

# Learning Design, Reinvented.

A Complete Beginner's Guide to Modern Digital Learning

### Introduction.

This guide is based on B Online Learning's original blog series, *Instructional Design, Reinvented,* a fresh take on how to create digital learning that's agile, learner-first, and designed for today's world.

We've expanded and refined the content here to serve as a practical, beginner-friendly eBook for anyone new to instructional design whether you're a corporate trainer, educator, subject matter expert or content creator.

Inside, you'll find a clear pathway through the foundations of modern learning design, using tools like Articulate Storyline and Rise, with tips, examples and strategies to get started with confidence.

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### Part 1: Foundations of Instructional Design.

*Summary:* In Part 1, we introduce what Instructional Design (ID) is and where it came from. We'll explore a brief history of the field – from its roots in World War II training efforts to the influence of major learning theories like behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. We also unpack traditional ID models such as ADDIE and the Dick & Carey system, examining their key steps and why they remain relevant for eLearning design today.

#### A Brief History of Instructional Design

Instructional Design, in simple terms, is the practice of creating effective learning experiences in a consistent, systematic way. While teaching and designing lessons is as old as education itself, ID as a formal discipline has more modern origins. The field **began to take shape during World War II**, when psychologists and educators were tasked with rapidly developing training for soldiers<u>instructionaldesigncentral.com</u>. This wartime effort required a systematic approach to train large numbers of people efficiently, planting the seeds for the ID models we use now.

In the post-war decades, educational psychologists continued to refine how we design instruction. Early approaches were heavily influenced by **behaviourism**, the learning theory focused on observable behavior change. For example, in 1954 B.F. Skinner introduced the idea of **programmed instruction** – breaking material into small steps, asking frequent questions, and giving immediate feedback. This method, grounded in operant conditioning, exemplified behaviourist principles in action: learners would respond to questions and get instant reinforcement, steadily building knowledge. Programmed learning materials and teaching machines of the 1960s applied these ideas, and while technology has evolved, the **notion of instant feedback and clear step-by-step instruction remains a staple** in eLearning quizzes and drills (a direct legacy of behaviourism).

By the 1960s and 70s, **cognitivism** began to shape instructional design. Cognitivist theory shifted focus to the mental processes behind learning – how learners perceive, process, and retrieve information. A key figure, Robert Gagné, outlined different types of learning outcomes (cognitive, affective, psychomotor) and famously proposed the **Nine Events of Instruction** (e.g. gain attention, present content, provide feedback, etc.). These events were rooted in cognitive psychology and remain highly influential – if you've ever started a lesson with an intriguing question or scenario to grab attention, you're using Gagné's principles. Cognitivism taught instructional designers to consider things like memory, prior knowledge, and mental organization when designing a course.

Entering the 1990s, **constructivist** ideas gained momentum, adding another lens for instructional design. **Constructivism** posits that learners construct their own

understanding through experience and reflection. In ID, this translated to more authentic, real-world learning tasks. For instance, instead of just reading theory, learners might engage in a **scenario or problem-solving activity that mirrors reality**, thereby constructing knowledge through experience. By the mid-90s, constructivists emphasized that learning should be *"authentic" and produce real-world experiences allowing learners to form their own knowledge*. If you've noticed modern eLearning using case studies or branching scenarios, that's constructivism at work, promoting learning by doing.

Alongside these theories, technology was changing how we deliver instruction – from films and overhead projectors in mid-20th century, to computer-based training (CBT) on CD-ROMs in the 1980s and 90s, and eventually internet-based eLearning in the 2000s. Each wave of tech evolution expanded what instructional designers could create, but the underlying goal remained: find the best way to help people learn.

#### Traditional Models: ADDIE and Dick & Carey

To make use of learning theories in real projects, instructional designers rely on **models** – step-by-step frameworks for designing courses. The grandparent of ID models is often said to be **ADDIE**. **ADDIE** stands for **Analyze**, **Design**, **Develop**, **Implement**, **Evaluate**, representing the stages of course development. It emerged in the 1970s for U.S. military training needs. ADDIE provided a *"flexible guideline for building effective training and instructional materials"*. In essence, you start by **analyzing** the learners and goals, then **design** learning objectives and strategies, **develop** the content and activities, **implement** (deliver) the training, and finally **evaluate** its effectiveness. This linear but iterative process (you can cycle back based on evaluations) became the template for countless course designs. In fact, most other ID models are considered variations or spin-offs of ADDIE. The reason it's so enduring is because it's logical and comprehensive – even today, if you systematically identify needs, craft well-defined objectives, create materials, and test if it works, you're likely to succeed.

Another classic model is the **Dick and Carey Systems Approach**, introduced by Walter Dick and Lou Carey in 1978. Dick and Carey's model took a **systems view** of instruction, meaning it sees all the parts of instruction (the teacher, learners, materials, activities, delivery platform, etc.) as interrelated components working together. This was a shift from treating each element in isolation. The Dick & Carey process has several steps, closely mirroring an ADDIE-like flow: defining goals, analyzing learners and contexts, writing performance objectives, developing assessment tools, planning instructional strategies, developing materials, and evaluating formatively and summatively. One distinguishing aspect is its emphasis on revision through **formative evaluation** – basically testing and refining the course as you develop it. In fact, Dick & Carey described their model as iterative rather than strictly linear; the components can be executed in parallel and revised as needed. This iterative mindset was forwardthinking and foreshadowed the more agile approaches used today.

