



# The Micro Manual

Getting microlearning, resources  
and performance support right

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# 1

## Introduction

When it comes to learning online, today's employees look for the minimum amount of content for the maximum impact in terms of how it can help them do their job.

For some things – like starting a new job where skills and knowledge must be learned from scratch – content may typically be structured as anything from 20-minute courses to several hours.

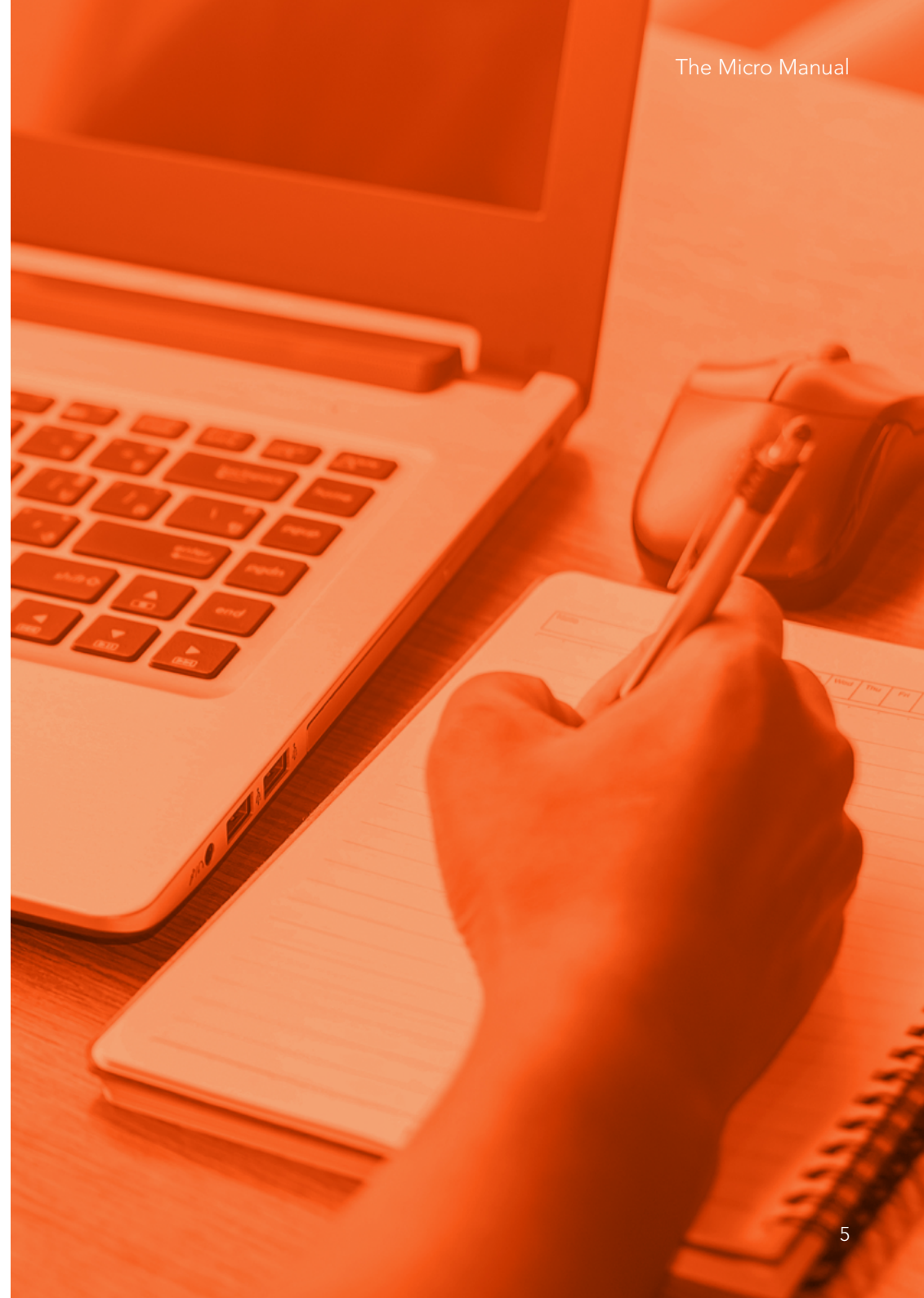
But increasingly there's much that can be usefully learned more quickly, hence the term 'microlearning'; corroborated by brain science which says we can only absorb four to five pieces of information into short-term memory at any given time.

