How to Select the Right eLearning Authoring Tool for You

6 Critical Questions for Instructional Designers & Developers

eLearning brothers

Creating an effective, engaging learning course requires more than pretty pictures and fancy animations. The best learning starts with careful instructional design planning—and the best tools.

The better the tool, the better the results.

For many organizations, training's effectiveness directly impacts profitability. So choose the tool that offers the greatest long-term return on investment.

How do you know which tool will help you achieve the best outcomes?

What if your development needs and priorities change from project to project?

Every authoring tool has its own benefits and drawbacks. Nevertheless, when responsible for achieving business results, it's hard to execute a winning blueprint if your authoring tool limits you.

While your authoring tool needs may vary depending upon training needs, budget, and your organization's requirements, there are critical questions worth exploring before making a purchase and investing time in a product.

Choosing a Course Authoring Tool

Here are 6 questions to consider for each authoring tool you're reviewing.

1

Does the Authoring Tool Offer Quality Templates and Stock Assets to Get You Started?

2

What Type of Interactions Do You Need to Build?

3

How Do You Collaborate With Others?

4

Does the Authoring Tool Cater to the Needs of All Learners?

5

Can You Build eLearning for Multiple Mobile Devices Easily?

6

How Can You Have the Best Authoring Experience Possible?

Let's dive into each of these questions.

1 Does the Authoring Tool Offer Quality Templates and Stock Assets to Get You Started?

The term "rapid authoring" refers to eLearning development using authoring tools and pre-built resources like templates to quickly produce learning content. Templates can range from a single content layout to a more complex interaction to a set of matching layouts with the same overall design scheme. Depending on the project and the deadline, a good template can get you to the finish line in record time. However, basic templates that support rapid authoring may not be enough—especially as you become more experienced. You want your finished project to be the highest quality possible, and not all templates will live up to that standard.

As you're trialing authoring tools, really explore the included templates to see if they'll support a variety of learning formats, like non-linear, interactive, adaptive, gaming, accessible, just-in-time training, and microlearning formats. Look for interactive templates with built-in navigation, designs that follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and included instructions to help you transform your content into a course that rocks.

Templates
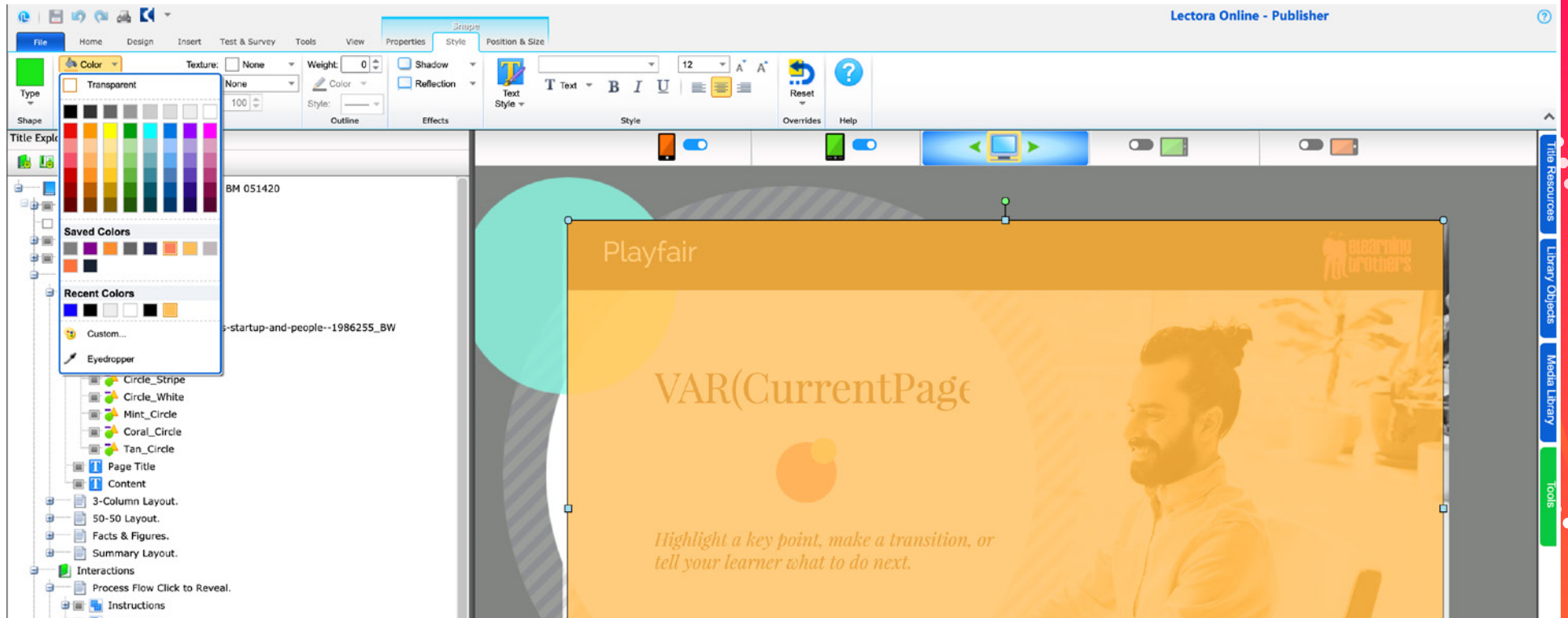
Plenty of tools, including Lectora®, Articulate® Rise/Storyline 360, Adobe® Captivate, Gomo®, Elucidat®, and DominKnow® One, offer templates but some look and work better than others. Gomo, Elucidat, and iSpring are good choices for basic, rapid authoring but they have limited customization options and a smaller selection of templates.

Lectora, Storyline, and Captivate offer the most template and stock asset options. Lectora offers in-app access to the eLearning Brothers AssetLibrary™. Storyline 360 comes with access to their Content

Library, but developers using Storyline 3 (the desktop version), do not have access to that. Adobe Captivate includes an asset store with templates and stock images.

Many eLearning developers love the eLearning Brothers AssetLibrary because the source files are included—making the templates fully customizable—new designs are added continuously, and their site provides extensive support materials.

Templates

How to Use Templates

Ideally, whether you've downloaded your template from a third-party assets site or from a library included with your authoring tool, it will include all the source files.

Why do source files matter? Say you love everything about the design of the template—the rounded corners, the headline font, the background graphics—but you HATE the color. If you have the source files to edit, you can go in and select each object and change the color.

For example, you could select a button and customize each button state so that when a learner hovers over a button it changes to one of your brand colors, or changes to gray after the button has been clicked. That's just one way you can customize a template when you have the source files. The possibilities are really limitless!

Pasting in your content and then making small tweaks to course templates here and there allows you to create a custom-looking course in much less time.

As mentioned above, you want your authoring tool to include a good variety of styles and designs. But as you're browsing, make sure that the template library isn't just a bunch of one-off layouts in wildly different designs.