#### Why do these traditional models still matter?

For beginners, models like ADDIE or Dick & Carey provide a safety net – a proven structure to follow so you don't miss crucial steps. They stress the importance of starting with clear objectives and ending with evaluation, which is vital for any effective training. Even if you later use faster or more flexible methods, understanding these fundamentals ensures you always design with purpose. Many organisations (including in Australia) still use ADDIE as a staple for developing learning content because it's systematic and repeatable. In short, the classic models instill a disciplined approach: know your audience and needs, design deliberately, and check if it works. As we'll see in Part 2, newer approaches build on these ideas to address the demands of modern rapid-development environments.

### Part 2: Modern Design Approaches.

*Summary:* In Part 2, we look at how instructional design has evolved to keep up with fast-paced, tech-driven workplaces. We explore **contemporary approaches** that go beyond the linear models – specifically the **Successive Approximation Model (SAM)** and **Agile learning design**. This part explains how iterative design, prototyping, and agile project methods help create better eLearning faster. We'll compare these approaches to ADDIE, highlighting their strengths in today's context.

#### From Linear to Iterative: Why New Approaches?

Traditional models like ADDIE are robust, but one criticism is that they can be **slow or inflexible** in certain situations. In a classic ADDIE "waterfall" process, each phase is completed before moving to the next. This means if a mistake or change in requirements is discovered late (say during development or implementation), you might have to backtrack significantly – a costly and time-consuming proposition As eLearning development needs sped up and projects started requiring more agility, instructional designers looked for ways to **"build, test, and revise"** more quickly rather than waiting until the end to evaluate. In fact, as early as the 1990s the concept of **rapid prototyping** in ID was introduced – creating quick early versions of learning materials and iterating on them. This idea laid groundwork for newer models focused on iteration.

#### The Successive Approximation Model (SAM)

One popular modern framework is the **Successive Approximation Model**, or **SAM**, developed by Michael Allen (a prominent figure in eLearning design). SAM was essentially a response to the limitations of ADDIE. Allen and his team felt that a less linear, more cyclical process would yield better results and keep projects moving. Instead of a strict sequence, SAM uses repeated cycles to **prototype, test, and refine** learning experiences.

How does SAM work? In practice, SAM involves a **Savvy Start** (an initial brainstorming and planning session with stakeholders) followed by small iterative design and development cycles In a SAM project, you create a prototype or a small piece of the course early on, gather feedback, make improvements, and gradually build out the full product through these iterations. This model encourages continuous problem-solving and adjustment, rather than *"simply following instructions"* in a set order. For example, if you're designing an interactive compliance course, under SAM you might build one sample scenario or module, show it to a few end-users or SMEs (Subject Matter Experts), and use their input to tweak the design before developing all the modules. This way, issues are caught and fixed early, and the final course is more likely to hit the mark. The benefit of SAM's approach is agility. Because it's **non-linear**, you can resolve issues on the fly and you're not locked into a design decided months earlier. It's forgiving if requirements change or initial ideas don't pan out – you "approximate" the solution iteratively. Many see SAM as aligning better with creative processes in eLearning, giving designers and developers more freedom to experiment and **"fail fast"** (learn from mistakes quickly and move on).

#### Agile Learning Design

Closely related to SAM (and sometimes overlapping in practice) is the broader trend of applying **Agile methodology** to instructional design. *"Agile learning"* or *"Agile instructional design"* refers to adapting principles from agile software development to the training world. Key values of Agile – **speed, flexibility, collaboration, and iterative development** – fit perfectly with modern learning needs. Just as software teams work in sprints, ID teams can break course development into smaller chunks and continuously improve the product.

In an Agile ID project, instead of one big deliverable at the end, you produce **incremental deliverables in short cycles (sprints)**. For example, an instructional designer might develop one lesson or module per two-week sprint, release it to stakeholders or a pilot group, gather feedback, and then move to the next sprint incorporating lessons learned. This approach embodies a *"failing fast" mentality*, where you quickly identify what doesn't work and adjust. Agile also emphasizes frequent communication – daily or weekly check-ins (sometimes called stand-ups or scrums) to ensure the team stays aligned and issues are addressed in real-time.

The result is a development process that can adapt to change even late in the project. Suppose a new compliance regulation comes in while you're mid-way building a course – an agile approach means you can shuffle priorities in the next sprint to include that content, rather than being derailed. Agile design also tends to be **learner-centric**, because continuous feedback (often including input from actual learners or reps) means the end product is tested for usability and effectiveness throughout.

Many organisations now use hybrid approaches – for instance, they may follow ADDIE at a high level but execute it in an Agile way. One example could be using **design sprints** within the "Development" phase of ADDIE, or iterating the "Design > Develop > Test" loop multiple times before Implementation. The specifics can vary, but the core idea is the same: embrace flexibility and keep stakeholders (and learners) in the loop through constant collaboration. A global best practice is emerging here: **design is never truly "one and done"** – even after launch, we gather analytics and feedback to iterate improvements. This mindset is increasingly seen in Australia's corporate learning projects, where fast-changing industries (tech, finance, etc.) demand training content that can be updated and improved continuously. With SAM and Agile methods, instructional design has become a more **dynamic**, **creative**, **and responsive** process. These contemporary approaches don't throw away the foundations of ADDIE – they build on them. We still analyze needs and define objectives (perhaps even more thoroughly, via kickoff workshops like the Savvy Start in SAM). We still care about good design and evaluation. The difference is *how* we get there: through a spiral of quick drafts and revisions, rather than a straight line. For a beginner, it's useful to know that you don't always have to design a perfect course outline on paper before trying things out. Modern ID encourages you to **prototype early**, **test often**, **and evolve your course with feedback** – a reassuring thought when you're creating something new.