There are also many situations where no learning is required at all, simply a resource to support the employee at the point of need.

In this guide we differentiate between microlearning as a structured learning

experience and resources which are more like the tools with which to do the job. Both at the end of the day are 'content' and here we share ideas and guidance on how to get them both right. Either way employees value what is:

- easy to access
- easy to use
- visually attractive
- quick to complete.



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# What do we mean by microlearning?

Microlearning means short, high impact bursts of learning often referred to as 'nuggets'. This term reflects their small scale and value as rich learning experiences. But many people also say 'microlearning' to mean content that supports performance at the point of need; what Deloitte's Josh Bersin calls "I need help now". In this context it's unlikely to be learning that's needed, as a tool or a resource would be more useful.

As Nick Shackleton-Jones, who has written passionately about microlearning, suggests: *'resources are context-centric, whilst microlearning is content-centric'*.

When we talk about microlearning, here's what it is, and what it most definitely is not.

## WHAT MICROLEARNING IS

- Online learning content in tune with contemporary users and their expectations
- Self-contained, standalone learning experiences
- Designed to meet a specific learning outcome or objective
- Short, sharp, taking 2-5 minutes at the max
- Often informal, with a focus on performance support
- Sometimes used more formally, through the creation of a defined learning path, made up of 'stackable' learning in bite-sized pieces
- Sometimes delivered continuously or over a set period of time and adapted to knowledge and gaps (AKA spaced rehearsal).

## WHAT MICROLEARNING IS NOT

- A resource where the content is not designed to be learned, internalised and remembered, but is simply to support immediate performance at the point of need
- Longer form content chopped up into short pieces
- A way of describing a short piece of content
- Straight information or a reference tool.

# 3

## How is microlearning delivered?

To some extent this depends on the needs of your project. On the other hand, it will of course depend on the technology in place.

