

How to Select the Right eLearning Authoring Tool for You

6 Critical Questions for Instructional
Designers & Developers



Every authoring tool has its own benefits and drawbacks. Nevertheless, when responsible for achieving business results, it's hard to execute a winning blueprint if your authoring tool limits you.

While your authoring tool needs may vary depending upon training needs, budget, and your organization's requirements, there are critical questions worth exploring before making a purchase and investing time in a product.

Choosing a Course Authoring Tool

Here are 6 questions to consider for each authoring tool you're reviewing.

1

Does the Authoring Tool Offer Quality Templates and Stock Assets to Get You Started?

2

What Type of Interactions Do You Need to Build?

3

How Do You Collaborate With Others?

4

Does the Authoring Tool Cater to the Needs of All Learners?

5

Can You Build eLearning for Multiple Mobile Devices Easily?

6

How Can You Have the Best Authoring Experience Possible?

Let's dive into each of these questions.



Does the Authoring Tool Offer Quality Templates and Stock Assets to Get You Started?

The term “rapid authoring” refers to eLearning development using authoring tools and pre-built resources like templates to quickly produce learning content. Templates can range from a single content layout to a more complex interaction to a set of matching layouts with the same overall design scheme. Depending on the project and the deadline, a good template can get you to the finish line in record time. However, basic templates that support rapid authoring may not be enough—especially as you become more experienced. You want your finished project to be the highest quality possible, and not all templates will live up to that standard.

As you’re trialing authoring tools, really explore the included templates to see if they’ll support a variety of learning formats, like non-linear, interactive, adaptive, gaming, accessible, just-in-time training, and microlearning formats. Look for interactive templates with built-in navigation, designs that follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and included instructions to help you transform your content into a course that rocks.



Templates

How to Use Templates

Ideally, whether you've downloaded your template from a third-party assets site or from a library included with your authoring tool, it will include all the source files.

Why do source files matter? Say you love everything about the design of the template—the rounded corners, the headline font, the background graphics—but you HATE the color. If you have the source files to edit, you can go in and select each object and change the color.

For example, you could select a button and customize each button state so that when a learner hovers over a button it changes to one of your brand colors, or changes to gray after the button has been clicked. That's just one way you can customize a template when you have the source files. The possibilities are really limitless!

Pasting in your content and then making small tweaks to course templates here and there allows you to create a custom-looking course in much less time.

As mentioned above, you want your authoring tool to include a good variety of styles and designs. But as you're browsing, make sure that the template library isn't just a bunch of one-off layouts in wildly different designs.

To create a cohesive course, you want a variety of content layouts—like title slides, 50/50 layouts, rule of thirds layouts, bulleted text slides, etc.—and interactions in the same unified design theme. Sure, you could try to recreate that design in a different layout for all the rest of the pages in your course or use the same layout for every page, but the end result won't look as good.

Many developers appreciate the ELB Learning Course Starter templates for that reason. Each Course Starter is a pack of different layouts, interactions, and a pre-built quiz all using the same design. You get the ability to mix and match the layouts and interaction types that work for your content and learning objectives, plus the comfort of knowing all the pages look unified. Course Starters are included within Lectora, and are available for other tools as a separate purchase.

ELB Learning Template examples below.



Stock Assets



Sometimes you need to add extra visuals or effects to your content, even if you started with a template. Whether you want to switch out the included stock images with photos that better represent

your learners' environment or demographic, or want to add sound effects to an element, having access to a stock asset library will save you time.

Choose from over 120 million stock images and vectors in the ELB Learning Stock Asset Library! Plus over 89,000 icons!

Strong Interactivity

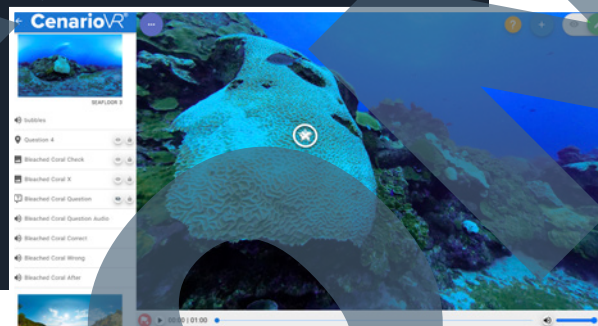
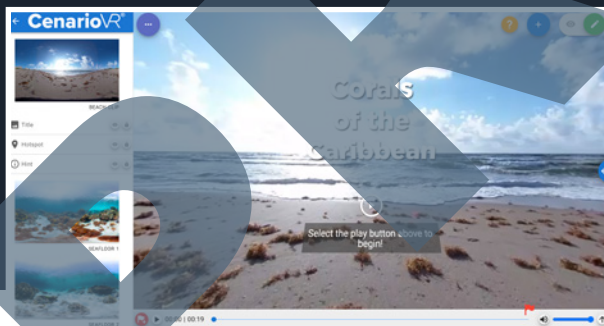
How Far Can You Push Your Authoring Tool?

