



Blended Learning

Overview

Blended learning typically makes people think of a combination of learning face-to-face in a physical environment, and learning online at home. The idea being that the interaction varies, and the content basically stays the same. Let's be honest: that doesn't sound terribly exciting, and sounds an awful lot like just doing extended "homework" in your own time.

The truth is that blended learning can mean so much more. To us at Learnlife, blended learning is a central part of personal learning, and that means that our learners can build their own passions, skills and knowledge anywhere, at any time, and from any place they choose. Doesn't that sound a bit more like it?



In this Article

- What is blended learning?
- Why is blended learning important?
- How to support effective blended learning
- How does blended learning happen at Learnlife?
- Summary



What is blended learning?

The traditional definition of blended learning is where the online and offline learning work together; each complementing the other. You probably also heard the term “hybrid” learning. Hybrid learning is a learning method in which both face-to-face and virtual learners participate simultaneously. This method combines both synchronous and asynchronous methods to create a flexible learning environment. Blending learning involves “mixing” face-to-face and online learning, i.e. face-to-face instruction is supplemented and enriched by online materials.

This is often seen as a progressive step towards more flexibility in learning, as it allows us to fit things around other commitments in our lives, and have more control over our own learning. What blended learning is *not*: a replica of a face-to-face classroom moved online or to the home.

We believe that blended learning is part of a wider concept, where all learning is valued. Whether you learn independently, at home, in a formal or informal setting, with others, or alone. Learning at home, for example, does not have to mean screen time, as there are many other opportunities available. Sitting down at the laptop is just one of these. So when we say “blended learning”, we are really talking about [all of the learning options available](#).

Why is blended learning important?

Blended learning is important because of the range of possibilities and opportunities it offers. Access to huge amounts of information, collaborative tools, networking with everyone from fellow learners to our heroes and role models, learning through reading, video, exploration, discussion, listening and so much more; the digital world has opened up learning on a massive scale.

The more channels, pathways, tools and approaches to learning that open up and become available to us, the more we can personalise our own learning. Supported by technology, we truly can learn on our own terms. Any time, in any way, in any place that suits us best.

That is good news for inclusive learning too. Consider those in our communities with Special Educational Needs and [neurodiverse learners](#); so often underserved by learning environments which cater to the majority. Learning online or at home means much more independence, and that is good news for a more inclusive learning community.

We also have to consider that digital skills are not a “nice-to-have” but rather something that will be essential in the future workplace. Whether we are talking about familiarity with a range of tech tools, or even the skills we can build around



digital information literacy, digital citizenship and remote collaboration, blended learning supports development of critical competencies for lifelong learning and the world ahead of us.

How to support effective blended learning

Online learning, home learning, face-to face learning: each of these can truly serve a learner in becoming the best versions of themselves, but that takes work. What it also takes, is mutual trust, respect and empathy to create a safe space for learning. How can we get it right so that the [personal learning approach](#) that combines the anywhere-anytime-any place approach really works?

The culture of the learning environment is key here. Learning guides and learners need to have a [lot of flexibility](#) in the way they combine these approaches. A culture of innovation is key here, where learning pathways are not set in stone and micromanaged, but are under a constant process of iteration and evolution. Simply providing a learning platform or list of resources is not going to create environments that nurture self-directed learning.

A culture of learning together is also essential in blended learning. New ways of learning means a curve for everyone involved, and a community approach to this is going to serve everyone well. Making sure everyone is part of the discussion as to how technology and home learning can best serve our learning interests is a great way to explore the possibilities and strengthen the sense of community at the same time.

Variety is another important part of making this work. Whether learning at home, face-to-face or online, the approach does not set the limits of our learning goals. Instead, the learner should always be supported to explore how they can best progress along the path they have chosen.

This might mean mentoring sessions are face-to-face, project research takes place outside in the learner's own town or city, a group debate happens on [Discord](#), a collaborative project happens over Zoom, and any other number of possible combinations. We need to use everything at our disposal to ensure our learners feel supported to explore what works for them.

