

THE BLENDED LEARNING RECIPE

By Dr Tim Gibson
Associate Director of Redtray Ltd

Serving up balanced fare

Beware of definitions of blended learning which are ingredients-based, especially the ones which say you need only have two: e-learning and stand-up. There are many more successful meals possible than just meat and two veg., as we shall see.

Process-based definitions, or recipes, are better as they prompt you to think about what goes with what and how best to prepare your food to maximise your chances of success. But, just as in the real world, there is no single, general purpose recipe; it depends on what you're trying to do. The next section contains a basic cookery course in the form of a series of hints and tips to help you prepare and provide tasty, balanced and nutritional fare which hopefully should leave your people wanting more.

Plan your Menu

First, formulate a chronologically ordered list of activities, or "courses", which constitute the meal. Meal plans are likely to vary according to whether you're developing knowledge, skills and/or competencies but, in any event, don't focus too narrowly on the entrée.

Note that each of these courses may well require a number of ingredients, which we shall come on to a bit later.

Remember that the most important thing is to get your people to turn up to your meal in the first place, so please be careful with your invitations and think about how best to motivate them to participate.



Example menu for developing skills	Your menu plan
Call to action	
Overview: objectives and motivation	
Awareness phase	
Practice phase	
Feedback	
Accreditation	
Closing	
Keeping skills fresh in the workplace	



Decide which ingredients you need for your meal

Fill in the table below as follows:

1. Add any extra ingredients you think you might need to the bottom of column 1
2. For each required ingredient, put a tick in either column 2 or column 3 according to its availability
3. Add your own notes, perhaps on the suitability of the ingredients in your larder and where / how you might purchase the missing items

Ingredient	In the company larder already?	Need to go to the shops?
Classroom courses		
E-learning courses		
Websites		
Knowledge bases		
Simulations		
Workbooks		
Bulletin boards		
Email		
Flyers		
Mentoring		
Chat		
Books		
Role-play		
Expert observation		
Team events		
Buddying		
Workshops		
Listservs		
Newsgroups		
Webinars		

It's important to point out here that the word "ingredient" tends to make you think of tangibles - learning content or collaborative technologies, for example. But you probably have more things in your larder than might appear at first glance. There may be events, processes, activities, knowledge and experiences that you might piggyback on to further your learning cause. It's often the less obvious ones which make the real difference.



Work out which ingredients go well together

Each and every learning method has its imperfections but luckily for us the imperfections in each are different; put another way, any method has its strengths and its weaknesses.

The secret of a successful blend is to combine methods that have strengths which complement each other as well as weaknesses which don't overlap.

To do our combining properly, we need to consider each ingredient's pros and cons according to a number of different criteria. These criteria - and their relative importance - very much depend on your own needs and situation.

Criterion	Importance
Impact on learning objectives	
Reportability of assessments	
Shelf-life	
Scalability	
Development time/cost	
Deployment time/cost	

Complete the following table by:

- Adding in your own criteria into column 1
- Score each H[igh], M[edium] or L[ow] in column 2

Now comes the fun part where you work out which ingredients are required for which courses, the trick being to combine those foods which go well together.

Complete the following table by:

- Writing the courses of your menu plan in column 1
- Writing the ingredients you will need for each course, bearing in mind the criteria above and their relative importance
- Ensure you combine ingredients with complementary strengths and different weaknesses
- Make sure you have sufficient high quality ingredients to make each course a success
- Within the limits of your timescale and budget, don't be afraid of redundancy. Many kinds of learning depend on repetition

Now that you have your menu, it's time to sanity check what you have done:

- Do you have the right number of courses?
- Are they in the right order?
- Is each course well balanced?
- Are you using sufficient numbers of ingredients / courses to satisfy your most important objectives?
- Is the menu do-able?
- Will it appeal to your people?
- How will you get them to turn up?
- How will you stop them drifting off between courses?
- and so on

