill/knowledge tests.
- Content is presented using text, graphics, audio, video, animation, games, etc.

Authoring Expertise Available

Everyone: Moderately proficient in word-processing and presentation software, such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint.

Novice Instructional Designer (ID): Understands basic instructional design principles. Willing and able to learn new software.

Intermediate ID: Significant experience in designing e-learning solutions. Has a basic understanding of authoring tools and some experience using one.

Experienced ID: Extensive experience in designing all types of learning solutions, including e-learning. Proficient in using one or more authoring tools.

Media Developer: Highly skilled in using a variety of authoring tools. Optional: basic instructional design, scripting, and/or programming skills.

Programmer: Experienced and proficient in scripting and programming languages, such as HTML, JavaScript, Flash, Objective-C, ASP, or PHP.

Tool Category

Formatting: Tools best used for displaying text or graphics and presenting content with no interactivity.

Authoring: Tools used to display content that:

- has low to medium levels of interactivity
- can be supported through the provided user interface without writing any code

Scripting: Tools used to display content that:

- has medium to high levels of interactivity
- requires writing code in a scripting language that does not need to be compiled

Programming: Tools used to display content that:

- has medium to high levels of interactivity
- requires writing code in a programming language that does need to be compiled