To create a cohesive course, you want a variety of content layouts—like title slides, 50/50 layouts, rule of thirds layouts, bulleted text slides, etc.—and interactions in the same unified design theme. Sure, you could try to recreate that design in a different layout for all the rest of the pages in your course or use the same layout for every page, but the end result won't look as good.

Many developers appreciate the eLearning Brothers Course Starter templates for that reason. Each Course Starter is a pack of different layouts, interactions, and a pre-built quiz all using the same design. You get the ability to mix and match the layouts and interaction types that work for your content and learning objectives, plus the comfort of knowing all the pages look unified. Course Starters are included within Lectora, and are available for other tools as a separate purchase.

eLearning Brothers Template examples below.

Stock Assets

Sometimes you need to add extra visuals or effects to your content, even if you started with a template. Whether you want to switch out the included stock images with photos that better represent your learners' environment or demographic, or want to add sound effects to an element, having access to a stock asset library will save you time.

Choose from over 120 million stock images and vectors in the eLearning Brothers Stock Asset Library! Plus over 89,000 icons!

Stock Assets

Cutout People

Cutout people are character images that typically come with transparent backgrounds, multiple poses, emotions, and props. These characters can be imported directly into your training courses and act as a virtual guide and teacher for your audience.

You can also use cutout people to create conversational scenarios between two characters, or create realistic scenes using a combination of cutout characters and stock backgrounds.

The most important thing to look for when considering cutout people libraries is diversity. You'll have more opportunities to create relevant content that aligns with your organization's demographics and learning goals if you can choose from characters of all ages, ethnicities, attire, and more.

Stock Images and Graphics

Stock images and graphics can help you set the scene, reinforce learning content, and add personality to your course. Look for a stock library that has more than just photographs. Vector graphics are especially helpful because you can resize and reshape vector images as needed without sacrificing quality. Another helpful stock asset type is icons. Whether you want to create custom navigation buttons or add style by using icons instead of bullets in a bulleted list, you'll benefit from having access to an icon library.

Audio and Video

Getting high quality audio or video footage can be time-consuming and expensive if you're trying to do it in-house or hire a production company. You'll save time and money if your authoring tool's stock assets include background music, sound effects, and video footage. Adding a video clip to a course intro can really add life to the training and engage your audience. And adding sounds effects is a great way to put some extra polish on a course button, animation, or element.

The last thing to consider when it comes to templates and assets is how good do they look? All eLearning templates are NOT created equal. Be sure to browse through any template library you're considering and make sure there's a good variety of styles and designs, and that they look professional! Ask yourself if you would want to present to your CEO a course built using these templates.

2

What Type of Interactions Do You Need to Build?

Great eLearning courses incorporate unique and creative ways to engage learners and assess learner knowledge retention. It's important that your authoring tool can spark and match your creativity in building interactions and assessments. You can find many pre-built quizzes and knowledge check templates, but depending on your learning objectives, you may want to customize those or create different styles of interactions.

As you attend how-to webinars and start to ask questions on user forums, you'll learn new tricks and ways to push your eLearning development. At that point, you may find yourself outgrowing the more basic, linear templates. If your authoring app is not flexible enough to let you develop higher-level cognitive exercises, your results won't be as amazing as they could be.

Look for the following features in the authoring tools you're considering:

- » Strong Interactivity
- » Quizzing & Assessments
- » Gamification
- » Tracking & Analysis

These functions will give the tool the most longevity as you strengthen your instructional design and development skills.

Strong Interactivity

One of the most exciting things about developing eLearning is dreaming up new ways to add interactivity to a course. Sure, you could just put a PowerPoint presentation online and call it eLearning, but with a good eLearning authoring tool you can truly create a learning experience.

Some of the most commonly used interactions are scenarios, click and reveals, drag and drops and hotspots.

Scenarios allow you to incorporate higher level cognitive reasoning into a course by challenging the learner to think deeply about what choice to make. Branching scenarios in particular allow you to realistically show the learner how both positive and negative choices might play out.

Click and reveal interactions provide an excellent way to share a large amount of information in small chunks. You can organize information into categories and get the learner interacting with your content instead of just skimming text and clicking "Next."

You can turn almost anything into a drag and drop. Suppose you're trying to educate employees on what items are recyclable versus compostable versus just plain trash. You could create a drag and drop challenge where the learner has to drop the waste item into the appropriate receptacle.

Drag and drop interactions are also great for testing personal protective equipment (PPE) knowledge. Present the learner with a scenario and have them drag the appropriate PPE onto a cutout character or silhouette.

Hotspots are another versatile function. You can use a hotspot to create an invisible button, that only does something when hovered over or clicked on. For example, you could add hotspots to a detailed graphic of an engine, and ask the learner to click on different parts to learn more about each one. The hotspot would then trigger a popup with more information.

As you get more comfortable with eLearning development, you'll see how you can use actions, variables, and triggers in your authoring tool to create more complex interactions. If you want to be able to create really out-of-the-box, unexpected interactions, you need an authoring tool that gives you that flexibility.

Strong Interactivity

## How Far Can You Push Your Authoring Tool?

If you plan on extending the functionality of your course through conditional actions, variables, or custom scripting, Captivate and Storyline have limited abilities for customizing HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.

Lectora® offers the most extensibility of all the authoring products. If you use the included Course Starter templates and built-in question types, you can rapidly author a course without ever getting into custom scripting and complex interactions. However, the flexibility is there for you if you need or want it—whenever you're ready.

With some of the more drag and drop widget-based authoring tools, you're locked into just the standard way they expect you to design a course.
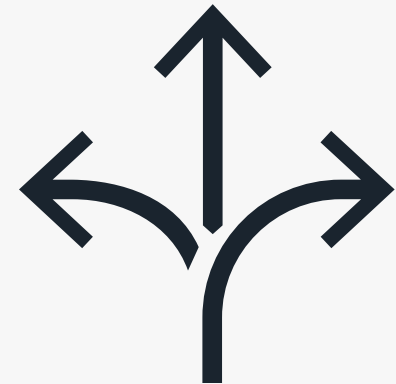
Want to create immersive learning experiences with virtual reality? Check out a VR course builder like CenarioVR®, included in the eLearning Brothers Authoring Suite.
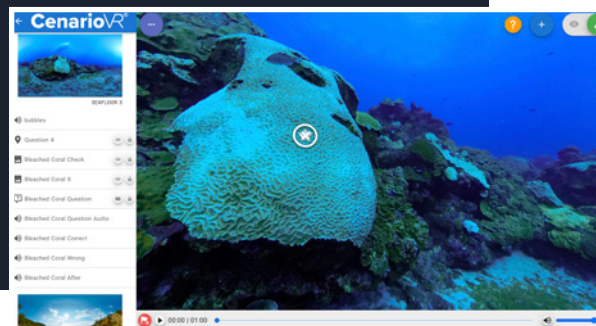
Quizzing & Assessments

When it comes to online training, quizzing and assessment types can directly impact your learner engagement and knowledge retention metrics. If your learners are not retaining knowledge, you may need to explore more sophisticated options.