If you plan on extending the functionality of your course through conditional actions, variables, or custom scripting, Captivate and Storyline have limited abilities for customizing HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.

Lectora® offers the most extensibility of all the authoring products. If you use the included Course Starter templates and built-in question types, you can rapidly author a course without ever getting into custom scripting and complex interactions. However, the flexibility is there for you if you need or want it—whenever you're ready.

With some of the more drag and drop widget-based authoring tools, you're locked into just the standard way they expect you to design a course.

Want to create immersive learning experiences with virtual reality? Check out a VR course builder like CenarioVR®, included in the ELB Learning Authoring Suite.



Quizzing & Assessments



When it comes to online training, quizzing and assessment types can directly impact your learner engagement and knowledge retention metrics. If your learners are not retaining knowledge, you may need to explore more sophisticated options.

Most authoring products offer multiple-choice, matching, and other typical assessment types, whereas, a robust authoring tool will give you more choices, such as game-based, randomized testing, and adaptive questions. Furthermore, a modern authoring tool should equip you to personalize quizzes using variables and branching.

Gamification



Adding game elements to your learning can boost learner engagement and retention. It also makes for a more enjoyable knowledge assessment.

You can build anything from a simple game board path with questions on various squares to a more complex gamified course with points, challenges, multiple lives, and a leaderboard tracking learner progress.

Recreating television quiz shows is one popular way to add interactivity while also testing your learner's knowledge. You can build these from scratch with actions and variables, or look for a game template. Another option is to purchase editable games from a source like [The Training Arcade®](#), which has several with multiple theme options, or pre-built quiz templates.

One of the most popular games in The Training Arcade is the official Jeopardy!® for Training game, created in partnership with Jeopardy Productions, Inc.

The ELB Learning Template Library also offers game templates for multiple authoring tools. Games are a great way to reinforce educational material, assess knowledge retention, measure overall teaching effectiveness, and improve learning outcomes.

A flexible authoring tool will allow you to experiment creatively with other game elements, like taking your learner on an epic quest with different challenges along the way, or incorporating badging and leaderboards. These are just a few ways you can create an interactive, gamified course.

Content Review Options



Many developers share simple storyboards or outlines with their SMEs and stakeholders in Microsoft Word, but it can be hard to combine changes if different people are reviewing at different times and sending back multiple documents with changes. It's a little easier to keep track of comments in Google Docs, but it's difficult to truly convey how an eLearning course will function, look, and sound using Google Docs or Microsoft Word files.

There are several third-party tools that have sprung up to make reviewing and commenting on eLearning courses easier. These

products consolidate reviewing, commenting, and resolution while being able to look at the content and other collaborator's comments in one place. The most popular authoring tools all include their own version of a review tool as well. ReviewLink (included with Lectora) and Review 360 (available with Articulate® 360, not included with Articulate 3) are the simplest for reviewers to use and don't require reviewers to download anything. The Adobe® Captivate Reviewer requires reviewers to download 2 separate applications.

Authoring Tools That Offer Collaborative Authoring



Lectora® (online version), Storyline 360/Rise, Elucidat®, Gomo®, and others all offer collaborative authoring. The key differences among the tools include how they handle versioning versus simultaneous

edits, how many collaborators they allow, and how much developers can customize content.

Accessibility Features in Lectora®

Lectora offers a Use Web Accessibility Settings option that you can turn on at any time while developing your course. When you select this option, Lectora will automatically enable certain features in the application that will assist you with meeting Section 508 standards and the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA. Turning on this setting will:

- » Always publish ALT tags for images and buttons (unless empty alt tag is selected, such as on a purely decorative graphic element) so that screen reader software can interpret and announce visual content.
- » Show only video and audio skins and controllers that are accessible.
- » Enable the “Set Reading Order to Last” property for groups at title level. This property allows you to place navigation buttons at the title level but set them to be read last.
- » Enable the “Language” property for text blocks. Using this property, you can let a screen reader know that a specific text block is different from the default language of the page.
- » Automatically generate captions.

- » Display visible focus indicators. This is a requirement of the WCAG 2.0 AA guidelines. A bright orange outline will be displayed for any element on the page that can receive focus, like an entry field, checkbox, or button. The color and size of the outline are editable.

Many of the pre-built templates available in Lectora are designed with accessibility in mind. That means all graphic elements have alt tags, tab order is specified for interactions, and more.



Designing for a Mobile World

Today, nearly every authoring tool offers some form of responsive design. However, each tool creates responsive content differently.

