

# Roadmap to Effective Distance Education Instructional Design

## Distance Education Students

The characteristics of distance education students tend to be different from “traditional,” in-class students. Although each group of students in a distance education course will be different, research indicates that distance education students, typically, have these characteristics:

- More than half are married with dependents.
- Three-quarters are working full or part-time.
- Three-quarters are working towards a degree.
- They usually feel isolated.
- Some may be technology-phobic.
- Distance learners are usually more highly motivated.
- They bring "richer" life experiences to the class because of their previous work or academic experience.

Distance education students have more freedom and more responsibility for their own instruction. Studies indicate that when students are active participants in the learning process, they are likely to perform better and remember more. The multimedia approach employed by many forms of distance education addresses a wider range of learning styles among students than do most forms of traditional classroom instruction.

Students not only have different physical and social differences, they also learn differently. As you design your course, it's important to keep in mind some of these differences so you can develop learning methods that appeal to several learning approaches. Three learning approaches that you may need to address in your distance education as you develop teaching methods are **kinesthetic learning, auditory learning, and visual learning**.

- **Kinesthetic learners** appreciate the opportunity to physically manipulate objects to derive meaning. This can be done in a distance environment with rollovers, drag and drops, and form entry.
- **Auditory learners** would rather hear someone read a lesson than read the lesson themselves. This is quite easy on the Internet, given the relatively small bandwidth necessary to delivery good-quality audio.
- **Visual learners** prefer graphs, charts, diagrams and photographs to assist their understanding. Bandwidth also is a consideration for delivering high-quality visual elements, such as photos and video.

How do you find out who the distance learners will be? It's very likely that you need to ask yourself these questions as you develop your course:

- What are the learners' ages, cultural backgrounds, interests and educational levels?
- What is their familiarity with distance education technology and delivery systems?

Getting as much information about the learners early on will help you as you design the entire course.