Most authoring products offer multiple-choice, matching, and other typical assessment types, whereas, a robust authoring tool will give you more choices, such as game-based, randomized testing, and adaptive questions. Furthermore, a modern authoring tool should equip you to personalize quizzes using variables and branching.
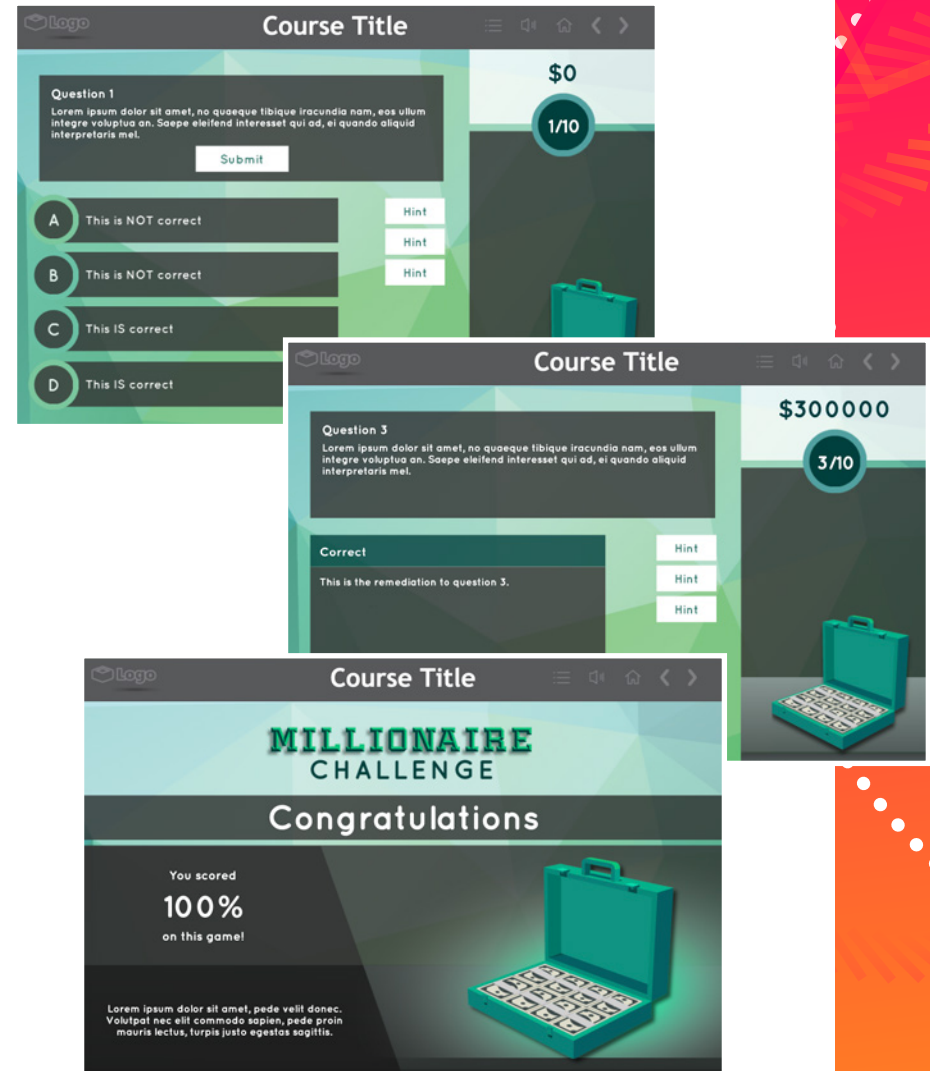
Assessments

Lectora®

Lectora question types include:

- » True/False
- » Multiple Choice
- » Multiple Response
- » Fill-in-the-Blank
- » Number Entry
- » Matching
- » Rank and Sequence
- » Drag-and-Drop
- » Hot Spot
- » Short Answer
- » Essay
- » Likert

You can also create surveys and import games from tools like The Training Arcade®.

Lectora also makes adaptive learning easy to execute as it directly integrates with BranchTrack. Dynamically modifying questions based on your learners' needs will make your results significantly better. While you may not be ready to personalize your course right away, you will eventually want this option.

An interactive quiz game template available for Lectora.

Assessments

Storyline 360/Rise

Articulate® Storyline 360 question types include form-based graded and survey questions and freeform questions. The form-based questions are:

- » True/False
- » Likert Scale
- » Multiple Choice
- » Multiple Response
- » Fill-in-the-Blank
- » Which Word
- » Word Bank
- » Short Answer
- » Essay
- » Drag-and-Drop
- » Drop-down
- » How Many
- » Numeric
- » Hotspot

Rise, Articulate's cloud-based authoring tool, is designed for rapid authoring and limits you to matching and multiple-choice types of quizzes.

Captivate

Adobe® Captivate question types include:

- » True/False
- » Multiple Choice
- » Fill-in-the-Blank
- » Short Answer
- » Matching
- » Hot Spot
- » Sequence
- » Rating Scale (Likert)
- » Random Question

Question types are just a starting point, however. It's how you incorporate them into your course and how creatively you frame them that makes all the difference in engagement. So don't make your choice solely on the sheer number of question types a tool might have.

Consider how easily you can incorporate those questions into a branching scenario, or pair questions with other elements of gamification. As you master the built-in question types you'll think of new ways to use them, and you want an authoring tool flexible enough to support your creativity.

Gamification
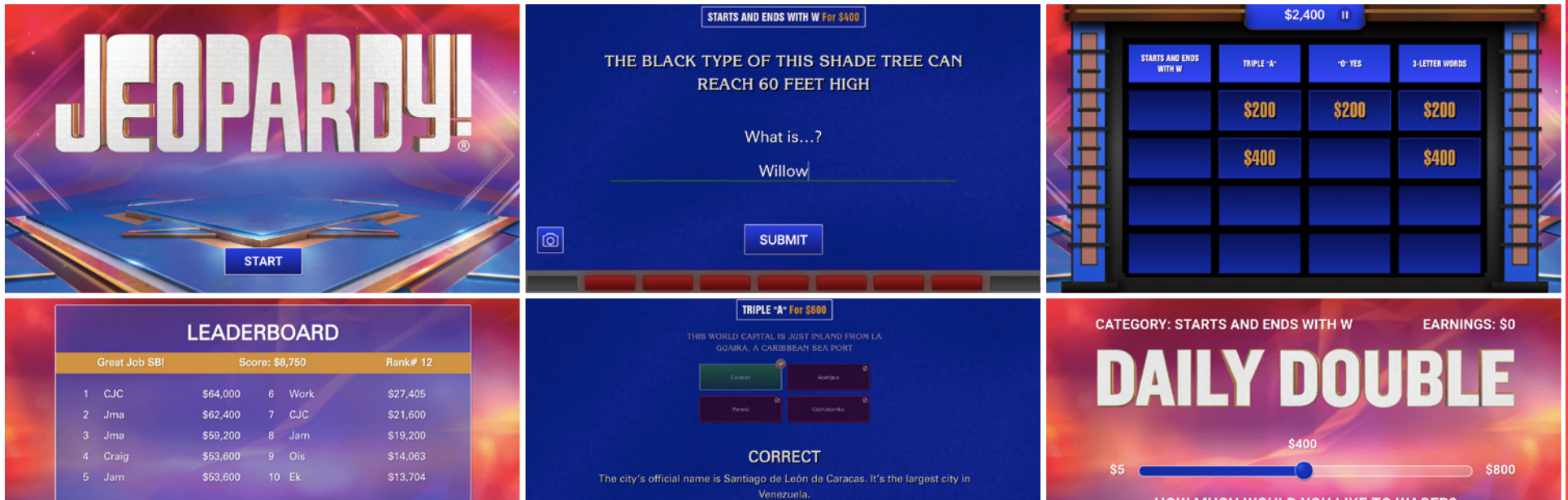
Adding game elements to your learning can boost learner engagement and retention. It also makes for a more enjoyable knowledge assessment.