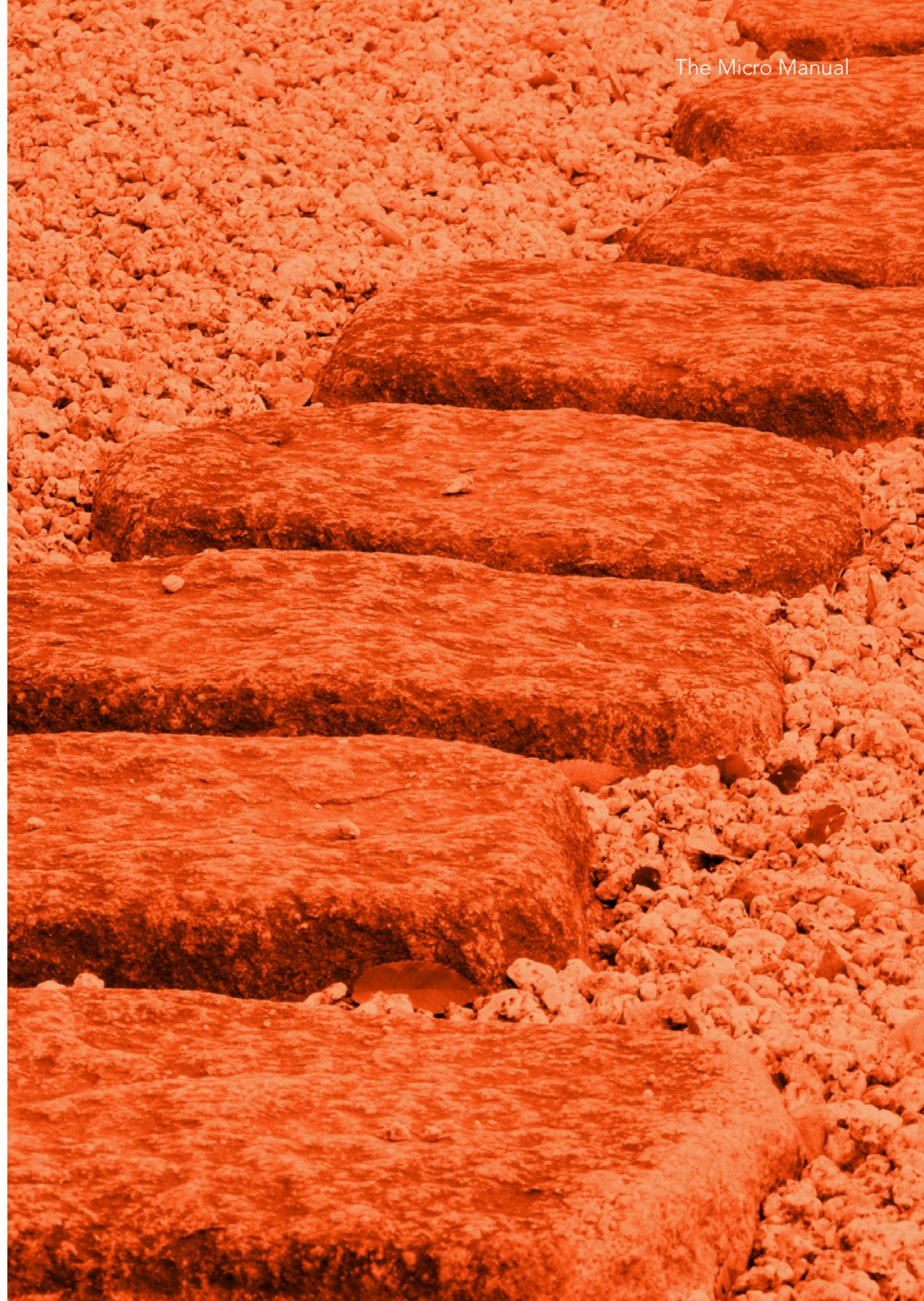
You can implement microlearning directly on your learning management system (LMS), where each 'micro learn' is SCORM wrapped, and either stands alone and is useful in its own right, or may be in a grouping of micro learns.

But technology like xAPI and learning record stores (LRSs) allow tracking to take place outside the LMS, and complicated implementations of microlearning might call for novel, even app-like delivery formats. For example, the free online language-learning platform, Duolingo, makes great use of a mobile friendly app to deliver bite-sized lessons which get you reading, writing and speaking right away. Duolingo pushes out daily reminders which encourage you to practice frequently but you're in control over when and where you do that. Lessons repeat

words and phrases from earlier lessons, refreshing your memory and testing recall.

Microlearning reflects the demands and preferences of today's employees who are likely to be:

- short on time, so they expect immediacy and up-to-date content
- sophisticated and active online consumers of media with high expectations in terms of visuals and a quick and easy user experience (UX)
- overloaded with information
- receptive to content they see up front as being relevant, useful, stripped back and to the point.



## 4

# So, how do you design it?

Useful questions to ask before you start

**Remember you should only have one objective for your single 'microlearn'. Asking questions like these can help you get your focus right:**

1. What's the top thing people must know about this subject/product/system/regulation/issue?
2. What are the key steps people must follow to do this right?
3. What are the most common mistakes people make? What are the consequences?
4. What case study, example or anecdote would help people put this subject in context?
5. Where should people go for more help, advice and information on this topic?

Having completed scoping, consider how to convert your raw content into an effective learning sequence, depending on the reason for its creation.

## Let the goal of your learning dictate design

Is your specific learning need for your next project focused on delivering knowledge and skills, information and communication, or behaviour and attitude changes? Depending on your answer, here are some learning models to get you started:

### Knowledge and skills models

Like any learning experience designed to help us retain core knowledge or build up new skills, it pays to have an established structure such as PEET:

**P**resent  
**E**xemplify  
**E**xplore  
**T**est

PEET gives us a standard sequence to systematically build knowledge and get learners to demonstrate understanding. And although usually associated with longer form elearning, it proves flexible timewise in that it can be applied to microlearning that runs at around two to five minutes.