Up next, in Part 3 we'll shift from process to **learning experience strategies**. We'll delve into techniques that make your eLearning *engaging* – because even the best-designed course plan can fall flat if learners tune out. Enter gamification, concept-driven design, and microlearning!

### Part 3: Engaging Learning Experiences.

Summary: Part 3 focuses on how to captivate your learners. We introduce **gamification** – using game elements to motivate and engage, **concept-driven design** – building learning around big ideas or themes, and **microlearning** – delivering content in bite-sized pieces. Through these approaches, we'll see how to make eLearning not only informative but also enjoyable and impactful. Practical examples (like using points and badges, scenario stories, or short daily lessons) illustrate how you can apply these strategies in your own instructional designs.

#### **Gamification in eLearning**

**Gamification** has been a buzzword for some time now, and for good reason: it tackles a perennial challenge in training – how to motivate learners who might otherwise be disengaged. In simple terms, gamification means **applying game mechanics and design techniques to non-game contexts** (like workplace learning) to make them more fun and engaging. One formal definition from Gartner describes it as *"the use of game mechanics and experience design to digitally engage and motivate people to achieve their goals"*. In the context of eLearning, our goal is for people to learn – so we use game elements to spark motivation and keep them hooked into the learning process.

What kind of "game elements" are we talking about? Here are a few common gamification techniques and how they apply in learning design:

- **Points and Leaderboards:** Just as games award points for achievements, an eLearning course might give learners points for completing modules or answering quiz questions correctly. These points can feed into a leaderboard to introduce a friendly competitive element. For example, a sales training course could display a leaderboard of top quiz scores, motivating sales reps to retry quizzes to improve their ranking. Competition, when applied appropriately, can drive learners to engage more and even repeat activities for a better score thereby reinforcing learning through repetition. (It's human nature: "Most of us have a competitive side... it can drive us to work harder and try again if we fail.")
- Levels and Progression: Games often have levels that players unlock step by step. In eLearning, you can design a course with levels or modules that only unlock after finishing previous ones, giving a sense of progression and accomplishment. This ties in with an important engagement principle: don't reveal everything at once. Creating a bit of suspense or a "what's around the corner?" feeling encourages learners to continue. For instance, an onboarding course might start with a "Rookie" level covering basics, then unlock a "Pro" level with more advanced content once the first is complete. A visible progress bar or

map can visualize this journey, which learners find satisfying as they see their advancement.

- **Challenges and Feedback:** Good games challenge players at just the right difficulty not too easy (boring) and not too hard (frustrating). In learning, this translates to activities that are achievable but still require effort. Scenario challenges (e.g. "Help this customer choose the right product") make learners apply knowledge. Immediate feedback on their choices acts like the game mechanic of seeing the result of your action. If they make a wrong choice, allow them to try again (a bit like having "lives" in a game). The idea of a *"safe space to fail"* is key in gamified learning people can see consequences and learn from mistakes without real-world risks. This iterative trying and improving mirrors how games encourage practice until mastery.
- Story and Characters: Many games have a storyline or characters that draw players in emotionally. In eLearning, weaving a narrative or a character-driven story can dramatically increase engagement. For example, a compliance course might feature a character, "Alex," who navigates ethical dilemmas, and the learner makes decisions for Alex. By giving the course a relatable protagonist and storyline, the experience feels less like a lecture and more like an interactive story. Research supports this: "*Providing a character to follow, empathise and identify with, brings a story to life and gives it meaning. Factual and dry narrative becomes more personable.*" When learners care about the story or character, they emotionally invest in the outcome, which can make the lessons more memorable.
- Rewards and Badges: Think of the badges, trophies or achievements you earn in video games eLearning can have its own versions. Badges or certificates for completing modules, or even fun titles like "Quiz Master" for acing all quizzes, provide tangible (albeit virtual) recognition. These rewards play into intrinsic motivation; adults still appreciate a pat on the back, even if it's via a digital badge. Some learning management systems (LMS) support issuing badges that learners can collect or even share. The key is that rewards should align with learning goals (reward the behaviors you want to encourage, like active participation or high scores, rather than just logging in).

Gamification doesn't mean turning training into a full-blown video game. It's about *"capturing the essential elements of games to make learning more engaging and memorable"*. Even simple tweaks can have an effect – for instance, phrasing quiz feedback as encouraging messages and allowing retries can make the experience more game-like (challenge > feedback > try again) rather than a one-and-done test. It's worth noting gamification is very popular globally: over 30% of companies report using gamified learning, and more than half are looking to implement it soon. In Australia too, organisations are embracing gamification for corporate learning, especially in sectors like sales, customer service, and product training where engagement boosts performance.

#### **Concept-Driven Design Approaches**

Another approach to make learning design effective – especially for complex topics – is what we'll call **concept-driven design**. This means building your course around **big ideas or key concepts** so that learners grasp fundamental principles that they can apply in many contexts. Rather than just presenting disparate facts or procedures, you anchor the learning with a unifying concept or theme.

In practice, concept-driven design often manifests as **teaching the "why" and the big picture** before diving into the details. For example, if you're designing a course on climate change for high schoolers, a concept-driven approach might center on a big idea like "interdependence" – illustrating how various factors (industrial activity, climate systems, human behavior) are interconnected. Each module would tie back to this concept, helping students see patterns and relationships, not just isolated data points. This is akin to **concept-based learning** models used in some curricula, which emphasize understanding broad principles that transfer across situations.

