

Creating a D-I-Y Blended Learning Course

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This article is a superset of the “Creating a D-I-Y Blended Learning Course” article posted on eLearningIndustry.com

Photo clip: TechSmith assets: Group of Students Studying TechSmith Assets - 810-9468-412



Hemingway score: 9

Excerpt

I am setting out to create a new blended course called "Young Person's Guide to Project Management" for release in 2020. Rather than use an LMS, a D-I-Y approach using great apps, quality recording equipment, and careful planning. This tutorial helps you create your own blended courseware.

Why Blended Learning?

Sites like [LinkedIn Learning](#) (aka [Lynda.com](#)) have been providing online, self-study instruction for years. For blended learning, however, that isn't quite enough. A recent CNBC article, "[Bill Gates: Textbooks are 'becoming obsolete'—here's the best way to learn today.](#)" predicts the need for blended learning. [1] Bill Gates is convinced that the future is online books, videos, and interactive quizzes. Not only is student retention of material better, the use of online resources can also be a cost saver as printed textbooks have become very costly.

Rather than write about a hypothetical example, I've chosen to use a real-life blended learning project. *My Young Person's Guide to Project Management* (YPG-PM) course includes a textbook with over 40 chapters covering the fundamentals of project management. Each chapter has more information available online that includes a video, quiz, and downloadable attachments. This combination of self-study and scheduled classes (live classroom or virtual) is what blended learning is all about. The class activity is important as it encourages collaboration and learning with others.

Normally, project management learning material is boring and uneventful. YPG-PM is the only textbook I know of aimed at students in high school or college. I hope to attract motivated displaced workers needing a career change.

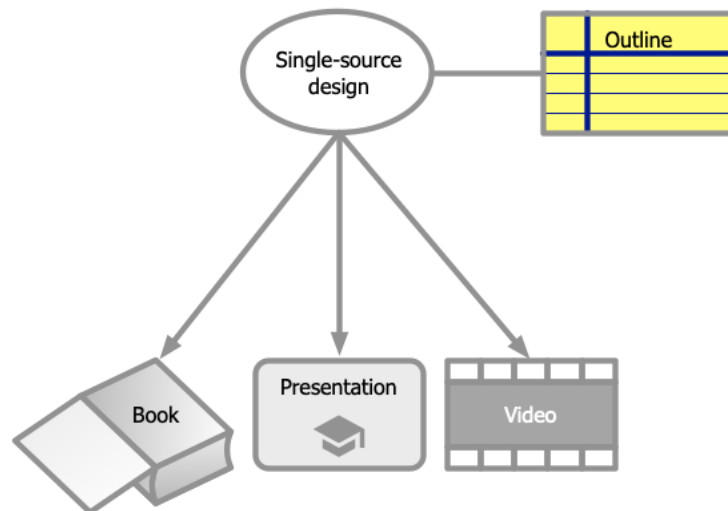
Designing a D-I-Y Blended Learning Course

Rather than invest in a comprehensive learning management system (LMS), I wanted to see if I could put a simple one together as a do-it-yourself (D-I-Y) project. There are well over 100 viable LMS options available on the market. A few are free (sort of) and most are pretty costly to use and maintain. If you want to examine early versions of this blended learning course, browse to <http://www.ygp-pm.com>.

For the online video part of the blended course, check out my three-part series on creating a professional home studio on eLearningIndustry.com:

1. [Creating A Quality eLearning Home Office Studio \(LSM site\)](#)
2. [Recording Professional App Training Videos \(LSM site\)](#)
3. [The Process of Producing App Tutorials \(LSM site\)](#)

To start, identify common elements to be used to produce a book, presentation, and online video:



By organizing what is common (and what isn't), the outline becomes the central repository of information used for every chapter (topic). The outline contains headings, scripts, artwork references, quiz questions and answers, and effects used in presentations and videos. As you might guess, an outliner app makes adjusting the order of content super easy.

Without the use of an LMS there needs to be a way to host lessons. I posted each chapter to my TechSmith's Screencast.com account. That means purchasers the book will be viewing online videos on Screencast. Screencast supports Camtasia-made videos with closed captioning (CC) and online quizzes. Screencast even has a facility to host downloadable attachments on each video web page.

There are a few downsides to a D-I-Y approach. Screencast.com doesn't have a way to authorize students or track their progress. There is also no ability to produce a certificate of completion which

I'll figure that out later. Otherwise, the book includes "secret" URLs to this online information and the student can simplify access by setting up a free Screencast.com account.