How, you ask. Well firstly it depends how you go about it. For example, you

can cover more ground in one minute of video than one minute's worth of traditional elearning (which is equated to one screen). In this example you can Present and Exemplify in one video clip, then follow up with an exercise that encourages Exploration, and finally a summative question(s) to close the piece. And of course, all the elements of PEET can be mixed up, so you might start with Test, follow up with a case study through which you Exemplify and Explore, and then close with the Presentation of the key facts and any calls to action.



## Information and communication models

The goal of these models has always been to get information to the learner and to be learner-driven.

### Process flow

Create clear steps by embedding information along the path of a task flow, e.g. the timeline of a project, the steps taken to manufacture a car or the stages in completing a successful interview.

### Guided stories

Most learning designs should include elements of storytelling (the Exemplify of PEET); this approach builds the entire course around a story. The content might unfold through a day in the life of a person or a project, as a video, an animation, an audio podcast style story - narrated with pace.

Opportunities to dive deeper may be included, provided this extra level is framed as such i.e. may increase duration – but it's optional.

### Rate and review

Present a case study perhaps as a piece of web style reportage with photos and graphics, or as a blog style, a video, or an interview with the learners exploring i.e. reflecting and/or rating it against one or more criteria. Followed by an expert or panel of experts' views so the learners build knowledge and skill through evaluation and comparison.

## Behaviour and attitude change

A goal-based scenario approach can help to change attitudes and behaviours, as well as building knowledge and skill. By immersing learners in a real-life situation – told as an interactive text story with branching, or as interactive audio or video to show the consequences of knowledge gaps or a certain mindset or behaviour.

### Challenge and support

This model offers two different routes based on the learner's preferred learning style or confidence level. They can dive straight into the challenge (an interactive scenario with a number of decision points) or start by exploring the support (short pieces of theory or information).

If the learner decides to take the challenge and makes a wrong decision they're directed to the related section of the support. This means they only need to look at the theory if they have a particular learning gap.

### Branching simulation

This approach allows learners to make choices, see the consequences, and have the opportunity to change direction and recover from mistakes or try different approaches. The complexity and depth of the simulation can vary and we can provide different levels of help along the way to cater for different audiences.

Content type	Learning models
Information and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process flow</li> <li>• Topic categories</li> <li>• Magazine style</li> <li>• Other useful tools: search; functionality; infographic; animations</li> </ul>
Knowledge and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guided stories</li> <li>• Rate and review</li> <li>• Challenge and support</li> <li>• Branching simulation</li> <li>• Other useful tools: expert/colleague Viewpoints</li> </ul>
Behaviour and attitude change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenge and support</li> <li>• Branching simulation</li> </ul>



### Leverage the power of social

Microlearning and social learning make a killer combination. They're both bite-sized, easily accessible and more personal. They take place outside of the traditional learning format, at the point of need. Whilst they're powerful alone, their combined power is greater still. Mix up their features to make the experience more interesting. Get people talking about or rating your microlearning. Sharing their stories, work aids. Provide forums to answer their questions and keep the conversations going.

Recently we've been working with a client on a series of bite-sized 'Safety Moments'. The premise being that it's one thing to watch a movie, but it's often just as much fun and rewarding debating it with a friend afterwards. Thus the learning consists of a short, powerful piece of filmed drama, followed by TED-ED style nuggets of additional content:

**Think** – where key learning points from the film are explored

**Reflect** – where questions are posed for the learners to consider (some of these will be open questions which encourage learners to think about the topic in relation to their own site and experiences)

**Dig deeper** – where learners can access further reading and materials

**Discuss** – where thought provoking questions about the film are posed with a call to action to join in the debate on Yammer, learning with and from others.