For adult learning or corporate training, concept-driven design can be applied by identifying the core message or principle you want learners to internalize. For instance, in leadership training, you might revolve the content around the concept of "trust". All scenarios, examples, and tips in the course underscore how trust-building is central to effective leadership. By doing so, even if specific processes or tools change, learners retain that big idea. It helps prevent the common pitfall of information overload; instead of trying to memorize 50 slides of content, learners focus on a few critical concepts and how the details support them.

**How to implement concept-driven design?** Start by asking: *What is the big takeaway concept here*? It could be a single word or phrase. Once identified, design elements can align to it. Use **metaphors or themes** to reinforce the concept – for example, a safety training course might use a theme of "navigation," comparing safety procedures to a GPS guiding you to a destination safely. That concept (safety as navigation) then influences the visuals (maybe road signs as icons), the language ("let's navigate this hazard"), and the structure (clear directions at each step). This cohesive approach makes the learning experience more unified and meaningful.

In essence, concept-driven design is about coherence – ensuring learners walk away with a deep understanding of the key idea, which they can then apply to new problems (a very constructivist outcome). By designing around concepts, you also cater to higherorder thinking; learners are encouraged to connect dots and think critically, rather than just recall facts.

#### Microlearning: Small Bites, Big Impact

You've probably experienced times when you needed a quick answer or a short tutorial – say a 5-minute YouTube video to learn a new software trick. That's the idea of **microlearning** in a nutshell. **Microlearning** is an approach to eLearning that delivers content in **short, focused chunks** – typically just a few minutes long and centered on a very specific topic or skill. It has surged in popularity as attention spans shrink and busy schedules demand learning that fits into the gaps of our day.

A helpful way to define microlearning: "a powerful and effective learning method that uses small chunks of information and just-in-time multimedia content to teach skills, knowledge, and behaviors". The goal is to provide **just enough**, **just in time**. Instead of a one-hour course on customer service, a microlearning strategy might be a series of ten 6-minute modules, each on a sub-topic like greeting customers, handling complaints, upselling techniques, etc., which learners can consume one at a time.

Key principles of microlearning design include:

- **Single Objective Focus:** Each microlearning module should have one clear learning objective or take-away. Because of the short format, you laser-focus on that objective without veering into unrelated territory. For example, one 3-minute lesson might simply teach "how to properly don and doff PPE gear." By keeping it that narrow, the content can be concise and memorable.
- **Bite-sized Content:** This often means keeping modules ideally under 5-7 minutes. It could be a short video, an interactive scenario, a quiz, or even an infographic or podcast snippet. The format can vary, but brevity is key. Learners should be able to complete a micro lesson in one sitting easily, even during a coffee break.
- Engaging and Rich Media: Since time is short, microlearning often leverages rich media to convey messages quickly think explainer videos, animations, or quick interactive challenges. Visuals and audio can often communicate a concept faster than text alone. That said, keeping it simple is also important (we don't want to overload a 3-minute lesson with 10 different media elements). A well-designed micro lesson might combine a bit of narration with on-screen text highlights and graphics, focusing on clarity.
- Just-in-Time Accessibility: Microlearning is most effective when learners can access the modules at the moment of need. This means making it mobile-friendly (so someone can pull it up on their phone on the job). For instance, an electrician might have 2 minutes before entering a site and quickly watch a microlearning clip on a safety check procedure as a refresher. Microlearning libraries or portals allow staff to grab the knowledge "on demand," which is great for performance support.

• **Spaced and Reinforced:** Many microlearning programs present small chunks over a span of days or weeks (a technique called **spacing**). Rather than a one-off training dump, you might send out one short lesson per day. This spacing helps combat forgetting – each day's micro lesson can reinforce or build on the last. Over a month, these small bites add up to significant learning. It mimics how we naturally learn and remember (frequent, short exposures are better for retention than one long exposure). Some microlearning will also include quick recap quizzes or challenges that repeat earlier content for reinforcement.

Why is microlearning so popular now? One reason is the **modern workforce's rhythm** – in Australia and globally, employees often have to juggle training with many other duties. Microlearning fits the flow of work. Learners feel a sense of progress ("I completed a lesson!") without committing huge time blocks. Additionally, it aligns well with mobile technology and platforms like learning apps or internal social networks (you can dripfeed content in an app, for example).

To implement microlearning, you can use tools like Articulate Rise (which we'll discuss in Part 4) to create brief, standalone lessons or even leverage video platforms. The key is chunking your content: take what would have been a one-hour course and break it into standalone sections. Ensure each chunk still makes sense on its own and has a clear outcome. Also, remember microlearning doesn't suit every topic – it's best for knowledge or skills that can be modular. Complex skills might still need longer practice sessions or workshops. However, even for complex topics, microlearning can serve as reinforcement or prerequisite learning.

**Example:** A case study snippet – A retail company rolled out a microlearning series for product training. Instead of a half-day workshop on all products, they sent a daily 5-minute interactive tutorial to sales staff's tablets each morning, each covering one product's key features and a quick role-play scenario on how to sell it. Over two weeks, salespeople completed 10 micro lessons. The results? Higher product knowledge scores, and employees loved that it didn't take them off the floor for long. This illustrates microlearning's power: *small, digestible content that's highly targeted can lead to big improvements*.

With gamification, concept-driven planning, and microlearning, we have a toolkit to design learning experiences that are not only effective but also learner-friendly and motivating. Part 4 will bring these ideas to life in the context of using popular eLearning tools. We'll see how to apply these principles when building courses in **Articulate Storyline and Rise**, and share some practical tips for keeping any eLearning module engaging.