You can build anything from a simple game board path with questions on various squares to a more complex gamified course with points, challenges, multiple lives, and a leaderboard tracking learner progress.

Recreating television quiz shows is one popular way to add interactivity while also testing your learner's knowledge. You can build these from scratch with actions and variables, or look for a game template. Another option is to purchase editable games from a source like The Training Arcade®, which has several with multiple theme options, or pre-built quiz templates.

One of the most popular games in The Training Arcade is the official Jeopardy!® for Training game, created in partnership with Jeopardy Productions, Inc.

The eLearning Brothers Template Library also offers game templates for multiple authoring tools. Games are a great way to reinforce educational material, assess knowledge retention, measure overall teaching effectiveness, and improve learning outcomes.

A flexible authoring tool will allow you to experiment creatively with other game elements, like taking your learner on an epic quest with different challenges along the way, or incorporating badging and leaderboards. These are just a few ways you can create an interactive, gamified course.

Tracking & Analyzing Results

Creating flashy interactions and assessments is just one facet of eLearning development. You also want to make sure that your interactions are driving knowledge retention, not just looking cool.

The newest standard for tracking learner activity is the Experience API (or xAPI). This specification makes it possible to collect data about the wide range of experiences a learner has.

How does it work?

Any activity in your course—a button click, a video view, the amount of time spent considering a multiple choice question before selecting an answer—can be recorded with an xAPI statement. This gives you far more insight about areas your learners are struggling with and what content they're fully understanding than previous learning specifications offered.

If your authoring tool supports xAPI, you'll be able to select from built-in xAPI statements or create your own. When an activity needs to be recorded, the application sends secure statements in the form of "Noun, verb, object" or "I did this" to a Learning Record Store (LRS.)

Learning Record Stores record all of the statements made. An LRS can share these statements with other LRSs. An LRS can exist on its own, or inside an LMS.

Most major authoring tools support xAPI now. Lectora® was an early adopter of the xAPI standard and provides many xAPI statements to choose from. In addition, the Lectora Course Starter templates from the eLearning Brothers AssetLibrary™ include built-in xAPI statements, so all the tracking is already set up for you. You can always add your own xAPI statements if needed.

Being able to build engaging interactions and track the results are key parts of successful eLearning development, so consider these features carefully when choosing your authoring tool.

3

How Do You Collaborate With Others?

As you're building your course, whether with a template or from scratch, you may want to share it with others. All developers and designers need an easy way to capture stakeholder feedback and review edits from subject matter experts (SMEs). In addition, some projects might require you to collaborate with a whole team of developers.

Content Review Options

Many developers share simple storyboards or outlines with their SMEs and stakeholders in Microsoft Word, but it can be hard to combine changes if different people are reviewing at different times and sending back multiple documents with changes. It's a little easier to keep track of comments in Google Docs, but it's difficult to truly convey how an eLearning course will function, look, and sound using Google Docs or Microsoft Word files.

There are several third-party tools that have sprung up to make reviewing and commenting on eLearning courses easier. These products consolidate reviewing, commenting, and resolution while being able to look at the content and other collaborator's comments in one place. The most popular authoring tools all include their own version of a review tool as well. ReviewLink (included with Lectora) and Review 360 (available with Articulate® 360, not included with Articulate 3) are the simplest for reviewers to use and don't require reviewers to download anything. The Adobe® Captivate Reviewer requires reviewers to download 2 separate applications.

ReviewLink® (Lectora®)

If you use Lectora, you can publish courses directly to ReviewLink at no additional cost whether you use the desktop or online version of Lectora. Then, send email invitations to unlimited team members, managers, or subject matter experts to review your course. Reviewers won't need to download anything; they just visit the URL sent to them and use a free review account. This gives them the opportunity to add comments and attach files to specific areas of the course. They can also preview the course on various mobile devices without having to pick up a smartphone or tablet.

Once comments have been made, you can filter, sort, and search a list of all comments or export comments to a PDF or CSV file to work offline. Each comment has a status to track its progress. You can select from a list of predefined statuses or add your own custom status.

Review360 (Storyline 360)

If you have a Storyline 360 account, you also get access to Review 360, Articulate's review app. However, Storyline 3 (the desktop version) users do not have access to this review tool. Just like ReviewLink, reviewers don't need to download anything, they simply view the course in their browser. Stakeholders and SMEs can make comments and reply to existing threads. Multiple reviewers can respond to a topic and you'll see all related comments and responses in one place. You can view comments and subsequent replies as threaded conversations. Review360 differs from ReviewLink in that it's not designed to review mobile responsive content.

Adobe® Captivate Reviewer (Captivate)

Adobe Captivate Reviewer is the most complicated to get set up, but provides pretty much the same capabilities in terms of viewing comments, responding to feedback, and sorting through comments. Instead of publishing straight from the authoring tool to the review site, as Lectora and Storyline do, developers must publish their project as a specific file type. Reviewers download the file and then open it using Adobe Captivate Reviewer. Reviewers must be on the same network to view each other's comments. Reviewers who are not a part of the shared network must export their comments to an XML file and send it to the author. You can accept, reject, or ask for feedback for the comments posted by the reviewers.

Reviewers must also install Adobe Captivate Reviewer. This can be done without having Adobe Captivate on their computers. However, they need to install Adobe AIR before installing the application. Adobe AIR can be downloaded for free from the Adobe website.

While a review tool may not seem that important now, more efficient reviews lead to more efficient development and quicker training rollout. And the sooner workers are trained, the sooner they can be safe and effective in their jobs. It's a win-win all around!

Collaborating With Multiple Authors

In addition to working with subject matter experts and stakeholders, you might be collaborating with other developers on the same project. For this, you'll want a cloud-based tool that enhances teamwork instead of hinders it.

