Readymade Course Content
Repurposing existing content for self-paced course creation

Developing self-paced courses is a time-intensive process. The standard industry estimates for development times range from 160-240 hours for a one hour course, with the higher number reflecting more interactive design. A significant portion of that development time involves working with subject matter experts to define and refine the content for the course.

In the Strengthening CE Content for Libraries Training Institute, WebJunction and partners explored options for repurposing existing content to save time in the content development phase of self-paced course creation. Participants in the program applied three replicable models:
1. Face-to-face presentation
2. Webinar archive
3. SME-generated article or book

This article describes the *technical* approaches to capturing the content for each model. It is beyond the scope here to cover creating interactive exercises, scenarios, quizzes, and other instructional design aspects that enhance the basic content. Each model links to an example of a fully-developed course, which will give you ideas about how to augment the core content. Also see these online training resources for more information.

The outputs of all three of these models can be imported to a course authoring tool, which supports user interactions, tracking and completions for a full-fledged self-paced course. Training Institute participants used Articulate Storyline; WebJunction has also used Articulate Studio. Here is a brief comparison of the two tools.

ONE: Face-to-face Presentation

This is low-hanging fruit. If you've given a presentation at a conference, you have a focused topic, content informed by subject matter expertise, and a presentation condensed to one hour or less—solid ingredients on which to build a self-paced course by adding an audio recording to your slide presentation.

Example: Having Fun at Work Again

The advantage of this approach over using a pre-existing webinar archive (model #2) is that you can plan the segments, activity breaks and reflection points before you record the audio. You have control over the pauses and segues between sub-topics, and you can add sub-topic title slides to the deck for clear divisions between segments. You can also add activity slides and narrate instructions or suggestions to go along with them.

Visual review
In a recorded presentation, the presenter is no longer the center of attention—the slides are. This means the visual elements of the slide deck are key to keeping learners' attention. Review the slide deck with a critical eye to how effectively the images, graphics and text communicate the content. You may want to add more slides so that the visuals refresh more frequently.

For some basic graphic design principles and suggestions, check out these webinar archives:
- Let's Make This Look Good: Graphic Design for Maximum Engagement
- The Power of Image: presenting with the brain in mind

Audio recording

Tools for recording narration can be as low-tech as recording directly in PowerPoint as you play through your slide show, or it can involve more sophisticated tools, such as Camtasia or Articulate Storyline, which create separate sound tracks, which can be manipulated relative to the visual content. Audacity is a good tool for audio recording; it's free and cross-platform.

The requirements for smooth narration of a presentation are quite different from speaking in person to a live audience. Without the eye contact and real-time feedback, some people find it difficult to be lively and engaging with a microphone and a laptop. Scripting, practice, and short segments will help.

Recording tips:
- Use a good headset to get good audio quality, something in the $60-120 price range. It's worth the investment.
- Write a script. Even if you never speak from a script in live presentations, the imposed structure of a script will help keep the narration synced with the slides; it will also minimize the "ums" that are more distracting to the learner in a recording than they are in person.
- Practice one or more times before committing to a final recording.
- Although the script is your guide, feel free to add spontaneous comments here and there.
- Record in short sections, rather than trying to go start-to-finish in one swoop. However, recording audio in one swoop *can* be more effective if you don't mind editing out mistakes afterward; let the mistakes happen, repeat yourself when necessary, and then cut out what you don't need at the end.

TWO: Webinar Archive

There are many excellent webinars that have been preserved as archived recordings. These archives contain content already condensed into one or two hours and already informed by subject matter experts. The essence of this approach is to chunk the webinar recording into meaningful segments that can be augmented with other resources and learner activities.

Example: Extreme Customer Service, Every Time

The following is a description of the basic steps for repurposing a webinar archive. Technical details will vary depending on what video-editing and course authoring tools you use.

Recording format

You will need a workable, editable format of the archive file. There a couple of ways to go:
- Most web conferencing tools have a way for administrators to export recordings of an archived presentation as a video file; however you'll need admin access since most don't allow users to export presentations.

- Another option is to re-record the presentation by playing back the archive and screen-capturing it with a program like Camtasia ($$) or [Open Broadcaster Software](#) (free). Essentially, you are recording the screen with the presentation playing.
  - PRO tip 1: In order to prevent your screen saver from interrupting the recording process, install the free [Caffeine](#) utility.
  - PRO tip 2: Create a folder with the title of the webinar to hold the recording and all files related to it in one place.
  - PRO tip 3: Make sure that you are recording the stereo playback as your input sound; otherwise you may get the video but the sound won't be good.

Recommended file outputs:
- Format: MP4 is most useful everywhere; Flash is being phased out
- Video dimension: 720p (1280 X 720)

Archive recording review
Begin with a high level review of the full webinar archive, noting key ideas, points for adding activities or questions, or areas that may need more explanation. As you listen, consider:
- Where does it make sense to chunk out the archive content?
- Are there clear segments within the webinar presentation already?
- Are there areas within a segment that should be broken up further by an exercise, activity, quiz, or other engagement?

Based on your review, draft an outline of the course to organize and label the course segments and identify places to plug in new activities or related resources.

Edit the recording
Video-editing tools, such as Camtasia or Windows Live MovieMaker (free with Windows), allow you to clean up the webinar recording:
- Trim excess from the start and end of the recording
- Use audio enhancement tools to even out the volume levels between presenters or reduce background noise
- Manually (and *carefully*) trim awkward pauses or other unwanted segments

Chunk the recording
Based on your review and draft outline of the webinar archive recording, use a video-editing tool to divide the recording into chunks. At this stage, it is important to keep the experience of the end user in mind, selecting segments that will give users a navigation menu (Table of Contents) to guide them easily to sub-topics within the webinar.

Camtasia allows you to set "markers" at each break point, which then outputs separate media files for each chunk of the recording.
    a. Try to find the least disruptive edit points, and if possible mark at **topic changes**.
    b. Try for segments of 10 minutes or less, if possible.
    c. Pro tip 1: It is more important to find logical breaks according to sub-topics, even if that means the segments are uneven in timing.
    d. Pro tip 2: Prioritize a clean audio cut point over a clean slide cut point.

THREE: SME Article or Book

In this model, the subject matter expertise comes in the form of an article or book written by an authority on the topic. Although this content is less course-ready, it still has potential for repurposing.

Example: Encouraging Early Literacy

In this example, a course on early literacy was crafted from *Early Literacy Begins with You* —an article and poster by Saroj Ghoting, noted authority on the subject. Ghoting had herself derived the article from ideas in her books, so she had already condensed a wealth of information into focused content ripe for turning into a course. The course author created slides with chunks of the article content, all wrapped in a consistent visual container.

In this case, the text, visuals, sequence and interactions were built directly in Articulate Storyline. However, the content could have been created first as a slide presentation and then imported into Storyline to add more functionality.

This author used a clever device to manage the density of content on the topic and create two different levels for experiencing the course. One level is a straightforward path for practitioners to go through the activities to acquire the basic knowledge. The other level includes icon markers that are links to short information pop-ups, longer articles, and to online resources, for managers/coordinators or those who want more in-depth knowledge. The learner can pick and choose how deep to go at many points throughout the course.