### Part 4: Creating in the Real World

*Summary:* In our final part, we turn theory into practice. Part 4 discusses how to apply instructional design principles using **Articulate Storyline and Rise**, two widely used eLearning authoring tools. We'll offer tips on creating engaging, learner-centric content with these tools – from developing story-driven scenarios and interactions in Storyline, to building visually clean, responsive modules in Rise. This part also highlights global best practices (like accessibility and learner focus) and how they translate in the Australian learning context. We conclude with a wrap-up of the series and key takeaways for your journey as a new instructional designer.

#### Why Articulate Storyline and Rise?

Articulate's eLearning software suite is popular among instructional designers worldwide, including Australia, because it caters to both flexibility and ease of use. **Storyline 360** is a powerful tool that allows for custom, highly interactive course design – you can think of it like PowerPoint on steroids, where you can program complex branching scenarios, drag-and-drop activities, quizzes with custom feedback, and so on. It's ideal for when you want **full control over the learning experience** and need to build something bespoke (for example, a simulated software tutorial or a decisionmaking scenario with multiple paths).

On the other hand, **Rise 360** is a web-based authoring tool that excels at quickly creating beautiful, mobile-responsive courses. Rise uses a template/blocks system – you assemble pre-built blocks (text, image, quiz, interactive tabs, timelines, etc.) into a coherent lesson. The advantage is speed and consistency: even beginners can create slick-looking modules without any coding or heavy technical work. Rise is fantastic for **microlearning modules or straightforward content** where you want good design but don't need intricate customization.

Most organisations use these tools together: Rise for rapid development needs and content that's more linear, and Storyline when they require something more immersive or complex. You can even embed Storyline interactions into Rise, combining the two.

Now, let's talk instructional strategies when using these tools:

#### **Designing Engaging Scenarios and Interactions**

One of the best ways to keep learners engaged is through **scenario-based learning** – putting the learner in a real-world situation where they must make decisions or solve problems. Articulate Storyline is particularly well-suited for building such **branched scenarios**.

#### Tips for Storyline:

- Use Slides as Story Moments: Think of each slide (or scene) as a moment in a story. For example, slide 1 might introduce a scenario: "You are a manager handling a difficult employee conversation." Then you offer choices: A, B, or C for how to respond. Based on the choice, the story branches to a new slide showing consequences. Storyline's triggers and variables allow you to set these branches up. By crafting a narrative with decision points, you immerse learners in *active learning*. They must think, choose, and see outcomes, which is far more engaging than reading a policy text. It aligns with the constructivist idea of learning through experience learners can **fail safely** in the scenario and learn from mistakes.
- Incorporate Characters and Dialogue: Storyline has built-in illustrated and photographic characters you can use, or you can create your own avatars. Incorporating dialogue (even in text bubbles) between characters can make the scenario feel like a real interaction. For instance, using speech bubbles or captions in a scenario where a customer asks a tough question and the learner must pick a response creates a relatable situation. Remember the gamification point about having a character to empathise with even a simple scenario with a character graphic can achieve that personal touch.
- Leverage Interactivity Beyond Click Next: Storyline allows triggers on almost anything – objects, images, buttons, keyboard keys. To keep courses engaging, vary the interactions: maybe a drag-and-drop activity to sort items into categories, or a slider that reveals content as you drag (great for demonstrating processes or before/after comparisons). These interactions should always tie to your learning goal (we're not adding gimmicks for the sake of it), but they help maintain curiosity. A well-placed interactive knowledge check every few slides can re-engage attention and reinforce learning.
- Visual and Media Considerations: With great power comes responsibility Storyline lets you design freely, but ensure you apply good visual design principles. Keep layouts clean; don't overcrowd a slide with too much text or too many elements. Use images or illustrations to support the content (a picture that reinforces a concept is better than decorative but irrelevant clipart). Also, maintain consistency in style (colours, fonts, character styles) so the course feels cohesive. Consistency helps reduce cognitive load – learners know what to expect and how to navigate. And don't forget accessibility: add alt-text to images, ensure color contrast is sufficient, and if using audio narration, provide transcripts or captions. These are global best practices that Australian organisations increasingly prioritise, especially with legal standards requiring accessible online content.

#### Tips for Rise 360:

- Structure Content into Lessons: Rise courses are organised into lessons within a course. Each lesson can be seen as a microlearning unit. A good practice is to have each Rise lesson correspond to one learning objective or topic. This keeps the course modular and digestible. Learners can even see a menu of lessons, which helps them understand the outline and navigate easily.
- Use a Variety of Block Types: Rise comes with a host of block templates (text, accordion, tabs, flashcards, quizzes, etc.). Mix and match these to create an engaging flow. For example, start a lesson with a scenario block (Rise has a special block for branching scenarios using preset character dialogue formats), then follow with some text and image blocks to explain concepts, then an interactive knowledge check block (like a quick multiple-choice question) to let learners apply it. The idea is to avoid a long wall of text instead, break content into chunks and interactions. Rise makes this easy and the result is a more interactive experience without heavy development work.
- Keep it Visual and Responsive: Rise's strength is its modern visual style. Choose high-quality images (there's an integrated content library with stock photos you can use) that add relevance to your content. For example, if the course is about construction site safety, use images of construction environments to set context. Rise is fully responsive, meaning the layout adapts to different screen sizes (desktop, tablet, phone) automatically. To leverage this, ensure any media you add is also mobile-friendly (e.g., avoid very small text in images). Test the course on a phone using Rise's preview – a common practice in Australia where a lot of learners might be doing training on their mobile while commuting or on-site.
- Interactive Storytelling in Rise: While Storyline is the go-to for heavy branching, Rise can also do simple scenario-based interaction. The Scenario block allows you to create a dialogue-based scenario with choices. It's great for linear scenarios like a customer service call simulation. Use it to complement your content – for instance, after a lesson on customer service principles, include a scenario where the learner practices a call. Rise will handle the layout of dialogue and options, making it look slick without you coding anything.