Collaborative authoring tools enable multiple people to work together on an eLearning project. They typically include versioning features that keep track of changes, much like Google Drive does. By nature, only cloud-based authoring tools allow authors to work on the same course together at the same time—which means desktop tools like Storyline 3, Captivate, and the desktop version of Lectora® don't provide this option.

With collaborative authoring, you can create an efficient eLearning development workflow with other developers. Plus, everyone can see changes as they happen, so there's more transparency around what is being worked on and no one is doing duplicate work. In addition, all your work is stored in the cloud, so you can access it from anywhere and don't need to worry about hard drives crashing or running out of storage. Another benefit is that you can log into your authoring tool from any browser, so you aren't tied to your primary desktop computer in the office.

Authoring Tools That Offer Collaborative Authoring

Lectora® (online version), Storyline 360/Rise, Elucidat®, Gomo®, and others all offer collaborative authoring. The key differences among the tools include how they handle versioning versus simultaneous edits, how many collaborators they allow, and how much developers can customize content.

Authoring Tools That Offer Collaborative Authoring

Lectora® (online version)

Lectora has many features to make collaborative authoring efficient, including assigning specific tasks to team members, tracking the completion of those tasks, and making content available to reviewers without having to publish or export the title to another format. Revisions are automatically tracked with built-in versioning features and you can create multiple course versions alongside other authors. Unlike other authoring tools that offer desktop and online versions, both versions of Lectora use the same format, making it easy for desktop developers to comfortably explore a cloud solution.

Storyline 360/Rise

Rise handles collaborative authoring a bit differently. Changes appear immediately. Everyone works on a course simultaneously, but any section actively being worked on will be grayed out with the author's profile image or initials next to it. Rise does allow you to set collaborators' roles, and it limits what parts of a course they can edit. Since Rise does not include versioning, you may want to be careful about how many people you give unfettered edit access to.

Gomo® and Elucidat® offer collaborative authoring as well, but are limited to a more drag and drop, widget-based development experience. It's not as easy to customize your training content.

4 Does the Authoring Tool Cater to the Needs of All Learners?

As you begin to develop online training, you will begin to hear the terms "Section 508" and "accessibility" thrown around. In fact, we've already mentioned them just in this eBook!

Wondering what those refer to?

Section 508 is part of the United States Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In 1998, the United States Congress amended this act to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities.

Under Section 508, agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information comparable to the access available to others. This applies to federal agencies and contractors working for federal agencies.

Internationally, many organizations expect their eLearning developers to conform to WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) standards. It's also considered best practice in the US to follow WCAG. There's a great deal of overlap between the two, but WCAG is stricter.

Moreover, there is a strong business need to create accessible content. If your learners include older adults or anyone with a disability, your course must be WCAG-friendly. Some authoring tools make it easier than others to execute this.

If accessibility is not considered from the start of the creative process, special (and often-unsuccessful) workarounds must be employed to make the output accessible. Using an authoring tool that's designed with accessibility in mind will give you a head start and make developing accessible content easier.

Creating accessible online training actually benefits all your learners—not just those with disabilities.

Ensuring that every visual also includes audio or an alt text description that will be read by a screen reader benefits not just the visually impaired learners. For example, the on-the-go learners who want to listen to their training while driving to and from work will benefit as well. Many learners, not just those who identify as disabled, would appreciate larger text or sharper color contrast.

Accessible eLearning is more convenient and less frustrating for everyone—leading to higher learning retention and greater learner satisfaction all around.

So how can your authoring tool help you develop accessible online training? Most of the major authoring tools include features to make it easier to create accessible digital learning.

> **"Accessible eLearning" refers to making courses accessible to those with visual, auditory, physical, and/or other disabilities.**
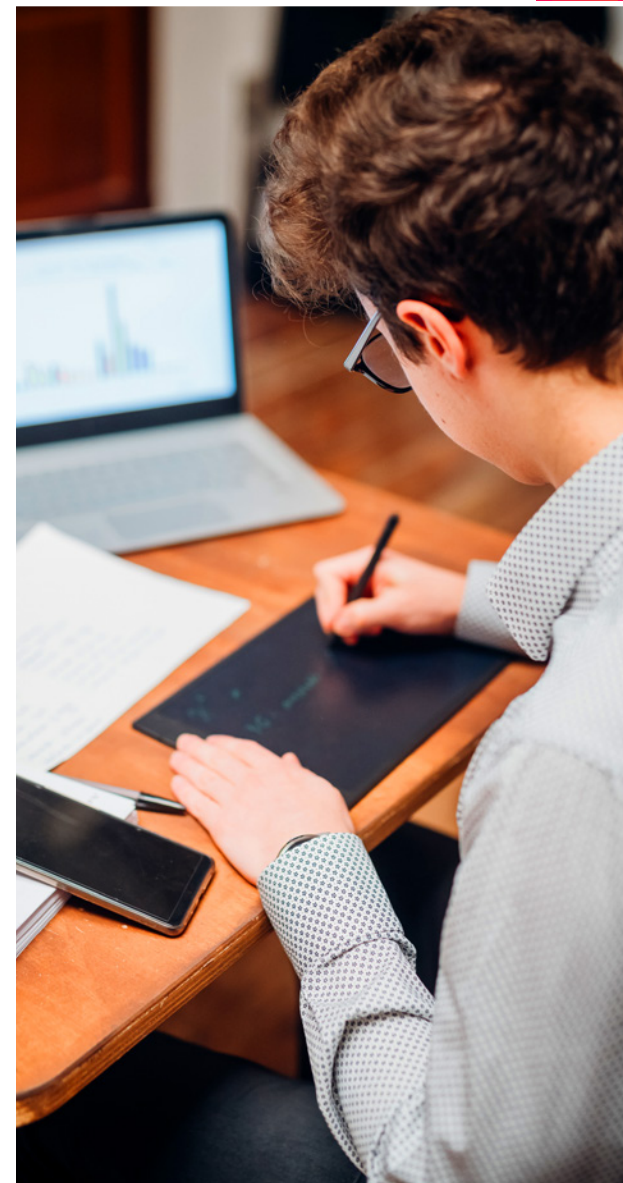
Accessibility Features in Lectora®

Lectora offers a Use Web Accessibility Settings option that you can turn on at any time while developing your course. When you select this option, Lectora will automatically enable certain features in the application that will assist you with meeting Section 508 standards and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA. Turning on this setting will:

» Always publish ALT tags for images and buttons (unless empty alt tag is selected, such as on a purely decorative graphic element) so that screen reader software can interpret and announce visual content.

» Show only video and audio skins and controllers that are accessible.

» Enable the "Set Reading Order to Last" property for groups at title level. This property allows you to place navigation buttons at the title level but set them to be read last.

» Enable the "Language" property for text blocks. Using this property, you can let a screen reader know that a specific text block is different from the default language of the page.

» Automatically generate captions.

