What Mode Of Training Is Most Effective?

We are often asked the question, "With all the options available to choose from, which type of training works the best?"

There is traditional classroom instruction, video training, audio training, self-study booklets, eLearning, webinars, just-in-time training, coaching, mentoring and blended combinations of all of these. So which is the most effective? The answer is - it depends. It depends on the audience characteristics, logistics requirements, certification requirements and most of all the nature of the training objectives.

Classroom Instruction
Classroom instruction is delivered in-person with at least one instructor or facilitator leading a group of students through specific materials. Often, the students are referencing a textbook, participant guide or other print-based materials while the instructor leads the session using PowerPoint, slides, transparencies or flip charts. Because of its hands-on nature, classroom instruction is best used for soft skills such as Customer Service Training, Sales Training, Leadership Training and Communication Training when the key learning points are best retained using interactive scenarios, role-plays and exercises which allow students to model the concepts taught, practice those skills and receive immediate feedback from an expert.

From a logistics perspective, classroom instruction requires coordination of schedules and other resources and because it requires travel is often very costly. It can require that employees be out of the office/off the line for periods of time reducing operation productivity and accruing more cost for temps to cover the students' shifts. Additionally, classroom training can present challenges in ensuring standardization across instructors and deploying training immediately for new staff and/or industry required updates.

For certification purposes, classroom instruction allows for both oral and written assessments without the concern of someone else taking a test, which is critical when certifying on subjects that require demonstration of skill mastery.

Video Training
Video training is training deployed with the use of visual, electronic mediums, whether it is using a DVD and television or other portable electronic format using a tablet or other device. Video training can be easily deployed to students as self-paced training when the logistics prohibit classroom training, while still providing the benefits of modeling behaviors. Video tends to be very expensive both in initial production and in maintenance.

From a certification standpoint, video training does not offer direct interaction with the video, so certification must be completed using another medium such as mailed-in paper-based training, proctored testing, electronic, computer-based training or other format.

Audio Training
Audio training is training delivered via a vocal recording, whether it be on cassette, CD, DVD or digital medium such as mp3 file or podcast. Audio training is best deployed to employees who have long commutes and/or travel plans where there is no access to a computer for other training formats, or room to spread out print-based materials. Subjects best covered by audio training include those that are vocal in nature, such as Call Center Scripts, Sales Scripts and Language training.

Because of its self-paced nature and lack of participant materials, audio training offers very limited certification options. The most popular option available for certification for audio training is through the use of Interactive Voice Response (IVR) certification where students call into a specific telephone number, uniquely identify themselves and then listen to questions and answer options, signifying their answer using the telephone keypad. These responses are recorded and then assessed either manually or through integration with a learning management system.

Self-Study Booklets
Self-study booklets are courses where all learning materials and knowledge are provided using print-based materials. The materials are written using a subject matter expert and designed for the student to be able to easily read and retain the key learning concepts of the training. Self-study booklets allow for print-based training when logistics and/or resources prevent deployment of other learning mediums, such as classroom or eLearning. They often contain numerous, well-known examples to clarify course content and practice questions with answers for students to confirm their understanding and retention of key learning concepts.

Self-study booklets can present challenges to students who struggle with reading and remembering a lot of content without any instructor or peer interaction.

From a certification standpoint, they offer no direct interaction and testing; however, similar to the video and audio courses, certification can be achieved through other testing mediums.

eLearning
eLearning training is computer-based training delivered over the internet. eLearning training allows organizations to deploy standardized training quickly to a large audience, eliminating logistic and scheduling concerns and costs. Additionally, eLearning training can be efficiently customized and also easily maintained, making distribution of critical updates easier. Training subjects best deployed via eLearning include Compliance Training, Ethics Training, Policies and Procedures Training and Products Training. Although expensive to create, eLearning is easier and less expensive to maintain than many other modes of training.

From a certification standpoint, eLearning allows for written tests, such as multiple choice, matching, true/false, short response, etc.; however, it does not allow users to physically demonstrate mastery of a skill. eLearning student activity is also immediately trackable when deployed with a learning management system allowing on-demand management administration and reporting of training activity.

Webinars
Webinars are instructor-led or facilitated training sessions delivered via a computer with internet access. Both students and instructors log into a specific website and teleconference at the same time to conduct the session. Webinars allow for the delivery of classroom-style instruction and some student-instructor interaction and participation when logistics prevent physical gathering. Webinars often include the use of a slide presentation style learning with live audio, allowing students to ask questions and respond to instructor prompts on-demand.

Webinars can present some technology challenges when internet connection, internet security or bandwidth limitations create a less-than-desirable and often distracting experience, such as poor voice quality or slow to respond screens.

From a certification standpoint, webinars do allow for oral assessments in front of the entire group; however, written assessments must be completed using another medium, whether electronic or paper-based.

Just-in-Time Training
Just-in-time (JIT) training is training delivered immediately, as needed. It is good for rare transactions and processes that are challenging to remember how to do after a few months, such as a form or system procedure that only happens once every few weeks or months but is critical. The training allows employees to quickly refresh or learn the transaction before completing it, keeping the content fresh in their mind when it is most needed. JIT training must be easily accessible and deployed in a format conducive to the employee's work environment.

Coaching
Coaching is hands-on training delivered in small groups or one-on-one to enhance a specific skill set. Coaching allows a senior staff member, manager or subject matter expert to reinforce a specific subject or employee performance. Coaching is best delivered directly, requiring physical proximity of the coach and his/her targets.

Mentoring
Mentoring is hands-on training delivered one-on-one between a mentor and a mentee. This training method is often used for new hires and/or new positions where a more senior staff member provides direct training. Mentoring often utilizes a three step process where the mentor first demonstrates a skill, such as completing a procedure, then practices with the student to complete the procedure together and finally certifies the student in mastering the demonstrated skill by observing the student completing the skill on his/her own. Like coaching, mentoring requires direct contact, and can remove the mentor for his/her other responsibilities while conducting the training.

Blended
Blended training combines various training modes, such as classroom instruction and eLearning. Blended training combines the benefits of multiple training modes to maximize student retention. It is best used when training subjects include both functional or technical and behavioral skills, or when foundational knowledge is needed before attending a class as a pre-requisite.

Like classroom instruction, blended training allows for both oral and written assessments, which is critical when certifying on subjects that require demonstration of skill mastery.

Conclusion
In conclusion, in order to maximize the value of deployed training, an organization must consider the audience characteristics, logistics requirements, certification requirements and most of all the nature of the training objectives. With the various training methods available, these requirements will quickly identify what method will achieve the training's goals.