#### Keeping Learners Engaged and Focused

Regardless of tool, some engagement tips are universal:

• **Start with a Strong Hook:** The first few screens of any module should grab attention. It could be a thought-provoking question ("What would you do if...?"), a surprising fact/statistic, or a relatable scenario. This is the equivalent of an

introduction that tunes the learner into WIIFM – "What's in it for me?". If using Storyline, perhaps an intro animation or a direct question to the learner. In Rise, you might start a lesson with a striking image and a question overlay. In Australian workplace training, an effective hook might be a quick anecdote from the field or a scenario that local learners recognize (e.g., an Australian nurse encountering a patient scenario that the learners likely have faced).

- Apply Story-Driven Narratives: We touched on this with gamification and scenarios storytelling isn't just for games. If possible, frame your entire eLearning course as a narrative journey. For example, an induction course might follow a new hire "avatar" from their first day to first week on the job, with the learner helping them along. Each section of content can tie into a chapter of that story. This approach keeps a consistent thread and motivates completion (people want to see how the story ends). It's a best practice that aligns with how our brains remember stories better than lists of facts.
- Chunk Content and Use Signposting: Breaking content into small sections (chunking) is crucial for online learning. Use clear headings and subheadings to guide the learner (signposting where they are in the journey). In both Storyline and Rise, ensure each section of content is not too long. In Rise, lessons naturally chunk content; in Storyline, you might design so that each slide covers one main point (or use layers on a slide to reveal points one at a time, rather than all at once). This prevents cognitive overload and maintains focus.
- Interactive Knowledge Checks: We've mentioned quizzes and knowledge checks these should be seen not just as assessment, but as engagement tools. A well-placed question makes a learner stop and think, re-engaging them mentally. In Storyline, you can place informal questions with feedback throughout, not just at the end. In Rise, use the *Knowledge Check* blocks within lessons, which let you pose a question without it being a scored test (the learner can try and see the explanation). For example, after a piece of content, ask "Given this scenario, what's the best course of action?" even if they get it wrong, the act of considering it strengthens learning.
- Visual Design and Multimedia: Good instructional design pays attention to visual clarity. Use bulleted or numbered lists to break up text (like we're doing here!), highlight key terms in bold, and use icons or images to represent ideas where possible. Make sure any on-screen text is readable (font size, color contrast). If you use audio narration in Storyline, consider the user experience: provide controls to play/pause, and don't have audio that autoplays unexpectedly if possible. For an Australian audience, also ensure the tone and examples in media are culturally appropriate (e.g., using Australian accents in

narration or local imagery if it makes the content more relatable – but this is optional, content just needs to be understandable by the target audience).

Focus on the Learner's Experience: Perhaps the most important principle of all, as echoed by many experts, is to maintain a *"relentless focus on the learner and the learning objective"*<u>learnstudios.com.au</u>. No matter which fancy interaction or new tool feature you consider, ask: Does this help my learner achieve the objective? Is this the best way to help them understand or practice? By keeping the learner's perspective central, you'll make design choices that lead to clarity and engagement. For instance, an elaborate animation might look cool, but if it doesn't add instructional value (or worse, distracts), it might be better to simplify or use a static visual. In every part of the design, think about how the learner will experience it – is it intuitive, is it interesting, is it relevant?

#### **Global Best Practices and Australian Context**

Instructional design best practices are largely universal – after all, they're based on human learning principles – but applying them in context is key. In Australia, learning designers adhere to global standards like **SCORM/xAPI** compliance (for content compatibility with learning platforms) and **accessibility guidelines** (e.g., WCAG 2.1 for digital content, ensuring courses are usable by people with disabilities). When you build a Storyline or Rise course, publishing to SCORM format for an LMS or adding alt text for images aren't just technical steps; they are part of designing a quality learning experience accessible to all. Australian organisations, particularly government and education sectors, often have mandates for accessible eLearning and will appreciate an ID who bakes that in from the start.

Another aspect in the local context is acknowledging **cultural diversity**. Australian workplaces and classrooms are multicultural. This means examples, case studies, and scenarios in your eLearning should be inclusive and avoid bias. For instance, if using characters in scenarios, consider representing a mix of genders, backgrounds, and roles that reflect reality (many authoring tools libraries have diverse character sets). Additionally, be mindful of language – use plain English and avoid idioms that might confuse non-native speakers. A friendly, conversational tone (which Australians generally prefer in workplace learning) can still be clear and respectful of diversity.

Australia also has a strong vocational education and training (VET) framework, where competency-based learning is standard. If you're designing eLearning for accredited training, align your content with the required competencies or units of competency. This might mean clearly stating learning outcomes in the beginning (which is good practice anyway) and ensuring every assessment question ties to those outcomes. Even in corporate training, being outcome-focused resonates well, as companies often want to see how training maps to skills or compliance requirements.

Lastly, an emerging best practice is considering the **learner's environment**. Australians might be doing eLearning from very remote areas (given our geography) or with limited internet. So, optimizing courses for lower bandwidth (e.g., not overloading with huge video files if not necessary, or providing downloadable text alternatives) can be crucial for reach. If designing for an audience that may include regional or rural learners, test that the course still functions on average internet speeds or allow offline access if using mobile learning apps.

