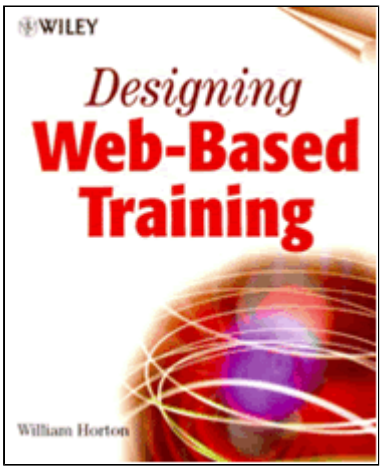
Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE July 2004 ISSN 1302-6488 Volume: 5 Number: 3

Designing Web-Based Training: How to Teach Anyone Anything Anywhere Anytime

By William Horton, 2000, New York: Wiley, pp. 607+xxv, Price: $44,99 ISBN 0-471-35614-X

Reviewed by Professor Ali SIMSEK
Anadolu University, Eskisehir-TURKEY



The book is a comprehensive guide for those who would like to design their own web-based instructional materials. It is not a scholarly work discussing theoretical issues or results of scientific research. It is written for practitioners who need advice in their design efforts. Thus, the author suggests that the user should not read the book in the conventional sense of starting with the first page and continuing toward the end. Instead, the user should get advice from related sections while his/her design matures. The book does not require a lot of technical expertise about programming, because basic web skills are enough to understand the issues of web-based training as presented in relevant chapters of the book.

The book comprises of fourteen chapters. Besides, there is a Question and Answer section at the beginning as well as a reference list and an index at the end. In the Q&A section, the author asks some questions on behalf of the reader and answers them in a personal language. These questions help the reader understand what the book is all about and how to use it strategically. The reference list includes 145 references of books, articles, papers, and reports. They are very useful resources for those who are interested in web-based training. The index is highly comprehensive in scope and it covers almost all the related concepts regarding the design of web-based learning. It serves as a kind of glossary of relevant terms.

Chapter 1 (Meet web-based training) is about the definition, history, and importance of web-based training (WBT). The concept of WBT is defined as "any purposeful application of web technologies to the task of educating a human being." It is rooted in distance learning (1840), computer-conveyed education (1960), Internet technologies (1990), and current practices of web-based education. WBT is considered one of the most important changes in the history of training since the invention of the chalkboard, or even the alphabet. The author claims that this rapidly changing technology does not change how humans learn, but it does change how we can teach them.

Chapter 2 (Evaluate WBT) raises the question of whether WBT is the best solution with respect to effectiveness, appeal, and efficiency of learning. In this context, the advantages and disadvantages of this technology are discussed. The author presents a number of examples from the corporate world, suggesting that WBT may contribute to improved learning, big cost savings, and better social attitudes toward training.

Chapter 3 (Pick an approach) indicates that many types of WBT courses are available and the designer should make certain decisions before starting to design his/her own course. The size of classes, type of learner control, the instructor's role, and appropriate technologies are some of the basic issues that should be dealt with in designing effective WBT.

Chapter 4 (Build the framework) explains routine but necessary parts of a WBT course by focusing on methods to attract, register, orient, and congratulate learners to navigate the

course reliably. The author rightly asserts that a course is more than a collection of lessons so that a framework or shell is necessary for a successful WBT course.

Chapter 5 (Organize learning sequences) addresses what designers must do to provide learners with the power of individual control to find the appropriate sequence of experiences to accomplish their learning goals. Toward this purpose, some guiding principles as well as basic schemes for organizing presentations, activities, and tests are suggested.

Chapter 6 (Activate learning) deals with exercises, practice sessions, team work, and projects to ensure an active learning experience. With the boosting effect of interactivity in mind, the author presents a catalog of proven activities and ingredients for those who would like to create their own WBT courses. Some of these activities are webcasts, presentation sequences, drill and practice activities, scavenger hunts, independent research, guided analysis, collaborative design, case studies, brainstorming, role-playing scenarios, group critiques, virtual laboratories, hand-on activities, and learning games. An illustrative key for common symbols used in WBT is also presented.

