Choosing a project

Suggestions

The ID project is a major part of the course. Choosing a “good” topic will go a long way toward making the course interesting and useful. Here are some suggestions.

• Read through the various project stages in the Stepich materials before making a final choice of topic. Pay particular attention to the project proposal, learner analysis, context analysis, content analysis, and formative evaluation. These assignments, in particular, will require data, which will call for some advance planning and access to people as sources of the data. It’s a good idea to make sure that you will have ready access to the people and data needed to complete the project.

• As much as possible, choose a topic that is interesting and relevant to you. This is important for two reasons. First, you’ll be spending a lot of time on the project during the semester. Second, I hope you will come out of the course with a project that you can add to your professional portfolio, something that will show off your ID skills. It will be easier to invest the time and energy if the project is personally relevant.

• Avoid projects that involve:
  ➢ The “attitude” domain of learning
  ➢ On-the-job training or one-to-one training
  ➢ Train-the-trainer

This isn’t quite as arbitrary as it sounds. Designing these kinds of training programs is a little more complicated than other kinds of projects. They will require a little more adaptation of the ID model and a little more effort to keep things straight throughout the project. The added effort may not seem like a lot, but it will be enough to make a difference, especially when the ID process is fairly new to you.

• Limit the scope of the project. You may choose to design instructor-lead training or self-instruction. However, in either case, the learners should be able to complete the instruction within 2-4 hours. Keep in mind that this doesn’t mean 2-4 hours worth of content. We will be building into the instruction a variety of activities (introductory information, practices, assessments, and so on) that will add to the length of the lesson. Look ahead to the “instructional strategies” section in Stepich for more information about the components of the lesson. If you have difficulty identifying a project that is small enough to fit into this timeframe, consider using a section of a larger training program.

• Keep it simple. Our focus in this class is on the basics of the ID process rather than the development of sophisticated instructional media or delivery systems (instructional multimedia, computer-based training, electronic performance support systems, etc.). For this course, I would suggest that you work with a relatively simple delivery system, such as paper-based self-instruction or mediated instructor-lead training (using printed handouts and/or PowerPoint slides, for example).
• Identify an organizational setting (including a “client”) for your project. Several parts of the project (project proposal, learner analysis, context analysis, and formative evaluation) ask for real, rather than hypothetical, information. Completing these activities will be easier if you have an organizational setting to draw on. If you would like to do a training program for the “general public,” think about a sponsoring organization. In any case, keep in mind that the more “real” and focused you can make the project, the more interesting and informative it will be.

• If you aren’t able to come up with a topic, here are a few suggestions:
  ➢ Home car maintenance/repair
  ➢ Telephone and cell phone etiquette
  ➢ The new “business casual” standard at work
  ➢ Satisfying demanding customers in retail sales

• If you use one of these topics, you will still have to identify an organizational setting and a target audience in order to continue with the project. Talk with me if you’re unsure about the project expectations, the scope of your topic, or if you just want to try out an idea before making a final choice. I don’t have any precise rules to follow for choosing a topic or adjusting its scope, but it may be that, with some discussion, we can define a topic that is both interesting to you and manageable from a practical perspective.

**Project Topics from Previous Semesters**

To give you an idea of the range of possible project topics, here is a sampling of topics that have been used in previous semesters. Each of these topics resulted in a successful project. There have been work-related projects:

• The wonderful world of mentoring
• Patient monitoring with the GE Marquette Solar 8000 monitor
• Labor relations and the bottom line
• How to use tag-ons and make referrals
• Autonomous maintenance, step one
• DreamWeaver basic training

There have also been projects that weren’t work related:

• Basic first aid
• Coping with diabetes
• Setting up your tropical fish aquarium
• Making beer at home
• Fundamentals of investing
• How to buy a computer
Using a Project from Work

As the examples show, you can use a project from work, if you like. But, a word of caution is in order – course expectations and work expectations are likely to diverge in several important ways.

- Scope of the project. In the course, the project will involve completing a relatively small training program – limited to about 2-4 hours in length. At work, training programs are frequently much longer, sometimes several days in length.

- Delivery system for the instruction. In the course, the project is limited to a relatively simple delivery system – paper-based self-instruction or mediated instructor-led training. At work, projects may involve more sophisticated delivery systems, such as instructional multimedia, computer-based or web-based training, electronic performance support systems, or some combination of all of these.

- Timeline. In the course, the project timeline is tied to a 15-week semester. In addition, because the goal of the course is learning, we will use part of that time to reflect on what we’re doing, abstract general principles, and connect this experience to other experiences. At work, projects may have longer or shorter timelines. And those timelines may change based on things such as organizational budgets and the availability of people. In addition, because the goal is to complete the project, those timelines often do not include time for reflection, abstraction, and connection.

- Design process. In the course, we’re going to complete each component of a published ID model. Related to this, you will be asked to complete a relatively formal report for each component of the ID process. At work, there may be limited time, budget, or management support for this relatively “formal” approach to ID and work projects are likely to require fewer formal write-ups.

None of this is to say that either the course or the organization is “right.” The point is that the course and the organization may have different expectations, because they have different goals. We can usually work with these differences, as long as there is some flexibility on your end. For example, it probably isn’t a good idea to choose a project that is due for rollout in a month. There won’t be enough time to meet the course expectations.

Following a formal ID Model

So a logical question is – Why aren’t we following a process that is closer to the way real work projects are done?

We are going to follow a relatively formal ID model. We will look for ways to complete the components of the model as efficiently as possible (based on the requirements of each project). However, we will take a relatively systematic approach to the ID process and complete each component of the model. There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, to paraphrase Lincoln, you may not need all of the components all of the time, but you will need all of the components some of the time. Since each component will be useful in at least some projects, it will be important to know how to use all of the components, for those situations in which they do apply. Second, depending on the
specific project, it is often possible to shortcut parts of the model. However, finding useful shortcuts requires understanding the process that is being cut short. Finally, each component of the model makes an important contribution to the overall effectiveness of the resulting instruction. The following table tries to capture this idea. The left hand column shows features of effective instruction. The right hand column shows the component of the model that helps produce that feature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction works best when it:</th>
<th>Relevant component of the ID model</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is directed at a specific, documented instructional need.</td>
<td>Identifying instructional needs and goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is directed at the needs and interests of the intended learners.</td>
<td>Learner analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Takes into consideration the setting in which the learners will be using what they learn.</td>
<td>Context analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Includes information that is accurate and up-to-date.</td>
<td>Content analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is directed at specific intended learning outcomes.</td>
<td>Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes a way to determine what the learners have learned.</td>
<td>Assessment instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is based on a coherent plan that incorporates current theoretical principles of learning and instruction.</td>
<td>Instructional strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes materials that are clear and complete enough to produce consistent instruction from one training session to the next.</td>
<td>Instructional materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporates at least one cycle of review and revision.</td>
<td>Formative evaluation</td>
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