To summarise Part 4, using tools like Storyline and Rise effectively comes down to marrying the tool's capabilities with solid instructional strategy. The tools will handle the heavy lifting of media and interactivity; your role is to craft that into a meaningful learning journey. Keep scenarios realistic, interactions purposeful, and visuals clear. And always remember – *focus on helping the learner achieve the objective in an engaging way*. Do that, and you'll be applying the best practices that successful instructional designers worldwide (and in Australia's own L&D community) swear by.

### **Conclusion: Bringing It All Together.**

Congratulations on making it through this comprehensive guide! We've journeyed from the **foundations of instructional design** – learning how the field started and the classic models like ADDIE that still provide a blueprint – through to **modern agile methods** that help us design quickly and flexibly. We examined **engagement strategies** like gamification, storytelling, concept-focused design, and microlearning that can transform dry content into motivating learning experiences. Finally, we looked at applying these principles in practice using popular eLearning tools, with tips tailored for Articulate Storyline and Rise users.

For beginners in instructional design, here are some **key takeaways** from our 4-part series:

- Start with a Strong Foundation: Knowing the history and theory (behaviorist, cognitivist, constructivist) gives you insight into *why* certain strategies work. Use models like ADDIE as a roadmap to ensure you cover all bases from understanding your learners to evaluating if your training succeeded. These aren't old-fashioned relics; they're reliable frameworks that underpin even the latest trends.
- **Be Open to New Processes:** Don't be afraid to iterate. Modern ID is rarely a straight line. Embrace prototyping, feedback, and agile development. Working in short cycles (like SAM's iterative design or agile sprints) can lead to a better product and save time correcting course. Collaboration with stakeholders throughout is crucial it's easier to fix the blueprint when the building is half-built than after it's complete.
- Keep Learners Engaged: Content is king, but engagement is the queen who gets things done. Use storytelling, challenges, and interactivity to capture attention. Whether it's through a gamified quiz, a relatable scenario, or a succinct 3-minute video, make the learning experience something people *want* to complete, not just *have* to. Remember that **emotion and motivation drive learning** a bored learner won't absorb much. So design with empathy: put yourself in their shoes and ask if you'd enjoy and value the experience.
- Leverage Tools Wisely: Tools like Storyline and Rise are just means to an end. Master their features, but always apply the "does this serve the learning?" test. A tool can animate a object or create a quiz in seconds, but you decide if an animation or quiz is instructionally sound at that moment. Start simple; you can gradually layer in complexity as needed. Both new corporate trainers and teachers find that Articulate tools have gentle learning curves – with practice, you'll be able to bring your creative ideas to life. And there is a huge community

(Articulate's E-Learning Heroes, for example) where you can learn tips or even download templates. You're not alone on the tools front.

• **Best Practices and Local Flair:** Incorporate global best practices like accessibility, user testing, and clear writing. These raise the quality of your learning design. In the Australian context, be mindful of the audience's needs – whether it's aligning to a national framework, ensuring content works in remote areas, or simply using a tone that resonates (warm, inclusive, and down-to-earth). Often, **staying focused on the learner's needs** will naturally guide you to these considerations.

As the field of instructional design continues to evolve, keep learning and stay curious. New technologies like AI, virtual reality, or data analytics in learning (Learning Analytics/LX design) are on the horizon, and they build upon the foundations you've just learned. The core mission, however, remains the same: helping people learn effectively.

In Australia and around the world, organisations value instructional designers who can create learning that truly makes a difference – whether it's improving workplace performance, helping a student grasp a concept, or ensuring someone stays safe on the job.

#### Why We've Reframed the Name

You may notice that we've chosen to update to **learning design** instead of the traditional "instructional design." That's no accident.

Instructional design carries a lot of legacy weight often tied to rigid models, academic structures, and content-focused delivery. But today's learning environment demands more.

**Learning design** reflects the shift from instruction to experience. It puts the emphasis on the learner their context, challenges and goals not just the content or the curriculum. It's more agile, inclusive, and aligned with the tools and methods we actually use today, like Articulate Rise, Storyline, blended delivery and adaptive learning.

This isn't just a name change. It's a mindset shift and one that better captures the energy, strategy and creativity of the work we do.

## The B Model: A Vision for ModernĂ.dźd ĥ ǯĂ Ďdrĥǯł <sup>6</sup>

### A New Era of Learning Design

Instructional design is in the middle of a profound shift from process to purpose, from content to experience, from static to agile. Across organisations, educators and learning teams are rethinking not just *what* they deliver, but *how* and *why*.

At B Online Learning, we've spent over 20 years guiding this transformation. Through our work with thousands of professionals from corporate trainers to university educators we've seen one clear truth emerge:

Instructional design isn't just a technical skill. It's a mindset, a method, and a strategic advantage.

This insight led to our four-part blog series: **Instructional Design, Reinvented** a modern guide for people designing digital learning using tools like Articulate Rise and Storyline.

What began as a practical roadmap evolved into something more foundational: a model for what **learning designers** need now, and how they can shape the future of learning.

We call it The B Model.

#### Why the B Model?

Because learning isn't static, and neither is design.

For too long, instructional design has been anchored to rigid models, outdated assumptions, and a heavy focus on content. But today, designers need to move faster, collaborate more deeply, and create learning that reflects the real world.

The B Model was born from that reality. It's not a checklist, it's a mindset. A set of design behaviours and values that elevate learning from *informative* to *transformational*.

It's also a nod to who we are - **B Online Learning -** and how we believe the world can learn better.

#### The Five Pillars of the B Model

Each part of the B Model aligns with a core capability required of modern instructional designers. They are not steps or stages. They are guiding forces interconnected, flexible, and deeply human.