Chapter 7 (Test and exercise learning) begins with the rationale for testing, continues with guidelines for different kinds of tests, and concludes with alternatives to tests. Suggestions for developing test items for various formats such as true-false, multiple-choice, matching-list, click-in-the picture, drag-and-drop, simulations, and fill-in-the-blanks questions are particularly useful.

Chapter 8 (Promote collaboration) explains how distributed learners and instructors can use the Internet to communicate fully and freely. E-mail, discussion groups, chat, screen sharing, virtual response pads, and conferencing to exchange messages as part of formal learning activities are discussed within the context of collaboration.

Chapter 9 (Teach in the virtual classroom) elaborates on how to select instructors, design a syllabus, manage the class, and conduct live events in virtual classrooms that use web-based tools to mimic the structure and activity of a physical classroom course. Maybe the most important point in this chapter is that "the instructor should teach the class, not just let it happen."

Chapter 10 (Motivate learners) suggests techniques that WBT designers and instructors can use to keep learners interested, energized, and enthusiastic. These suggestions are particularly helpful because electronic courses are reported to have significantly lower satisfaction ratings and higher dropout rates than traditional classroom courses, sometimes up to 85% dropout rates are claimed.

Chapter 11 (Go global) assumes that the Web is global and WBT should be too. It means that the web is a global source, reaching every part of the world. Similarly, putting training on the web makes it available around the globe, but availability is not enough. Barriers of culture, language, technical infrastructure, custom, expectations, and other local conditions may restrict who can take WBT. With this in mind, the author presents a general perspective for WBT designers to broaden their design so it works for people of different countries, cultures, and time zones.

Chapter 12 (Overcome technical hurdles) discusses how to make WBT available to more learners and organizations by eliminating or reducing technical difficulties. Based on the fact that many novice learners often find the technical requirements of WBT too difficult, the designer should learn how to overcome these hurdles and keep them running smoothly. The chapter provides a number of solutions for such a task.

Chapter 13 (Venture beyond courses) presents considerable alternatives and adjuncts to conventional courses. Some of these can be used in to replace conventional courses, while others can be added to conventional courses to augment or extend them. A short list of alternative may include, but not limited to, libraries, museums, glossaries, job aids, mentors, conferences, guided tours, field trips, and simulations.

Chapter 14 (Contemplate the future) provides some predictions of how WBT and the functions it serves will continue to develop. The author predicts that WBT will break out of technical training, standards will muddle along, WBT will develop a marketplace, education and training will merge, the division between training and publications will disappear, the classroom will blossom or be renewed, gizmania (a code for fascination with technology for its own sake and the perceived need to use every technology available) will run out of batteries, and WBT will become a customary way of delivering training in a decade -or two, at most.

Overall, this book addresses many important issues in WBT and presents practical solutions for fellow designers. It is highly comprehensive in its scope so it serves as a pragmatic handbook. The general approach in the book is realistic, task-oriented, easy to understand, and engaging. Although, the author admits that this is not a scholarly work, the content of the book is not constrained by his own personal views; even the suggestions made in the chapters are theoretically sound and supported by research. This is consistent with another point that the author makes "personal preferences are not a good guide for design." It appears that the depth of substance and effective presentation style of the book will make it a great reference book in the field of WBT.

The Author

William Horton created his first network-based course in 1971 as an undergraduate student at MIT. Since then he has spent approximately three decades helping people put training materials and documents onto computers. For the past 15 years, he has been teaching courses on WBT in industry training centers and hotel meeting rooms. By conducting and observing successful training, he has gained first-hand field experience. He created his first full-scale web-based course in 1996. As a designer, he has won international awards for user interfaces, manuals, technical papers, and books he has produced. Along the way, he has written books on designing online documents, icons, graphics, and web pages. In preparing this book, he has studied over 200 web-based courses, talked to many course designers, instructors, administrators, and learners about their experiences creating and taking WBT.
