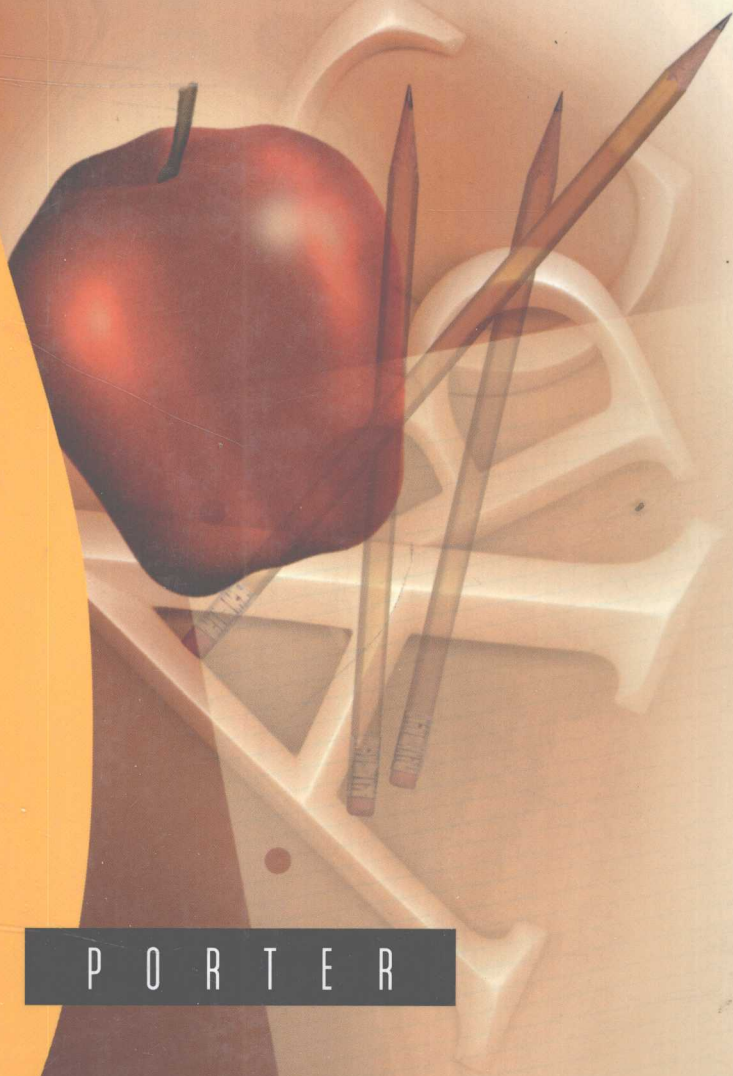


creating the

virtual classroom

DISTANCE LEARNING with the Internet



LYNNETTE R. PORTER

Creating the Virtual Classroom

**Distance Learning
with the Internet**

Lynnette R. Porter

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About the Author

Lynnette R. Porter received her M.A. in English, with a specialization in technical writing, from Bowling Green State University, where she also received her Ph.D. in English, with specializations in technical communication, rhetoric, and composition.

She has been an active member of the Society for Technical Communication, for which she served on the board of directors as a director-sponsor. Additionally, she is a frequent speaker at the Society's regional and international conferences and has participated in several committees. She is a member of several other professional associations, including the Association for Business Communication and the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing.

She has been an associate professor at The University of Findlay in Ohio and also operates a consulting business. In her role as consultant, she has been a writer of everything from brochures and newsletters to manuals and proposals; an editor of two professional journals; and a technical/computer trainer.

List of Illustrations

Table 2.1	Options for Distance Learning	38
Table 6.1	Representative General Mailing Lists	117
Table 7.1	Design Do's and Don'ts for Web Pages	156
Figure 2.1	Seattle Central Community College Web site.	29
Figure 2.2	University of Alaska, Anchorage Web site.	31
Figure 2.3	Centre for Distance Learning, University of Calgary Web site.	33
Figure 2.4	University of Calgary's videoconference courses.	34
Figure 2.5	Athabasca University's Internet undergraduate courses.	37
Figure 2.6	Online course description, Athabasca University.	37
Figure 3.1	Questions to determine the appropriate (nongrant) types of funding for your distance learning program.	46
Figure 3.2	Department of Health and Human Services (GrantsNet).	50
Figure 3.3	The Distance Learning Funding Sourcebook.	51
Figure 4.1	BellSouth Foundation: How to apply for a grant.	57
Figure 4.2	BellSouth's Grant guidelines, continued.	58
Figure 4.3	BellSouth's Grant guidelines and general selection criteria.	59
Figure 4.4	BellSouth's Grant guidelines and restrictions.	60
Figure 4.5	BellSouth's Grant guidelines submission information.	60
Figure 4.6	BellSouth's Grant guidelines table of contents.	61
Figure 4.7	BellSouth's online application form.	62
Figure 4.8	BellSouth's online application form (continued).	62
Figure 4.9	BellSouth's online application form (continued).	63
Figure 4.10	Intelenet Commission's home page.	64
Figure 4.11	Intelenet's Memorandum.	64
Figure 4.12	Intelenet's Grant Program.	66
Figure 4.13	Intelenet's application form for transport services.	68