We now arrive at our final critical success factor, which is that a culture of wellbeing is consistent throughout every "mode" of learning. Wherever, whenever and however a learner chooses to engage, there needs to be a culture of trust, mutual respect and empathy, so that the learner feels able to check in with the learning guides, their peers and their families when they want to, about how they are feeling and what they might need.



A mixture of learning environments and approaches means lines can blur, workloads can grow, and isolation can creep in. [Personal learning requires personal attention and support](#), and to include families in the discussion wherever possible. While a learner can reach up and flourish in so many ways with blended learning, there must be a constant layer of support underfoot at all times.

How does blended learning happen at Learnlife?

At Learnlife, learners [co-create a “menu” of learning](#) in 4-week periods. We explore what learning they like to focus on, how they want to meet these challenges, and how we can best support them.

In preparing for that learning “sprint”, all options are on the table. They might want to book some studio time to explore a hands-on project with the 3D printer, go and visit a makers studio in the community, spend some time researching ideas at home, arrange some group collaboration and brainstorming time in one of our learning hubs. Learners can define their own schedules to [introduce blended learning to their lives](#).

We have learners who move around internationally and engage with us largely online, and then spend time in one of our learning hubs worldwide. We have learners who pursue more traditional education elsewhere, but come to us to develop passion projects or just because their parents want to see them fall in love with learning. We have learners who visit one of our learning hubs a couple of days each week, and then engage in home learning for the remainder of the week; something that particularly suits some of our neurodiverse learners. This truly is . blended learning in its broadest sense!

What makes this all work is the fact that the learners are in control and are agents of their learning. We support, guide, mentor, suggest, and encourage but we do not sculpt or direct. Taking full responsibility for learning doesn’t happen overnight, but with time and expertise, as well as use of a wide range of learning methodologies learners navigate their way towards autonomy and self-directedness – and full ownership of their learning.

When the pandemic happened, we saw firsthand what a self-directed learning culture means for blended learning. Though there were certainly challenges, we saw our learners make the transition to [learning at home and online](#) in a way that affirmed our approach at Learnlife. Self-directed learning was already part of our DNA, and because our learners had honed the skills of self directed learning, this transition worked.

By creating positive conditions for learning and focusing at all times in supporting learners to self-direct and become lifelong learners, we can ensure that however they choose to learn, they have the tools and support that they require.



In Summary...

Our learners also have the opportunity to learn online and to engage with learners from around the world as well as with learners at our Learnlife hubs. Home learners co-create their personal learning plan with their learning guide, who then mentors them through their learning experiences, which happen both online and offline. Through this process, learners gain important lifelong learning skills of self-management and self-organisation. The flexibility of home learning also gives learners an opportunity to incorporate time for wellness and family activities into their personal learning plans.

Blended learning to us is really just...learning. We can engage with learning in many different ways, but to be successful learning needs to happen in a culture and environment of learner empowerment, one where there is support for wellbeing and a fluid and iterative approach to learning. Learning then becomes holistic and one in which learners engage any time, anywhere, in any place in pursuit of their own goals, passions and ideals.

Our Blogs on Blended Learning

- [Blended learning can be so much more](#)

Our Programmes

- [Home Hub](#)

Elements of the Learning Paradigm

- [Online and Blended Learning Experiences](#)

Sources

- [Four Essential Principles of Blended Learning | KOED](#)
- [Blended learning – how to use it, and how to make yours better](#)
- [SUPPORTING STUDENT WELLBEING in a digital learning environment](#)
- [Investigating self-directed learning and technology readiness in blending learning environment | International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education | Full Text](#)
- [\(PDF\) Blended Learning Supporting Self-Directed Learning and Communication Skills of Srinakharinwirot University's First Year Students](#)
- [Blended learning: what's in it for the learner? | by Jisc | Medium](#)