Apps Used to Create the Course

I use a Mac and the most important apps I use are readily available and not too outrageously expensive:

- *Outliner*: The Omni Group OmniOutliner
- *Grammar and sentence structure checker*: The Hemingway Editor app
- *Draft document app*: Microsoft Word (from the Office suite)
- *Book document app*: Adobe InDesign (from the Creative Cloud suite)
- *Drawing app for business graphics*: The Omni Group OmniGraffle
- *Presentation app*: Microsoft PowerPoint (from the Office suite)
- *Video recording and editing*: TechSmith Camtasia
- *Online posting of videos, downloadable attachments*: TechSmith Screencast.com

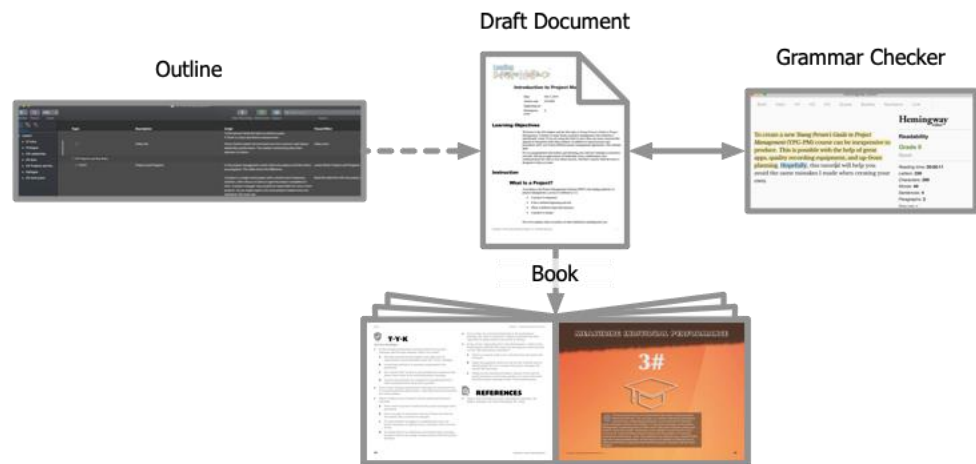
The Textbook as the Focus of the Course

Creating a blended learning course takes *considerably* more time than writing a book. In my own project, the YPG-PM course is scheduled to be completed in the first half of 2020. I have identified the textbook as the springboard to all of the course material:



To make the book accessible to everyone, design the book for the most popular formats: print, PDF, and Kindle. For YPG-PM, each chapter includes instruction material, class exercises, and tests. There is self-study that includes a condensed video presentation of the material, downloads that the student can use, and a short quiz. (“Self-study” is a subtle way around calling it “homework.”)

The figure below shows how the book is created:

