

The 3 Biggest Myths About Microlearning

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Microlearning is a training method that presents lesson content in bite-sized pieces instead of long instruction sessions. Because of its universal accessibility and its ability to reach through to learners with small attention spans, microlearning is one of the most buzzed-about trends in organizational training.

Well, with great buzz comes great responsibility. The benefits of microlearning are widely touted, but because it's a fairly recent development in the world of educational technology, some of the finer points about how it works are often misunderstood. We at Grovo come across misconceptions about microlearning frequently.

We love that people are excited about microlearning, but we also want to dispel some of the misconceptions about it. Here are three of the most common myths about microlearning we've encountered.

Myth #1: It's just chunking content into smaller pieces.

Creating microlearning is a much more involved process than just dividing big sections of content into smaller ones. It requires organizing a learning topic in an entirely new way.

[Dr. Thomas Eibl](#), Training Media Manager for Airbus, wrote an [article](#) called “What Size is Micro?” that describes the requirements for good micro lessons:

They have to be self-explanatory and self-contained in order to be recognized as autonomous units; they have to make sense to the trainee, to provide sense and communicate sense. (*Eibl 128*)

In other words, our brains take in information best when it arrives inside a story. We're used to reading that story in a book, or hearing it from an instructor. Microlearning enables it to take place even easier by making the pieces of story easily consumable. Creating the content requires more than turning the story into bullet points; it requires holistic overviews of individual concepts, boiled down to their essences. The microlearning version of a novel, for example, wouldn't just be a shortening of the plot. It would include micro lessons on each character, each setting, and how they all interact.

Myth #2: Microlearning does away with instructional design.

Actually, we at Grovo take the approach that instructional design is more important with microlearning than ever before.

An interesting theory arose when microlearning first came on the scene: researchers wondered whether instructional design mattered in an environment where learners could choose their own learning experience. Instructional design, the thought went, was once necessary when planning a whole course or textbook for students. Back then, someone needed to figure out what order the content came in. With microlearning, each student makes that decision themselves. Was it outmoded to design instructional content?

Well, consider this post's first section. It's clear that in order to intelligently chunk the lesson content into micro units, the person doing the chunking needs to approach it with an understanding of the lesson itself, and of the learner. Is that not instructional design? Dr. Eibl writes that there are seven highly-technical steps to creating micro content. Stuff like, "No. 2: The four components, as described by the UCIT, are analyzed together with their interdependencies." Or "No. 4: The elaborated taxonomy is evaluated and adapted in a hermeneutic process." Understanding microlearning to the proper depth is a level of expertise beyond what average learners experience when simply choosing which lesson to view next. So yes, instructional design is critical to the development of good microlearning. If you'd like further proof...

Myth #3: The secret to microlearning is making things short.

No, the challenge is to make short things matter.

The human mind holds on to things that it can use. Everything else goes away. Your brain takes in untold gigabytes' worth of information on a daily basis, but it lets just about all of it slide through your consciousness without any retention. Forgetting short-term memories is a built-in release valve for your mind; it's how you keep from getting overwhelmed. Put another way, all memory is selective.

Learning something—which in cognitive terms is the process of subjecting a short-term memory to the process of “consolidation” to turn it into a long-term memory—is aided by giving your brain something to attach it to. Just like how it's better to sort computer documents into folders than it is to dump tons of files on your desktop, your brain tends to retain a lesson better if it has a place to put it. An effective learning process presents the lesson within a context and, if possible, a personal attachment.

Micro content is designed to lighten the learner's cognitive load, which means that it makes their brain do less work. It's great for consuming a lot of content in a short amount of time. But inputting so much information with such little investment presents the challenge of how to make it all matter. Your brain has to have a reason to keep it. This is where the need for story comes in. Personally, I think this is why we tend to teach **history** as the story of individual people's actions: biographies are more compelling to our brains than glacial cultural shifts.

Micro content needs to be just as compelling. And though it's hard to accomplish in a 60-second video without the proper expertise, microlearning done right opens up entire dimensions of modern learning strategies.