Figure 4.14	Intelenet's application form for a one-time grant.	69
Figure 4.15	Wisconsin Advanced Telecommunications Foundation and Educational Technology Board's guidelines and forms.	70
Figure 4.16	Wisconsin Advanced Telecommunications Foundation and Educational Technology Board's cover sheet.	72
Figure 4.17	Wisconsin Advanced Telecommunications Foundation and Educational Technology Board's project budget form.	78
Figure 4.18	Information for the online proposal form.	81
Figure 5.1	Checklist for evaluating distance learning courses.	101
Figure 6.1	Classroom e-mail.	114
Figure 6.2	Virtual Art School.	115
Figure 6.3	E-mail request for information.	119
Figure 6.4	Newsgroup response to request.	120
Figure 7.1	Chunks from the University of Missouri Web site.	131
Figure 7.2	Chunks (Links) from the University of Missouri Web site.	131
Figure 7.3	Chunks (list of additional links) from the University of Missouri Web site.	131
Figure 7.4	University of Iowa's request for information links.	141
Figure 7.5	University of Iowa's links to other administrative information.	141
Figure 7.6	California College for Health Science's FAQ sample.	142
Figure 7.7	California College for Health Science's transfer policy.	142
Figure 7.8	University of Iowa's information about distance learning courses.	143
Figure 7.9	University of Iowa's examination information.	143
Figure 7.10	Kodak's home page.	148
Figure 7.11	University of Maryland, Project ICONS.	150
Figure 7.12	Distance Education Centre, University of Southern Queensland.	151
Figure 7.13	University of Waterloo, Distance and Continuing Education.	152
Figure 7.14	Humber College.	153
Figure 7.15	Design questions about your Web site.	155
Figure 8.1	Distance Learning Network.	164
Figure 8.2	Distance Learning Network's registration information.	165
Figure 8.3	Butler Communications, Inc.'s distance learning and satellite programs.	165
Figure 9.1	The World Lecture Hall.	178
Figure 9.2	World Lecture Hall course policy.	178
Figure 9.3	World Lecture Hall online form—descriptions.	179
Figure 9.4	World Lecture Hall online form.	180

Preface

Distance learning is not a new subject, but it recently has come in vogue again. With the advent of new educational and training technologies and the need to meet the needs of learners in a fast-paced world, distance learning is becoming a necessity. In its best sense, it can help educate more people anywhere at any time. Our renewed interest in distance learning has the potential to change public perception of education and its ongoing importance throughout our lives.

For consistency, I use *distance learning* as the preferred term, instead of distance education, another common term. Although many educators prefer the latter term, I use *distance learning* to indicate instruction for both education and training.

The term *education* in this book includes elementary and secondary programs, continuing education and noncredit programs, and public and private colleges and universities; it refers to more traditional courses offered through accredited or licensed institutions. *Education* also implies knowledge that may be highly pragmatic, or simply “nice to know”; it includes theoretical as well as application-based information.

Training includes skill development and knowledge geared toward practical applications; although training may be offered by traditional educational institutions, it also is the province of private vendors, such as businesses specializing in customized training for individuals and corporations, and in-house training departments.

Distance learning involves both education and training; the emphasis varies with the types of courses being offered. Finally, I use the term *learner* to

refer to anyone who takes a distance learning course. I realize that some “learners” may not actually learn anything, although they have taken a course. Nevertheless, I prefer this term to indicate persons who take distance learning courses, in part to emphasize the lifelong nature and importance of education and training.

I prefer to highlight the benefits of distance learning and some positive implications for educational change, although I indicate throughout the book that distance learning programs must be carefully designed and managed if they are to be effective for learners. The effectiveness of distance learning programs depends on their design and implementation; throughout this book you’ll read some principles and suggestions for planning an effective course or program.

