Effective eLearning:
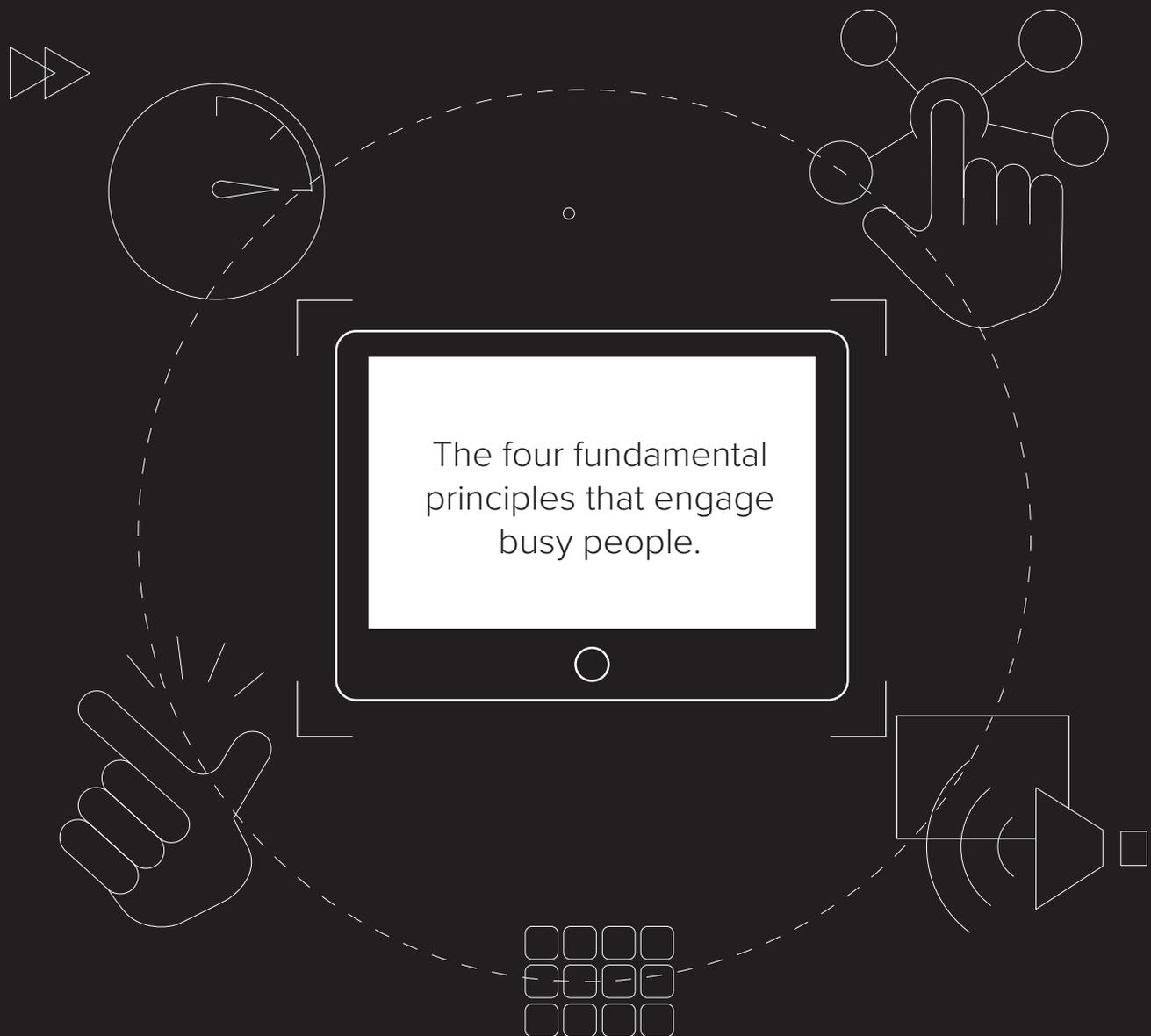# The Essential Elements

Jeff Rohrlick, eLearning Expert, and Lynn Nye, PhD, Strategic Thinker

The four fundamental principles that engage busy people.

Health care professionals are overburdened with increasing responsibilities, less time to spend with patients, and only short intervals throughout the day to catch up on new developments. To keep their knowledge and skills current, we must make it easy for health care professionals to access and retain knowledge. Effective eLearning is a tool that helps accomplish this goal. These are the four fundamental principles that we use in our eLearning programs to communicate effectively and stimulate advances in our complex health care environment.
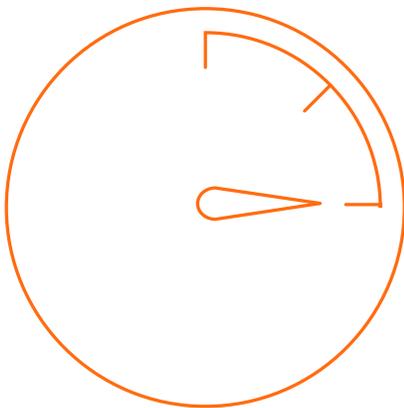
1. KEEP IT SHORT:
WE LEARN IN QUICK BITES

Think back to a time when you learned something complex like riding a bicycle or driving a car. You learned it over time in relatively short lessons, and now it's an ingrained skill. That's how our brains work. We use the same principle in eLearning, breaking down information into quick bites, the shorter the better and no longer than 15 minutes for maximum engagement. It's what we call microlearning.