» Display visible focus indicators. This is a requirement of the WCAG 2.0 AA guidelines. A bright orange outline will be displayed for any element on the page that can receive focus, like an entry field, checkbox, or button. The color and size of the outline are editable.

Many of the pre-built templates available in Lectora are designed with accessibility in mind. That means all graphic elements have alt tags, tab order is specified for interactions, and more.
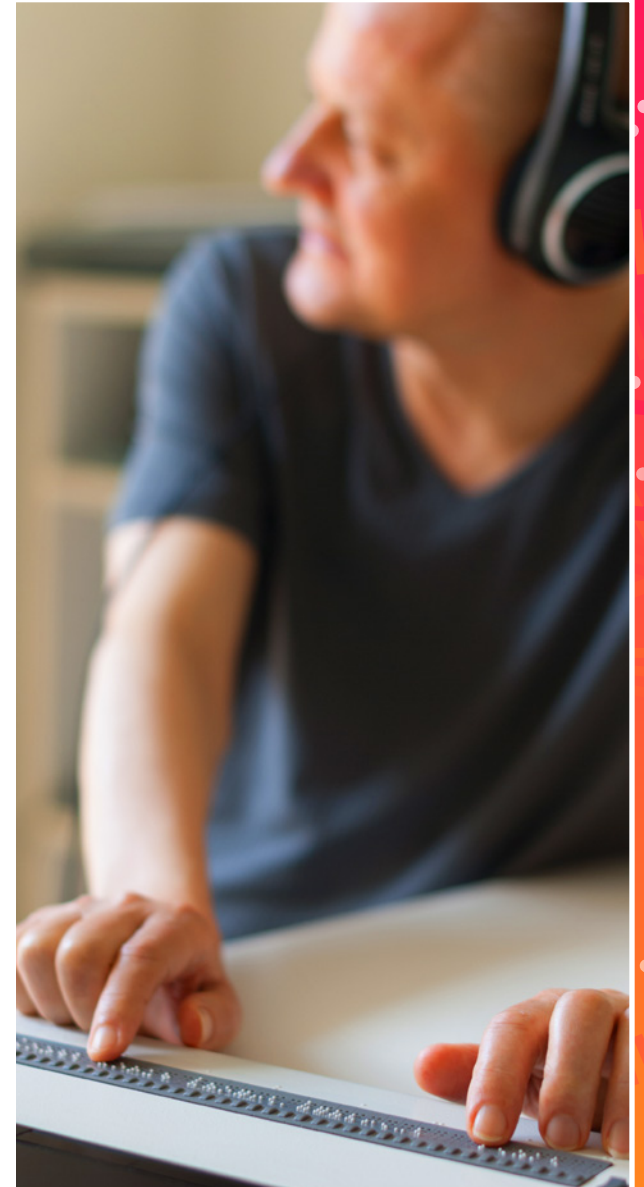
Accessibility Features in Storyline 360

Storyline content must be viewed in the Storyline player, which can be difficult to navigate for users with disabilities. The latest Storyline 360 release improved the player accessibility with a more logical hierarchy of features and controls. In addition, the skip navigation shortcut is now visible until the learner activates it or tabs past it. This temporary visibility helps keyboard-only users who aren't using a screen reader.

Developers using Storyline can incorporate all the recommended adaptations for accessibility, although it requires a bit of manual work. You can:

» Create and edit closed captions with the built-in editor

» Generate closed captions that are automatically synchronized with text-to-speech narration

» Import closed captions

» Use tables to organize content

» Add alternate text for screen readers

» Customize the tab order of slide objects

» Change the player font size

» Skip player navigation when tabbing through a course with a screen reader

» Identify the course language for screen readers

25

Accessibility Features in Captivate

Similar to Storyline, you can create accessible learning content in Adobe® Captivate, but it requires more manual work than Lectora. Adobe Captivate has historically been a strong tool for creating software simulations. Simulations are not inherently accessible, but you can provide descriptions and assign keyboard shortcuts to make them more accessible. Captivate uses your captions and text captured on-screen to help you create descriptions quickly and then delivers them to screen reader users automatically.

You can also:

» Provide closed captions for audio content

» Create keyboard-accessible content by inserting clickable areas into your content that allow keyboard access. This allows individuals who have difficulty using the mouse to view your movies.

» Provide accessibility name and accessibility description for onscreen objects, such as text boxes and shapes

» Provide alt descriptions for movies and slides. These descriptions provide details about the movie or slide to users of screen readers and other assistive technology.
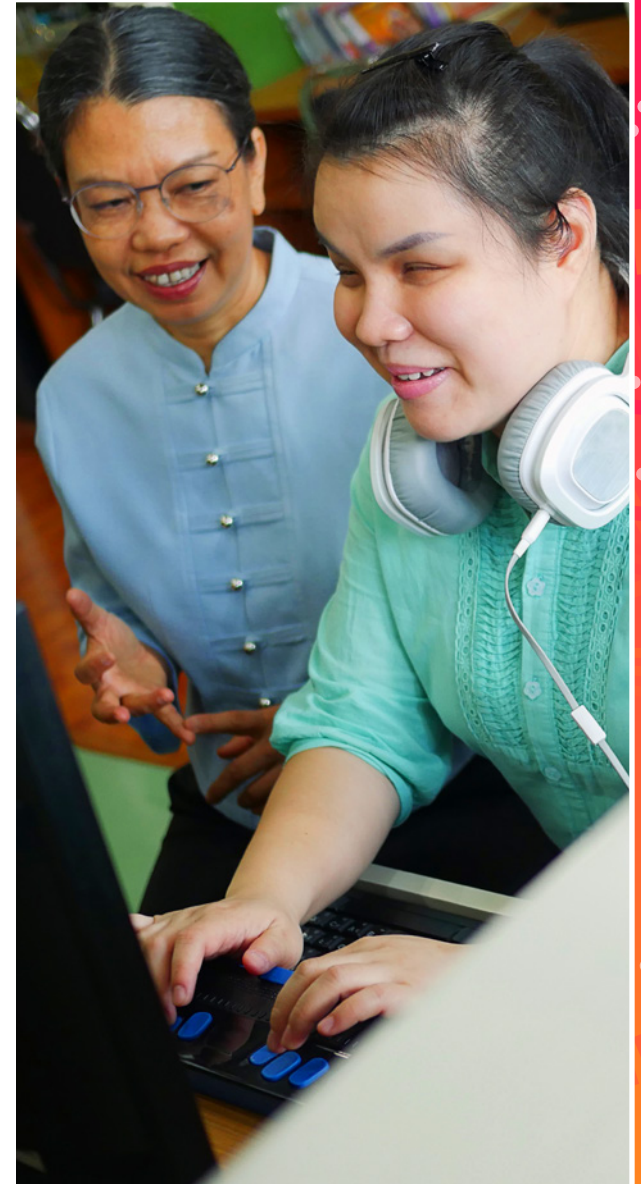
Other Considerations to Include Every Learner

Making a course accessible to all also includes considering your learner demographics, locations, and cultures. While not part of Section 508 or WCAG guidelines, you want your learners to be able to relate to your content and have the opportunity to access it in their native language.