This book has been designed for educators, trainers, administrators, businesspeople, and the learners they hope to serve. It provides an overview of distance learning and the types of programs most commonly offered. Because I often emphasize online distance learning programs, most examples come from the World Wide Web (Web) and the Internet.

The book consists of the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 Distance Learning in Today’s Education and Training
- Chapter 2 Types of Distance Learning
- Chapter 3 Funding a Distance Learning Program
- Chapter 4 Preparing a Grant Proposal
- Chapter 5 Determining the Suitability of Distance Learning Courses
- Chapter 6 E-mail, Faxmail, and Voice Mail as Distance Learning Tools
- Chapter 7 The World Wide Web in Education and Training
- Chapter 8 Teleconferencing and Desktop Videoconferencing
- Chapter 9 Advertising Your Distance Learning Program
- Chapter 10 Reconceptualizing Education and Training through Distance Learning
- Chapter 11 International Educational Issues

Most chapters include descriptions of distance learning programs and courses, plus suggestions for implementing your own courses. Questions to help you plan your course or program and checklists also guide you.

As well, seven appendices provide lists of online and print resources to help you learn more about distance learning programs and to locate additional examples of programs and their materials. The appendices are these:

- Appendix A Bibliography of Printed Sources
- Appendix B Distance Learning Newsgroups and Mailing Lists
- Appendix C Online Resources about Grants and Granting Opportunities
- Appendix D E-zines about Distance Learning

Appendix E Instructional Web Sites

Appendix F Copyright, Patent, Trademark, and Intellectual Property Web sites

Appendix G International Distance Learning

As with any book including information about and from the Internet and the Web, many addresses and examples may change between the time the book is written, then used by readers. I have tried to update the samples and locations of electronic information up to the date of publication.

Distance learning is a challenge, for those who create the programs and those who participate in them. It offers us the potential to provide ongoing education to more people, but it also requires us carefully to evaluate our instructional methods and the technologies to establish communication among learners and educators/trainers. I hope you will use this book as one of many first steps toward developing more effective distance learning courses and programs.

Acknowledgments

In preparing this book I browsed several hundred Web sites, visited distance learning classrooms, attended conference presentations and meetings featuring educators and trainers experienced with distance learning, observed teleconferences, and discussed distance learning with colleagues through several mailing lists and newsgroups. Many people who provided insight into distance education were anonymous; I “met” them through their Web sites and e-mail messages. Nevertheless, I thank the many people whose work with distance education helped shape my perspective on this changing topic.

More specifically, I thank two reviewers who assisted in the manuscript preparation: Brandi Ross, for her helpful comments on an early draft of the book, and Bart Porter, for his insight and inspiration throughout the development of the book.

Contents

About the Author	v
List of Illustrations	xiii
Preface	xv
Acknowledgments	xix
1 Distance Learning in Today's Education and Training	1
What Are Some Structural Differences in Distance Learning Programs?	2
What Degree of Supervision Is Required in a Distance Learning Course?	3
Who Participates in Distance Learning?	4
Vendors of Distance Learning Courses or Programs	5
Learners Who Take Distance Learning Courses	10
What Are the Benefits of Distance Learning?	12
What Is the Future of Distance Learning?	16
Summary	22
2 Types of Distance Learning	23
Creating a Virtual Classroom	24
Types of Distance Learning Courses	27
Correspondence Courses	27

	Broadcast Education	31
	Teleconferences and Desktop Videoconferences	32
	Computerized Education and Training	34
	The Internet and the World Wide Web	35
	Designing an Effective Distance Learning Program	38
	Summary	40
3	Funding a Distance Learning Program	41
	Fees for Distance Learning Programs	42
	Increasing the Number of Learners	43
	Decreasing the Costs for Each Course	44
	Finding Short-term or Long-term Partners	45
	Grant Funding	46
	Determining Ways to Meet the Grantor's Needs	52
	Summary	53
4	Preparing a Grant Proposal	55
	Writing a Grant Proposal	55
	Solicitation Notices and Selection Criteria	56
	Parts of a Typical Proposal	69
	Meeting a Grantor's Requirements	80
	Submitting the Proposal	80
	Following Up on the Proposal	82
	Summary	83
5	Determining the Suitability of Distance Learning Courses	85
	Criteria for Effective Distance Learning Courses	85
	The Educators/Trainers	92
	Learners	97
	Checklist for Evaluating Potential Courses	99
	Summary	102
6	E-mail, Faxmail, and Voice Mail as Distance Learning Tools	103
	Networks and E-mail	104
	E-mail Correspondence within Courses	105
	Setting Up an E-mail Course	109
	A Few E-mail Basics	111