A program that our team developed for the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) is a good example. At AGA's annual conference, 2020 Principles of GI for the NP and PA, experts presented 30- and 60-minute live presentations on a range of gastroenterology topics. The AGA team tasked us with converting selected presentations on diverse topics into brief eLearning presentations. The online program consists of seven interactive, microlearning modules, 10–15 minutes in length, that can be viewed separately at any time. Each module includes stopping points with questions to ensure the learner understands the information presented.

2. KEEP IT SIMPLE:
KEY POINTS AND LINKS TO MORE DETAILS

Do you scan the headlines before deciding whether to read an article in full? Most people do. Effective eLearning programs help people assimilate key facts by providing clear objectives, information and graphics that outline critical knowledge. Then we provide links to more detailed information in multiple formats, such as published references and detailed tables, for those who want to dig deeper and learn more.

For example, in the AGA eLearning program described above, some of the original presentations included a lot of complex information. We employed two different techniques to "keep it simple":

- Simplified graphics, such as in Dr. Laurie Keefer's presentation

- Optional links to more detailed information for those who wanted to dig deeper, as in this presentation by Dr. Gregory Sayuk
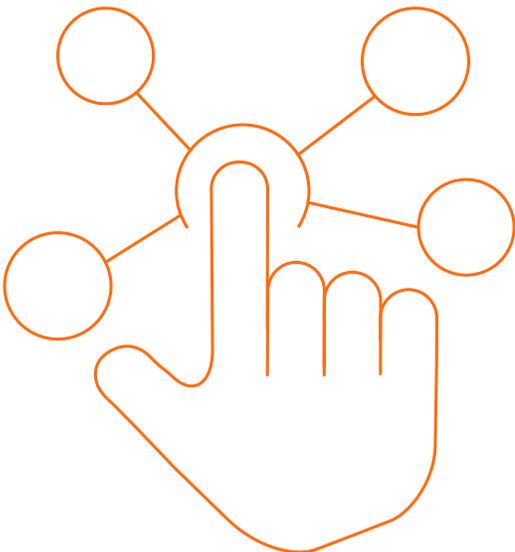
3. MAKE IT INTERACTIVE:
ENGAGEMENT HELPS RETENTION

A decade ago, in 2011, we gained valuable feedback when our Dexcom client performed human factors testing on their first patient tutorial. It was a very nice 15-minute video that explained how to insert and set up the company's ground-breaking continuous glucose monitor (CGM). Although it was a short video, human factors testing showed us that by the time people got to the end they had forgotten how to perform the first steps. However, when we stopped the same video and asked the user to perform each critical step before moving on to the next, they were able to complete the process perfectly.

Ten years later, in 2021, Dexcom is using the same process for the CGM tutorials — a great example of how to do it well!

We continue to use stopping points and knowledge checks with polls and questions in all of our eLearning programs, as exemplified in the AGA eLearning program described above.
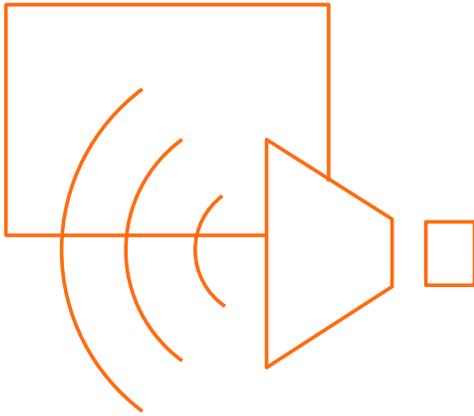
4. USE AUDIO AND VISUAL COMMUNICATION: WE ALL LEARN DIFFERENTLY

A combination of text, graphics, audio and video is the best way to engage people with different learning preferences. Research tells us that the brain processes visual information 60,000 times faster than text and that most people read less than 30 percent of the information on a web page. However, for academic studies, especially related to science and medicine, it's often important to provide detailed textual information to support the accuracy of topline statements.

The program that our team developed recently for the AGA, the Roadmap for the Future of Colorectal Cancer Screening in the US, is a good example. It includes text, graphics, and audio and video presentations plus links to detailed information in the published references quoted in the presentations.

IN SUMMARY

All of us are constantly deluged with too much information. So, using short, simple, interactive eLearning programs that engage busy people in different ways, we can contribute to the dissemination of knowledge that stimulates learning and ultimately advances the standard of health care.

INTERESTED IN WORKING WITH US ON AN ENGAGING ELEARNING PROGRAM?

CONTACT OUR TEAM NOW