If you are creating content for learners across the globe, you may need to evaluate localization features. For example, if your learners speak another language or multiple languages, you may need your authoring tool to have strong translation capabilities. Look for XLIFF support to make translation as simple as possible. XLIFF (XML Localization Interchange File Format) standard is used for storing language translation information. This will make it easy to import and export localizable data.

5 Can You Build eLearning for Multiple Mobile Devices Easily?

According to the Pew Research Center, over 81% of Americans own smartphones, and the percentage is even higher in other countries—especially amongst Millennials.

Since Millennials are now the largest segment of today's workforce, and smartphones rarely leave their side, creating a course that is "responsive" or mobile-friendly is a typical requirement, not an afterthought. Otherwise, you risk pulling workers away from their jobs, which is counterproductive—exactly what you don't want.

Some types of eLearning, such as "time-of-need" or "just-in-time" training and "microlearning," which refers to short bursts of content for learners to study at their convenience, are directly dependent upon how content works or "responds" to mobile devices. Therefore, selecting an authoring tool with strong "Responsive Design" capabilities should be a top consideration. You'll need it to provide an optimal user experience across phones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers.

The key question is, how do you create mobile content in an authoring tool?

Obviously, you'll want the responsive design creation process to be very easy or automated. You'll also want to have control over how it looks. Sometimes an automated one-size-fits-all approach could make your course look terrible.

Designing for a Mobile World

Today, nearly every authoring tool offers some form of responsive design. However, each tool creates responsive content differently.

Responsive Design

Lectora®

Lectora uses a method called Responsive Course Design. You design your course for the desktop first, and Lectora automatically adjusts your content for tablet and phone views in landscape and portrait mode. You can go in and make any small tweaks necessary, but most of the work is done for you.

With Lectora, you have the most control over how your mobile content looks. While you probably won't need to make any adjustments at all, some authors like having this level of flexibility. For example, you may want to anchor how an object is positioned, or adjust a screen width, and in Lectora, you can do that very easily.

Storyline 360/Rise

Storyline 360 has a responsive player that can be used to view content on tablets and phones, but the content itself is not responsive. You can use Articulate's other product, Rise, to create mobile courses, however, your design and interactivity options are more limited. Rise uses drag and drop blocks and pre-built layouts.

Captivate

Captivate initially came out with a responsive design method using breakpoints. Recent releases use Fluid Boxes instead, although you can switch back to breakpoint mode if you prefer. Fluid boxes are meant to provide an arrangement of objects on a slide so that the objects behave predictably when the slide accommodates different screen sizes and devices. There are pros and cons to each method. Fluid boxes seem to have a steeper learning curve than the breakpoints method.
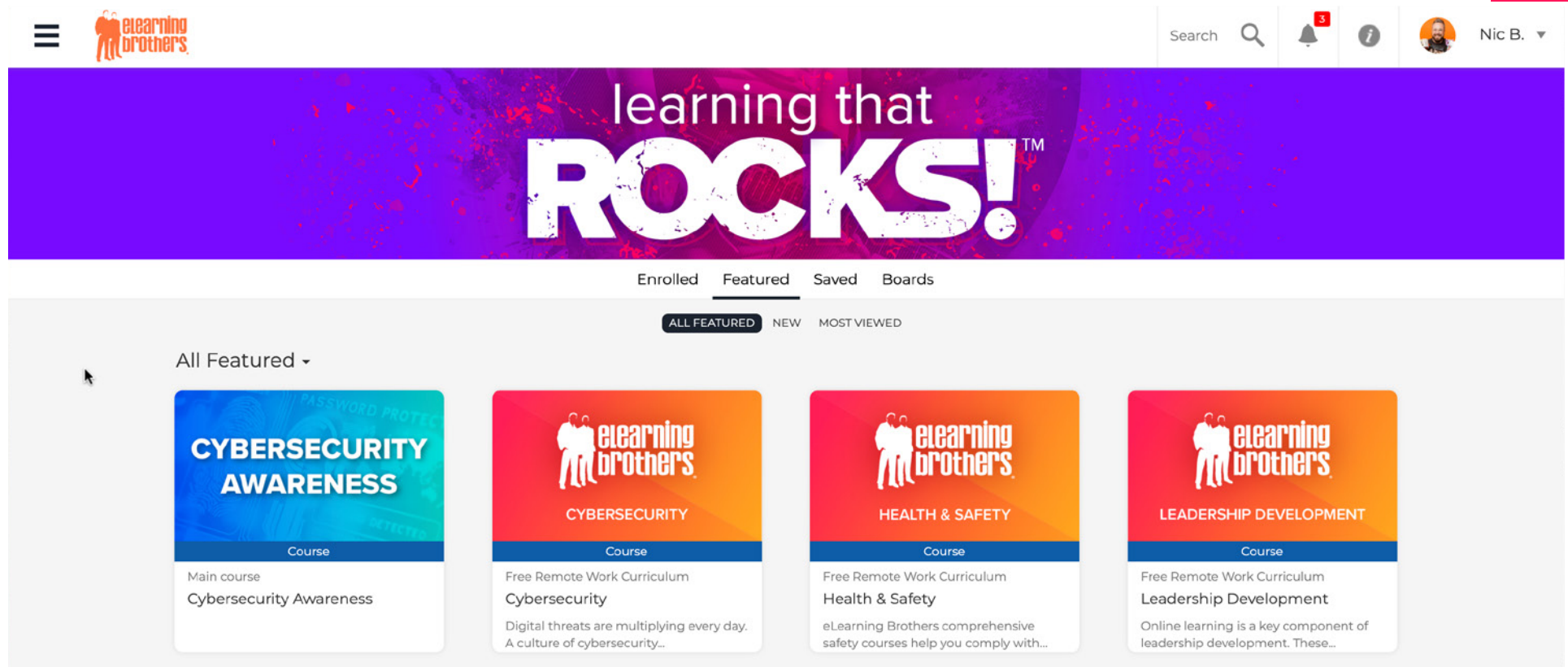
6
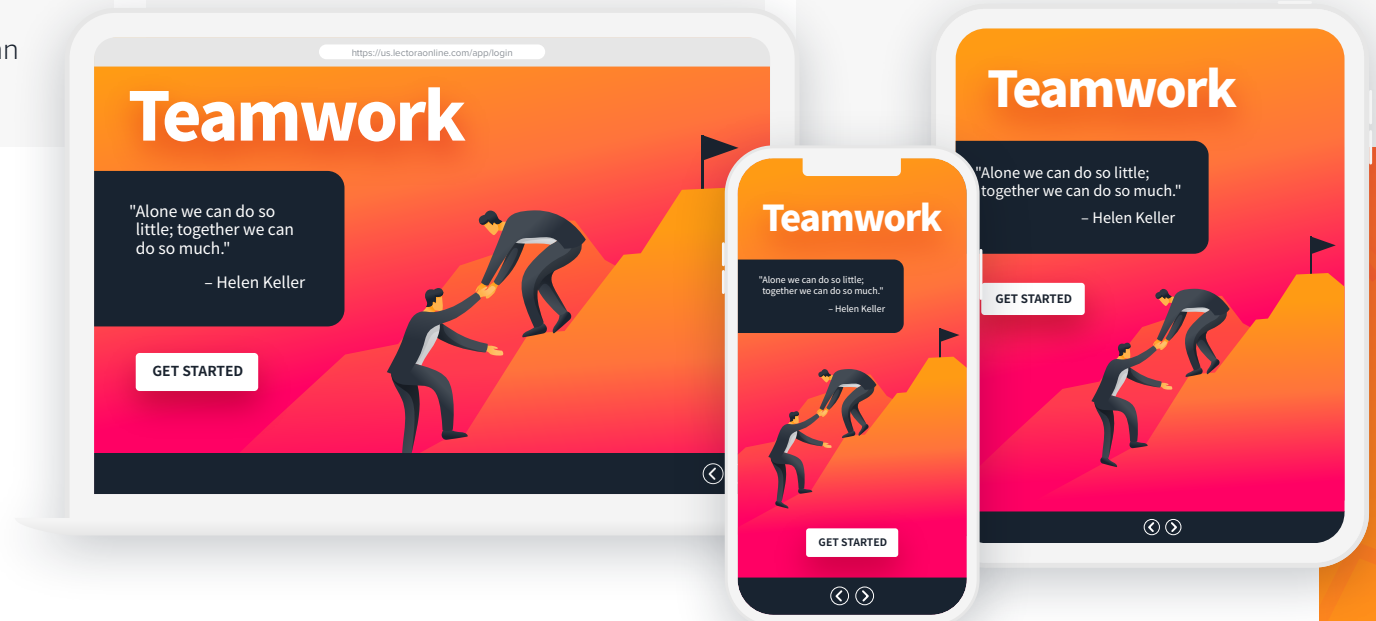
How Can You Have the Best Authoring Experience Possible?