A Few Examples of E-mail Use	113
Bulletin Boards	115
Using Bulletin Boards in a Distance Learning Course	116
Mailing Lists	116
Using Mailing Lists in a Distance Learning Course	118
Newsgroups	119
Multiple-User Domains/Dimensions (MUDs)	121
Using a MUD in a Distance Learning Course	121
Faxmail in a Distance Learning Course	122
Voice Mail in a Distance Learning Course	122
Checklist for E-mail, Faxmail, and Voice Mail Communication in Distance Learning Courses	123
Summary	124
7 The World Wide Web in Education and Training	127
Web-based Instructional Activities	127
Chunking Information	128
Basic Questions for Developing a Web-based Course	132
Types of Information Needed in Your Web Site	143
Designing a Home Page for Your Course	144
Designing Other Web Pages for the Site	146
Creating a Visually Interesting Screen	147
Sample Distance Learning Sites	148
Questions about Web Site Design	153
Summary	156
8 Teleconferencing and Desktop Videoconferencing	157
A Brief Overview of Teleconferencing and Desktop Videoconferencing Terminology	158
Basic Equipment Needs for a Teleconference and a Desktop Videoconference	161
Teleconferencing in a Distance Learning Course	162
When Is Teleconferencing Beneficial?	167
Desktop Videoconferencing in a Distance Learning Course	169
Benefits of Desktop Videoconferencing	170
Additional Teleconferencing and Videoconferencing Benefits for Educators, Trainers, Institutions, and Companies	171
Summary	172

9	Advertising Your Distance Learning Program	173
	Forms of Advertisements	174
	Print Advertisements	174
	Broadcast Advertisements	176
	Online Advertisements	177
	Other Forms of Promotion	180
	A Marketing Plan for Distance Learning Programs	184
	Planning Advertising for Your Distance Learning Program	186
	Marketing and Advertising Checklists	188
	Summary	189
10	Reconceptualizing Education and Training through Distance Learning	191
	Teaching and Training in a Virtual Classroom	192
	How Does Technology Fit with Your Vision of the Institution or Business?	193
	How Does Technology Relate to Education or Training?	194
	How Can You Teach More Efficiently with Technology?	195
	How Can You Best Meet Learners' Needs through a Distance Learning Course?	196
	How Can the Institution Support the Distance Learning Program?	197
	Principles for Effective Distance Learning	198
	Keeping Informed and Furthering Distance Learning	203
	Resources for Learners	205
	Resources for Educators and Trainers	205
	Summary	205
11	International Education Issues	207
	Copyrights and Fair Use	208
	Copyright Notices	209
	Registering a Work	210
	Fair Use	210
	Citing Copyright Information	211
	Course Design Considerations for a Global Audience	212
	Open Universities and Colleges	216
	Administrative Issues	218
	Summary	219

Appendix A Bibliography of Printed Sources	221
Appendix B Distance Learning Newsgroups and Mailing Lists	229
Appendix C Online Resources about Grants and Granting Opportunities	231
Appendix D E-zines about Distance Learning	235
Appendix E Instructional Web Sites	237
Appendix F Copyright, Trademark, Patent, and Intellectual Property Web Sites	245
Appendix G International Distance Learning	249
Glossary	251
Index	255

Distance Learning in Today's Education and Training

*D*istance learning has become a hot topic in the past few years, although it's far from being a new idea. Whether it's called distance learning, directed learning, assisted learning, distance education, or some other name, there is an obvious answer to the question, What is distance learning? It is educational or training information, including the instruction and experience that learners gain, although they are physically distant from the source of that information and instruction.

In practice, however, distance learning can be much more than this simple definition indicates. It can involve the use of new technologies, innovative materials, and interactive instructional methods. It can reach people of all ages and abilities who might otherwise find it difficult to further their education or get the training they need. It can help learners realize the importance of life-long education, whether for personal interest or career preparation and enhancement. Distance learning is not a panacea for all educational or training ills, but it does offer additional possibilities for educating and training more people than can be easily and efficiently accommodated in more traditional settings, such as in-house corporate training programs, public schools, and universities. In its broadest sense, distance learning can be very private or it can be highly formalized.

Distance learning is an important way for educational institutions, from public elementary and secondary schools to state-funded and private colleges and universities, to offer instruction to a new market of students. In the past, some potential "customers" have had difficulty fitting traditional courses into their schedules; they lived too far from the site offering the instruction or the