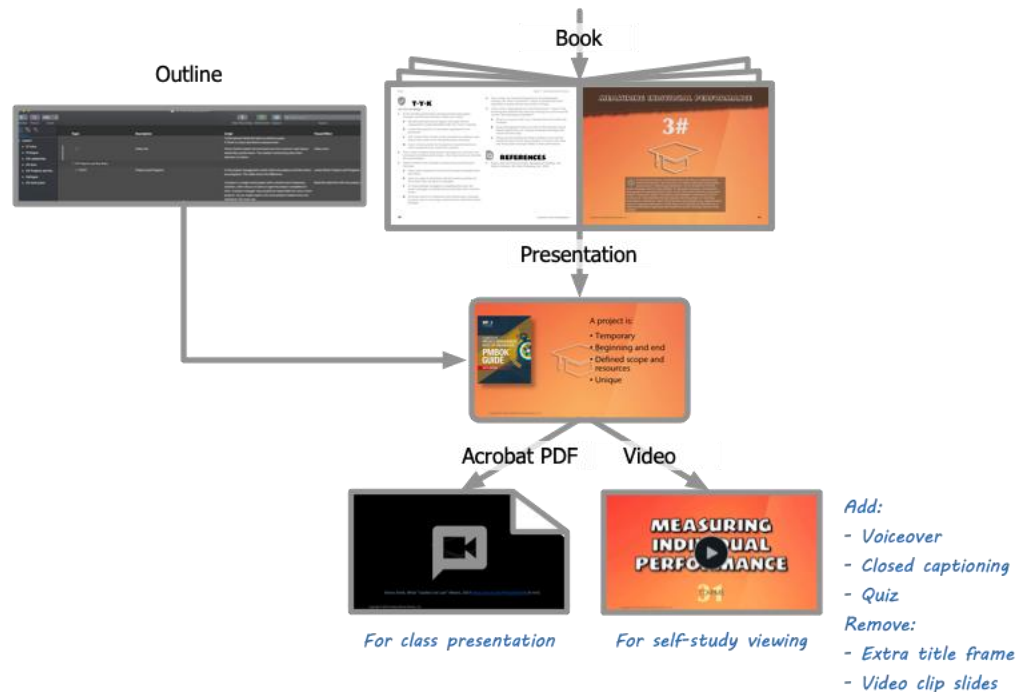


As an outline is created, a draft document is formed. Document text is double-checked with a grammar checker app. Grammar checking found in Word or InDesign don't compare to what the Hemingway app offers. Hemingway evaluates the text and since YPG-PM targets high school students, text must have a readability range between grades 7 and 10.

The draft document text is then placed in the textbook using a page layout app like Adobe InDesign. You *could* try to use an app like Microsoft Word to produce the final textbook, but you'll never achieve the professional look common in textbooks. Most importantly, InDesign supports accurate four-color mastering and complex layout of text and graphics.

Create the Videos

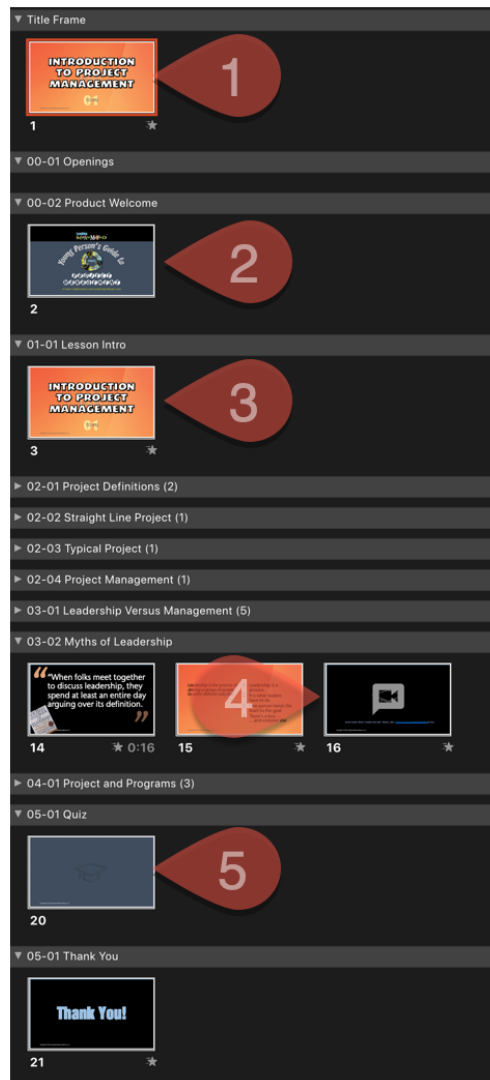
Blended learning encourages the extensive use of video. For this reason, a video of the most important material in each chapter of the book is created. A practical approach that just about everybody does is to create a PowerPoint slide show and use Camtasia to record it. In Camtasia, add a voiceover, closed captioning, and a short quiz. In my case, videos are primarily used for self-study. The PDF version of the slide show can be used to complement the textbook during class instruction. (Neither the student or the instructor needs the original PowerPoint presentation.)



The outline is also extremely critical in this stage. It should include the voiceover script, reference to artwork, animation and other effects used, and questions and answers to the quiz. Any material you want the student (or instructor) to download should be packaged up and added to the Screencast video page. This includes the PDF version of the presentation, templates, documents, and worksheets.

Special Considerations in Handling a Presentation Slide Show

Each presentation begins with a title frame slide. All remaining slides are organized in numbered sections:



To produce a PDF document with slides for the instructor

When exporting the presentation to PDF do the following:

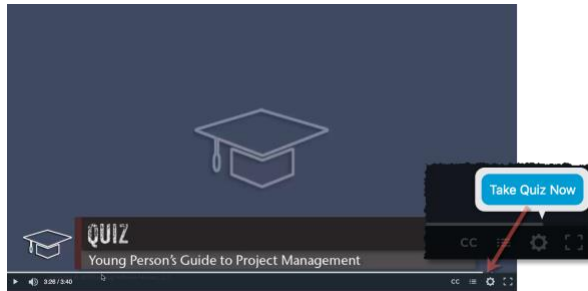
1. Leave the title slide.
2. Hide or remove the book title slide.
3. Hide or remove the lesson info animated slide (redundant).
4. Leave any video slides. The URL hyperlink in the caption should allow the video to be displayed in a separate browser window.
5. Hide or remove the quiz slide.

