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# CONSUMERS GUIDE TO e-LEARNING

Prepared for the Canadian Association for Community Education  
by FuturEd Inc., January 2002

# WHAT IS e-LEARNING?

The word “e-learning” is used to mean learning using both a computer and the Internet.

E-learning products or services take various forms.

They may be:

- single courses and/or entire programs
- course units, lessons or components
- aimed at individuals or entire groups in classes
- instruction with or without various support services, such as access to a library
- offered for credit at an education institution and/or for general interest without credit
- very expensive, free of charge, or consistent with other public education tuition fees
- aimed at specific age groups and/or any age group
- offered by public and/or commercial education and training agencies
- really effective or of questionable quality

This consumer’s guide is best used with e-learning at the post-secondary and adult education level – college and university level, continuing education or work-related skills training. It will help you choose the right e-learning for you by examining one product or service at a time.

## LET’S GO

The background to this Guide is available online at

<http://www.futured.com> and many other websites.

These questions are designed on three levels to help you select the best e-learning option for you. The first level are the basics – the most important questions. You will progress to levels two and three if the products and services you are looking at meet the basic quality requirements.

**Before you sign up for an e-learning course or program, ask yourself these questions.**

- What is my purpose for taking this course? Do I know what I want or need to learn?
- Do I need a credit or certificate when I finish it, or do I just want to know more?
- How much can I afford to spend? How much time can I invest?
- What hardware and software do I have, and is it enough?
- Where will I access the Internet, what will it cost, and how convenient will it be?
- Are my computer and Internet skills good enough for the course I have in mind? Will I need technical help?

You will need a lot of information to make an informed choice. Good e-learning products and services will provide you with written information and a “demo” to help with decision making.

For help to understand education terms, go to the glossary at:

<http://www.canlearn.ca/english/help/glossary.html>  
<http://www.canlearn.ca/francais/aide/glossaire.html>

For help to understand technology terms, go to the glossary at:

<http://wombat.doc.ic.ac.uk/foldoc/index.html>

# LEVEL 1 CON'T

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, IN WRITING:	Ponder these questions. If your answer is NO to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.	Yes/No	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· What you will pay in total – registration, tuition, books and materials, equipment, other</li> <li>· How credible the product/service is – the qualifications of the content, design and delivery personnel and objective evaluation reports</li> <li>· How to get started and connect with the supplier – complete registration procedures and services</li> <li>· How to get help – contacts for technical assistance and content expertise</li> <li>· How to get out if you're not satisfied – policies for withdrawal and refunds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Can I afford it? Exactly how much is this going to cost? Is everything included, like access to technical assistance?</li> <li>· Does this supplier have a good reputation? How do I know? What do other students think? Can I see an objective evaluation report?</li> <li>· Is it easy to get started? Do I need transcripts or pre-tests? Is the registration process clear?</li> <li>· Is assistance available 24/7? How do I access technical and content assistance?</li> <li>· Can I get my money back if this doesn't work for me?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>	

**LEVEL1 IS FINISHED** – Are you satisfied with the basics of your e-learning choice? If not, go on to **LEVEL2**

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:	Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?	Yes/No	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system works for the learner.</li> <li>Navigation is logical and well-organized.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the demo or the system work consistently?</li> <li>Can I navigate my way in to and out of the online system? Can I make my way through the materials and find what I need?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content is relevant, well-organized and presented in an interesting manner.</li> <li>Materials are updateable and frequently updated.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the organization make sense? Is there a logic that I can relate to?</li> <li>Is the content updated, or the same thing year after year?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The learning package has options for individuals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can I personalize the course for maximum benefit?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A package includes all institutional services (registration, payment, advising, tutorial assistance, library services).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I have access to the learning resources and advice that I need around organizational requirements? Does the system appear to be organized and efficient?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online instruction and communication are conducted in “real time” (synchronous) or more flexible (asynchronous) for a reason.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do I have to meet specific schedules or can I access the course as and when I am able to? What is the reason that there are scheduled expectations?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everything learners realistically need to succeed is easily and accessible online.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Am I able to efficiently access the course and the assistance I need online or do I have to find other ways?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication and interaction opportunities with teachers, content experts, process experts, and other students are provided.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there ways for me to feel connected to the instructors and to other students? Are they convenient and effective?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessment of learning takes a variety of forms and is against clear, achievable criteria.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will I be able to successfully demonstrate what I've learned?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p>	

**LEVEL2 IS FINISHED** – Are you satisfied with the design? If so, go on to **LEVEL3**

# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WAN'T THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:	Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?	Yes/No	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Treating students as important individuals.</li> <li>· Flexible scheduling and learner-centred approaches.</li> <li>· Materials that are appealing and user-friendly, well-organized, current and affordable.</li> <li>· Approaches and materials that are free of cultural, racial, class, age and gender bias.</li> <li>· An understanding that you already know some things and shouldn't have to relearn them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Am I made to feel like a valued customer?</li> <li>· Can I register, learn and be assessed when and where I need to?</li> <li>· Are the materials interesting and motivating?</li> <li>· Is there any obvious insensitivity to different cultures, sexual orientation, ability, race or gender?</li> <li>· Is there a Prior Learning Assessment process? Do I have the chance to demonstrate my current skills and knowledge so that I can get advance credit or a shortened training program?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· A statement of acquired skills and knowledge – what you've learned – that is as important as a completion certificate.</li> <li>· Various approaches to meet different learning styles – learning best by reading, doing, listening, viewing, demonstrating.</li> <li>· Regular, systematic and objective evaluation of all components – instructors, curriculum, student success, processes and resources</li> <li>· Demonstration of return on investment – a favorable comparison of the benefits to the costs for the student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Will I be able to add a new body of skills and knowledge to my learning portfolio?</li> <li>· Will I be able to learn in a way that works for me? Are there options for learning and testing?</li> <li>· Do I have access to evaluation reports and references? Is there an efficient approach to delivering a quality service?</li> <li>· Will the benefits of taking this course justify the expense? Is it a good investment?</li> </ul>	<p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p> <p>Yes/No</p>	

**LEVEL3 IS FINISHED** – Congratulations! You should feel confident about your choice. We hope this has been helpful to you.

If you have suggestions or comments,  
please contact us at: [e-learningguide@futuresd.com](mailto:e-learningguide@futuresd.com)

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<http://www.amtec.ca>  
Canadian Association for Community Education  
<http://www.nald.ca/cacenet.htm>  
Canadian Association for Distance Education  
<http://www.cade-aced.ca>



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Commonwealth of Learning  
<http://www.col.org>  
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Office of Learning Technologies, Human Resources  
Development Canada  
<http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca>  
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