Once you assess the main features of each authoring tool you're considering, you may want to consider other perks (or red flags) which could directly impact your user experience, such as:

- » Integrations
- » Support
- » Value

Integrations

When all of your eLearning tools work together harmoniously, you can save precious time and even money.

For example, if you work with video heavily or want to explore VR, having directly integrated tools at your fingertips (versus logging in elsewhere and or importing external files) could be a big productivity boost.

Also, if you already have a Learning Management System (LMS) in place, a direct integration with a system such as KnowledgeLink®, HealthStream™, Saba®, and others may also impact your authoring tool decision.

Integrations

Screen Recording

If your authoring tool has built-in screen recording and editing, it's a wonderful perk—assuming these features work smoothly.

Screen-recording is especially useful if you're building any sort of simulation, software training, or want to show a step-by-step process of something that happens online. Or, if you'd like to personalize your course by recording your webcam, it's helpful if you can use the same authoring application versus logging in elsewhere.

Obviously, you may still want to use an external tool to create multimedia in some situations—especially if you work with immersive learning. However, why pay for a separate screen recording and editing tool if it's already a standard part of your authoring solution?

Luckily, Lectora®, Storyline, and Captivate include built-in screen recording, and all of them are excellent. However, other authoring tools may not have this, so it's worth investigating.

Integrations

Publishing

Since Adobe® is discontinuing support for Flash® at the end of 2020, you'll want to make sure the authoring tool you choose does not publish Flash output. Most of the major authoring tools have already switched to producing HTML5 output, but it's worth double-checking.

Secondly, if there are required formats needed for your existing delivery platform, such as xAPI for tracking data within a Learning Management System (LMS) or Learning Record Store (LRS), you should find out beforehand in the event your authoring tool doesn't support it.
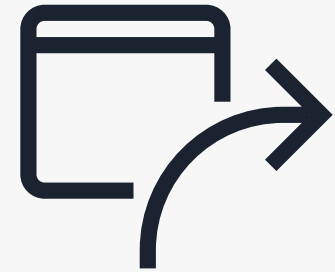
Lectora® Publishing Options

- » xAPI (Tin Can)
- » cmi5
- » HTML5
- » SCORM 2004, SCORM 1.2 (LMSs) & older versions
- » AICC (LMSs)
- » ReviewLink
- » PDF/Word
- » Executable for Offline

Storyline 360/Rise Publishing Options

- » xAPI (Tin Can)
- » cmi5
- » HTML5
- » SCORM 2004, SCORM 1.2, (LMSs)
- » AICC LMSs
- » Review360
- » Articulate® Online (Articulate Mobile Player)
- » CD
- » Word
- » Video

Captivate Publishing Options

- » Tin Can
- » HTML
- » SCORM/LMS
- » AICC
- » SWF (soon to be discontinued)
- » Video
- » Executable
- » iOS/Android
- » Windows 8

Support

Having access to readily available product information makes a big difference in your authoring experience. Software products usually come equipped with a knowledge base and or some form of documentation. Some also offer a Community where you can interact with other developers and designers.

Certainly some resources will be better than others. In a moment of need, being unable to reach an actual person can be extremely frustrating. Therefore, you'll want a clear understanding of how support tickets are handled, and who answers them. While very few companies offer on-demand phone support 24/7, they should at least offer a phone number and/or a sales representative who can assist during urgent situations. It's also worth asking if product support comes with your purchase, or if it is charged separately.

Value

Lastly, the price of an authoring tool will likely impact your purchase decision, especially if a vendor gives you a great deal or includes multiple tools in one package.

When considering an all-in-one type of option, it's worth calculating what the cost would be if you have to purchase each item separately. For example, if you have to buy a screen recorder separately, a low price tag may be deceiving. Or if you need a bunch of extra storage, you'll need to budget for it accordingly. Or, if you're interested in dabbling in VR or immersive learning, you may get a better deal including it with your traditional authoring tool versus seeking a VR authoring tool separately at some point in the future.

Overall, your authoring tool vendor should clearly define exactly what's included with your authoring tool package.

Choose the Tool That Fits Your Needs

These are just a few of the questions to ask yourself as you're evaluating authoring tools. You'll also want to ask each vendor for customer references, and then sign up for a free trial of each product to compare the value of each authoring solution.

The best tools include easy-to-use, well-designed templates, intuitive ways to solicit feedback from stakeholders, and robust features for building effective assessments, accessible content, and responsive interactive eLearning. Whether you want additional features like collaborative authoring and extensibility are up to you, but hopefully we've helped you determine if those options would add value for you.

Effective training drives productivity and profitability. So choose the tool that will enable you to make the best training possible.

Ready to try out an authoring tool?
Sign up for a free trial of Lectora® today.

FREE TRIAL