To record the presentation for editing in Camtasia

When using the presentation in video production with Camtasia, do the following:

1. Restrict the title slide to one frame in the video.
2. Leave the product welcome book title slide.
3. Leave the lesson intro animated slide.
4. Since Camtasia doesn't easily accommodate a URL or video within-video, hide or remove any video slides. *The instructor displays these video shorts from either the downloaded presentation PDF or from the book.*
5. For the quiz, extend the duration of the blank quiz frame to accommodate the lower third animated display.

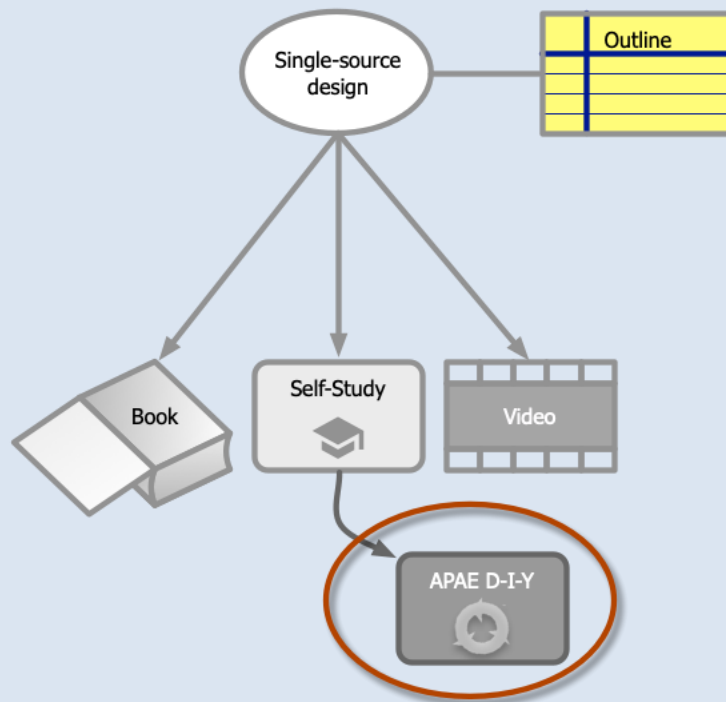
The actual quiz logic won't let the student proceed without taking the quiz. See the figure below.



Reusing the Presentation Slide Show for Other Purposes

There is one more benefit that you may wish to consider.

By carefully planning topic content and presentation, the book's slideshow can be tailored for use in live Applied Project Acceleration Engagements (APAE):



Class exercises in the YPG-PM book are not included in the self-study presentation and may be added to the APAE D-I-Y presentation. Everything else (including URLs to online videos) can be

used. PowerPoint template backgrounds need to be changed (from the education cap to a three-arrow circle).



What a great way to let the customer select presentations to form a custom workshop. For more information, browse to <http://www.leadingswmaniacs.com/apae.html>. (A production note is that specific year range in copyright notices in the footers are removed.)

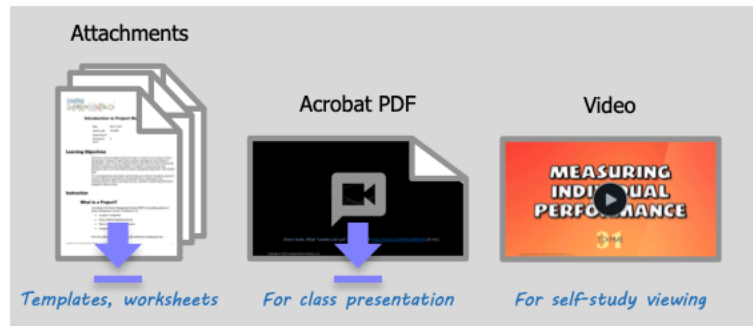
To transition the presentation for componentized topics in APAE:



1. Hide or remove the title frame and product welcome slides. Don't forget to remove the YPG-PM chapter number.
2. Use the lesson intro animated slide.
3. From the YPG-PM book, introduce team exercises.
4. Hide or remove the quiz placeholder slide.