## 5

# Choose your media

Microlearning is, by definition, a contemporary format and is therefore best delivered using digital media. For today's learners that means video, audio, branching, interactive video, interactive storytelling and a possible social media dimension that allows people to chat, comment, like and share.

A microlearning approach is especially suited to the use of media, such as video, that enables a lot of the message to be conveyed and compressed into a short runtime. So a classic micro learn might be comprised of:

- short film - whether that be a video, including filmed on mobile (1 min)
- interactive exercise(s) (2 mins)
- reinforcement – summary and/or summative question(s) and links (2 mins)
- social.



The example we referenced earlier illustrates this approach by integrating with social media - as it's embedded in, and links back out to, Yammer for the total learning experience.

Microlearning is all about opportunities to deliver a more intense, compressed and condensed learning experience around a single objective using digital media, such as:

- video
- interactive video
- interactive audio
- podcasts
- animations
- blogs
- emails
- quizzes.

Digital media is not an end in itself; content will always be king but how it is presented definitely helps! The next section has plenty of ideas to consider.

## What do we mean by digital resources for performance support?

Resources are by definition anything that's going to be useful and helpful at the point of need - anything from PDFs to tools, user generated videos, checklists and so on.

However, to be functional doesn't mean resources shouldn't be engaging and creative, just as long as they give the user what they need to support them in their work.

So here are some ideas on how to present content imaginatively that can also be adopted when designing microlearning.



## 6

# How should digital resources be delivered?



## Videos – guerrilla style

### Ask the expert

Opens with an empty chair with an envelope on it, enter the expert, who opens the envelope, reads out the question in it, sits down and answers the question to the camera. Maybe against the clock and of course can be improvised depending on what your SMEs can handle under pressure

### One minute wonders

A catchy way of describing a series or collection of 60 second films covering a series of topics or one topic split into a family of shorter clips. They could be video, animation, the list really does go on

### Animated films

Lend themselves to the 60 seconds format for maximum impact, even a text-only film; say white text on an all-black background, with a sequence of hard hitting messages. Though can be fairly simple, this text approach really focusses on the message and has a lasting impact

### Points of view

We use what we call our 'Myriad' video wall to give many different opinions. The idea is to use an interactive mini-video wall featuring short to camera sound bites and vox pops and/or maybe short, sharp animate written and graphical statements and quotes

### Split screen quick-fire questions

Inspired by a cult Italian TV show, this involves two people answering the same question one after the other – you could for example have two different SMEs answering the same question but in their own words

### Bird's eye view

Filming aerial footage with a drone, for example, of a work site, is low cost and adds a really sophisticated cinema style dimension to intercut interview clips and voiceover to the aerial

### Day in the life

Follow one person for a day and splice together into a three-minute film, maybe interspersed with speeded up or with time lapse edits, and possibly with links out to further reading or other associated films for a more in-depth take on things

### Vlog-style

The selfie style approach where you film a process, a demonstration of a skill, a situation etc. and intercut with homemade style to camera comments and insights

### Pecha kutcha

Transferring this presentation technique of 20 PowerPoint slides that are 20 seconds each to instead using a timer and a presenter to camera format, possibly with overlays and graphics displayed alongside to emphasise key points

### TED talk

Film an expert talking to a group of people – or possibly script and stage the event using an actor to play the part of the TED presenter

### 5x5

A social media convention of films comprising five scenes stitched together of five seconds each – you'd be amazed what can be conveyed in 25 seconds – or several 5x5s!

These are just some examples of how the techniques of TV shows, film styles and graphical techniques can be used and adapted to delivering resource-based digital learning. Video opens up a lot of possibilities to say the least



### Audio - podcasts

Although podcasts have been around for some time now, their popularity is soaring. 57 million Americans listen monthly, up 23% year on year. And podcast listeners get hooked. In the UK, podcast listeners listen to over six hours per week.

