To avoid being overwhelmed by the diversity in eLearning, start by looking at the “big picture.” What changes are you trying to effect with training initiatives? Have you been successful? If not, is it because you haven’t defined objectives, or is the process flawed?

Once you’ve answered these questions, determine where eLearning fits into the broader equation of adult learning, beginning with this self-assessment:

1. **Is everyone on board with your training initiatives?** Without buy-in from the C-level on down, your initiative may produce culture shock rather than culture change.

2. **How do you assess competencies?** The best-designed program will fail if you target the wrong skills for development. Similarly, follow-up assessments ensure the training has paid off and identify new areas needing improvement.

3. **Are your asynchronous (self-paced) programs engaging and do they offer true interaction?** Engaging asynchronous training is a great way for learners to acquire the basic “nuts and bolts” of interpersonal skills.

4. **What’s your plan for practice and application of newly-acquired skills?** Our research and experience indicate that these vital steps are best handled live. The medium, though, is flexible, encompassing telephone, virtual classroom and face-to-face interactions.

5. **What support community tools do you offer? Are they used, or have they become online ghost towns?** These can range from self-paced tutorials and online communities to expert-moderated forums, in both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous environments.

6. **Do learners have access to reinforcement?** Good skill reinforcement is where the “just-in-time” concept earns its stripes, allowing learners to grab just enough review, just when they need it.

7. **Does your content follow a sound instructional design process?** High-quality content is research-based rather than guru-based, and is relevant to your curriculum’s skills and objectives.

After answering these questions, tackle the shortcomings in your eLearning programs. When we talk specifically about asynchronous Web-based training, look at these elements:

- **Interactivity.** Good interpersonal eLearning has a high degree of interactivity, such as simulations or games. PowerPoint presentations no longer suffice. Where bandwidth and hardware allow, use audio, graphics and even streaming video to engage learners on multiple levels and heighten the reality of the experience.

- **Interoperability.** Courses can’t exist in a vacuum. They should communicate with a learning management system to track the learner’s progress, scores and other data. To ensure interoperability, build your courses to conform with recognized SCORM and AICC industry standards.

- **Reusability.** By embedding descriptive data (metadata) within the course’s code, you create reusable learning objects (RLOs), which multiply the usefulness of those objects across many courses.

Jack McDaniel is Media Project Manager with AchieveGlobal (www.achieeglobal.com), international provider of training and consulting services in customer service, leadership and sales performance skills.