Posting the Videos and Attachments

ScreenCast provides a web-based folder structure that works perfectly for each chapter's online information. I found folders to be the best way to keep each chapter's online information organized. Access to each folder could be password-protected (which is identified in the beginning of the textbook). The video is posted for viewing with closed captioning enabled. The PDF presentation is uploaded as an attachment along with any other artifacts. I make it easy by compressing these into a ZIP file.

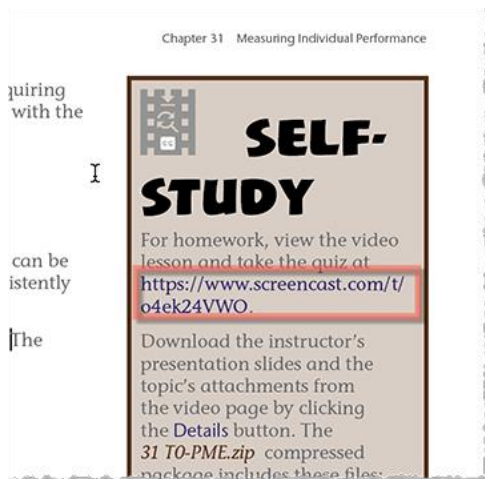


Posted on Screencast.com

Each of these video webpages has a unique URL generated by Screencast.

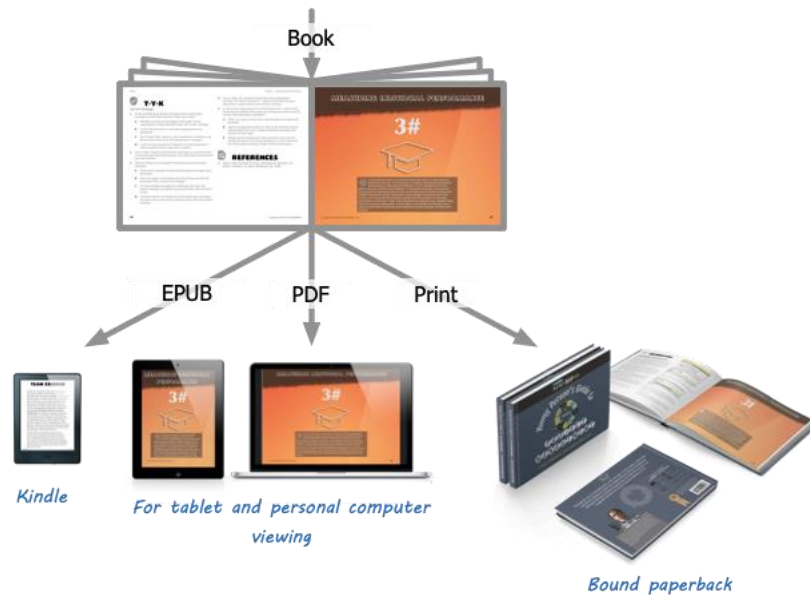
Finishing the Textbook for Production

Take the URL generated for the video and downloads web page on Screencast and insert it in the book:



By employing a single-source book design, you should be able to render the textbook to at least three different uses:

- **Kindle:** In EPUB format
- **Online:** In viewable PDF format
- **Print production:** In full-color PDF format



There are different approaches to designing books to accommodate different devices and different output formats. LinkedIn Learning has some great videos on how to do it and, I wrote a book on the very subject named [InDesign to Kindle, 2nd Edition](#). You can choose to download it for free by clicking a secret, al link. Scroll down to the book thumbnail and click on that itsy-bitsy blue letter “o”.

You know, there’s nothing like your very own D-I-Y project!

References

1. Elkins, Kathleen. “Bill Gates: Textbooks are 'becoming obsolete'— here's the best way to learn today.” CNBC Make it (*article*). February 13, 2019. <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/02/12/bill-gates-the-best-way-to-learn-today-is-not-from-textbooks.html>.

Bio

Ken Whitaker, managing director of [Leading Software Maniacs](#), has more than 25 years of software development leadership and training experience. He has written books on leadership and is an innovator in instructional design and agile project leadership workshops. Ken is the creator of PM Chalkboard, a software company VP, and most recently the editor for *Better Software* magazine. He is creating a unique gamification product that redefines learning and a visual book/workshop called *A Young Person's Guide to Software Project Management*.