#### Ask the expert

A great way to capture and share expertise and knowledge, especially if there's a significant chunk of content to communicate as a 'long form' recordings or series - easy to download and listen in situ, or in your own time

#### Q&A

The recording can be staged as a question and answer session - in a conversation style - between, say, an expert and an interviewer or a straight to microphone memo style recording

#### Audio visual

An enhanced version of a podcast using the recording as a soundtrack to a slide deck, creating an audio slideshow with a low cost visual dimension

#### Round table

For a variety of perspectives and inputs, record an informal style discussion, or a more formal debate and maybe give it an identity/brand to make it a regular event, alerting people to the latest download by email



### PDFs and PowerPoints – interactive

Never underestimate the power of the PDF, especially when it's interactive and positioned in attractive ways. It's all in how it's positioned as useful assets in their own right, such as the following:

#### Myth buster, jargon buster

'Digital resource' is an inclusive term that still embraces the written word, especially lists which are very popular in blogs and on the web generally. And with the interactive dimension we can make that content clickable and easy to navigate with an overview level and clickable links to drilling down in-depth as required

#### Buzzfeed-style lists – the top tips

7 reasons to be cheerful, 10 things you need to know about.. - lists are known for their viral nature. Used correctly, and they could be just as big of a hit in your company

#### Just in time

The aide memoire never went away and can still be the most valuable and timely time performance support

#### ebook

There's still a need for 'long form' digital content, not least where the learning is more knowledge based and complex to boot, so let's make it easy and enjoyable to read. The trick is to invest in layout and art direction to ensure the ebook is both on brand and a good read

#### Slideshow

OK it's a PowerPoint deck, but that's a popular, familiar and versatile way to publish and communicate content. As with the ebook, it's about endorsing the value you attach to the content with consumer-level layout and standard of

publishing. We can even up the ante with PowerPoint's often overlooked capability of interactivity and embedded audio and video to make the slideshow a multimedia experience



### Interactive video

#### Branching

This is commonly used for scenarios, but from a resource point of view, is especially effective as a way of offering different routes and channels within the same video. For example, consider branching by job role, for different perspectives, versions of the same event, processes or scenarios

#### Guided tour

Throughout the film, hotspots are flagged as icons you click on to open related video windows which play film, animations, even questions as you go

# 10 TIPS FOR MICROLEARNING AND RESOURCES



**1**

**Stay focused**


Only cover one objective or one facet of a subject in each piece of micro learning



**2**

**Don't sacrifice richness**


Microlearning needs to work hard to capture and motivate the user in such a small space. Make sure content is rich and memorable



**3**

**Design for reuse**

Microlearning can be mixed, matched and recombined for different audiences and learning experiences. Make sure your learning can stand alone enough to give you maximum flexibility



**4**

**Design a learning curve**

Introduce complex subjects slowly over a series of microlearning nuggets. This allow users to get their head around the topic in short stages and allows more experienced users to jump in at the point that's relevant to them



**5**

**Do your research**


Reach out to your audience. Time is tight – what do they really need



**6**

**Cut the fluff**


Keep your writing tight and direct, and minimise text



**7**

**Try mixing media**

Don't just think in terms of elearning modules. Other media like videos, podcasts, short games, ebooks and podcasts can also work well



**8**

**Design for mobile phones first**

Microlearning is a great way to spend five minutes between meetings or in the bus queue. Make sure learners can access it on their own terms by designing with the smartphone as the key platform



**9**

**Make it shareable**

Because microlearning is short and to the point, it's perfect for sharing with a colleague in need or linking from a newsletter. Making your learning easy to link to and email will help everyone get the most out of it. Consider including analytics to find out exactly how it's being used



**10**

**Remember microlearning might not work for everything**

Sometimes, splitting a subject up into small chunks might be distracting. If people need to concentrate on a subject for longer than a few short minutes to get the full picture, then look for longer learning experiences

# Discover how we're shaping the future of learning

Everything we do at Kineo stems from a simple idea - if we design a better learning experience, together we'll get better results.

Kineo helps the world's leading businesses improve performance through learning and technology. We're proud of our reputation for being flexible and innovative, and of our award-winning work with clients across the world.

Whatever your business challenge, we will partner with you every step of the way to find the learning solution that fits best – and delivers results. So, how can we help you?



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