We've mapped these traits to the four parts of our series, but they stand alone as a vision for the future.

#### 1. Boldness

#### Challenge assumptions. Ask bigger questions.

Great design begins with courage the courage to push beyond templates, to question what's always been done, and to imagine something better.

This mindset reframes learning design from "delivering information" to "designing for change." It invites experimentation, curiosity, and a willingness to reimagine.

Boldness showed up in **Part 1** of our series, where we explored the shift from instructorled content to learner-led experiences. We challenged the idea that instructional design is about content coverage, arguing instead for purposeful, outcome-driven design.

Bold designers don't just follow briefs they help shape them.

#### 2. Brilliance

#### Design with clarity. Focus on outcomes.

Brilliance isn't about complexity or polish it's about clarity. It's knowing exactly what success looks like for the learner and designing with that goal in mind.

Brilliance requires stripping away the unnecessary and building learning that is focused, useful, and aligned to real-world application.

In **Part 2**, we introduced agile design practices, rapid prototyping, and a leaner, more collaborative way of working. Brilliance was found in how we talked about working smarter: less content, more connection; fewer slides, more story.

Brilliance is not the flashiest design. It's the clearest path to growth.

#### 3. Breakthrough

#### Creativity that transforms.

Creativity isn't a luxury in learning design it's a necessity. In a world competing for attention, breakthrough learning is what people remember. It uses emotion, story, interaction and visual design to move beyond information and into meaning.

Breakthrough is the heart of **Part 3**, where we explored microlearning, gamification and concept-driven design. These aren't just tools they are strategies that unlock engagement, deepen understanding, and inspire reflection.

One standout example was how we reframed compliance modules to include gamebased feedback and scenario-driven questions transforming "tick-the-box" training into active learning.

Breakthrough design connects ideas to action.

#### 4. Balance

#### Adapt to real-world constraints.

No project happens in perfect conditions. Timelines tighten. Priorities shift. Budgets get cut. And yet, learning still needs to be delivered with clarity, creativity and impact.

Balance is the designer's ability to navigate those tensions. To work iteratively. To choose tools that fit the task. To know when good is good enough and when to fight for better.

In **Part 4**, we stepped into the real world. We showed how Rise and Storyline can work together to create layered, scalable learning. We shared examples where video, branching, and embedded media turned dry topics into immersive experiences all within realistic scopes.

Balance isn't compromise. It's smart, strategic design in motion.

#### 5. Bridging

#### Connect people, ideas and tools.

Instructional design is never a solo act. It's about connecting with SMEs, developers, business leaders, and learners. It's about translating between expertise and experience, between goals and action.

Bridging is the soft skill that underpins all others. It's the difference between good design and meaningful, collaborative impact.

This final value weaves through the entire series. From co-creating with SMEs, to prototyping early with stakeholders, to designing feedback loops bridging turns instructional design into a shared journey.

In the future, designers who can bridge knowledge and empathy, systems and stories, will lead the way.

#### The Model in Action

Here's how the B Model aligns with our four-part series:

B Trait	Series Part	Design Capability
Boldness	Part 1 – The Great Shift	Reframe learning from content to experience
Brilliance	Part 2 – Agile, Creative, Learner-Led	Design clear, focused, outcome-driven learning

B Trait	Series Part	Design Capability
Breakthrough	Part 3 – Design for Impact	Use strategy and creativity to make it stick
Balance	Part 4 – Creating in the Real World	Apply modern tools under real constraints
Bridging	All parts	Collaborate across people, platforms, and purpose

#### What Makes the B Model Different?

There are many instructional design models ADDIE, SAM, Gagne, Bloom. They're useful, but often linear, prescriptive or theoretical.

The **B Model** is different:

- It's flexible, not fixed
- It's behavioural, not procedural
- It fits how modern design actually happens

It's not about ticking steps. It's about developing design fluency the ability to move between mindsets, to collaborate, to build what matters.

It's also practical. If you're building a new course in Rise, managing a stakeholder review in Storyline, or guiding a team of subject matter experts this model meets you where you are.

#### Why This Matters Now

The future of work is changing fast and learning is how people keep up.

That means instructional designers are more valuable than ever. But it also means the role is evolving:

- From order-taker to strategic partner
- From content builder to experience architect
- From explainer to enabler

To thrive in this role, we need models that reflect reality not just theory.

The B Model offers that. It's a call to action, a creative mindset, and a collaborative approach. And it's designed for the tools, teams and timelines we work with today.

#### **Final Thoughts**

This isn't just a model. It's a movement.

The B Model is for anyone designing digital learning corporate trainers, teachers, L&D professionals, instructional designers and eLearning developers. It's a framework built for this moment, and for what comes next.

Because great instructional design doesn't happen by accident. It happens when we're:

- Bold enough to challenge the norm
- Brilliant enough to clarify what matters
- Breakthrough in how we connect and create
- Balanced in how we build under pressure
- Bridging learners, experts and ideas together

This is learning design. Reinvented.

#### Thanks for Reading.

We hope this guide has sparked new thinking, fresh ideas, and confidence in your journey as a learning designer.

Whether you're just starting out or reshaping your current approach, one thing is clear: learning design is no longer about transferring information. It's about creating experiences that empower people to think, act and grow.

At B Online Learning, we've been helping individuals and organisations transform how they design learning for over 20 years and we're just getting started.

If you're ready to build your skills, elevate your team, or bring a powerful digital learning vision to life, we're here to support you every step of the way.

#### <u>Get in touch | Explore Certified Articulate Training | Discover our Content</u> Development Services | Research Birch Learning Platform



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