Advantages and Disadvantages of
Three Categories of Delivery Modes

The following summarizes some commonly cited advantages and disadvantages of delivery modes. The list is derived from discussions in past WMO Online Courses for Trainers and other resources.

Classroom and Online learning are delivery modes typically associated with formal learning solutions, with a series of planned activities, presentations, or projects in a defined period of time, and usually some form of assessment. Informal and Semi-formal Learning solutions are more self-directed and occur in the workplace or in other locations outside training facilities. They have diverse delivery modes, include On-the-job training, mentoring, self-directed learning, and interacting in professional communities (Communities of Practice).

Advantages and disadvantages are sometimes stated as comparative qualities of different solutions, and not absolute qualities. In the list, you will see increased opportunity for interaction assigned to Classroom Learning and also for Online Learning. How can this be? Perhaps different kinds of interaction are being referenced.

Consider this:

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, wrote that all things have "essential" and "accidental" qualities. Essential qualities are inherent and never change. They are part of the thing's nature. Accidental qualities are those that are changeable, and that could be related only to the most common, familiar, or traditional use. For example, a wooden chair is *essentially* a moveable place to sit (a chair), but only *accidentally* wooden (it could have been made of steel, wicker or leather). Furthermore, I might use the same chair to stand on when I change a ceiling light bulb. Is it now a ladder and not a chair, or is it merely showing its flexibility?

If your first experience with online learning is a self-directed module with no interaction with others, that might influence your impression of what online learning can be. What are the essential qualities of the classroom and online environments, and which are accidental? As you read the lists, consider if we should be thinking more broadly about classroom, online, and informal delivery modes. What advantages can we draw from them to achieve the best outcomes? How can we overcome the "accidental" disadvantages? Should we be blending the solutions and delivery modes to achieve an optimum outcome?

Classroom Learning

Advantages	Disadvantages
Learning time can be structured and focused	Available time can be limited
High level of interaction and social engagement is possible	Individual needs (level, pacing) of learners are hard to meet with large groups
Questions and feedback between trainers and students is easy	Format often leads to lecturing with limited interaction
Easier to judge if students are learning	Cost is high due to travel and facility needs
Learning activities can be flexible/adaptable	Inconvenient to be away from job and family
Collaborative learning is possible	Learners may have jet lag.
Practical exercises are easier	Limited participants and trainers due to costs and time commitments
Familiarity of the format to trainers and learners	Language and culture barriers can be prominent

Online Learning

Advantages	Disadvantages
Flexibility of time and place for learning	New technical skills required for trainers and learners
Lower cost for large audiences	Difficult to recognize individual learner needs
Student control over pace of learning	Lack of direct interaction with learners restricts personal guidance
Increases access to learning for more participants and facilitators	Can create feelings of isolation
Can increase opportunities for interaction	Requires higher motivation and time management skills of learners
Makes available resources for pre-and post-course review	Online learning may be unfamiliar

Informal Learning Delivery Modes

Informal learning is a very broad category of *learning solutions* that can include many different delivery modes, including everything from self-directed learning to on-the-job coaching and mentoring, to professional communities of practice. We will further identify the advantages and disadvantages using three delivery modes: **Workplace learning** (on-the-job), **Self-directed learning** (independent learning, often using online resources), and **Communities of Practice or CoP** (groups of colleagues that share about work experience and skills in the workplace, at conferences, or online).

Advantages	Disadvantages
High degree of interaction and social engagement *(Workplace learning and CoP)*	Unfamiliarity of the format *(Self-directed learning and CoP)*
Allows for collaborative learning *(Workplace learning and CoP)*	Too little structure *(Self-directed learning and CoP)*
Practical, realistic exercises and problems are more likely *(Workplace learning and CoP)*	Limited opportunities for questions and feedback *(Self-directed learning, at times CoP)*
Learning control and flexibility *(Workplace learning and Self-directed learning)*	Limited interaction and social engagement *(Self-directed learning)*
Content will always be current (*CoP and Workplace learning*)	Unknown reliability of content *(Self-directed learning, potentially CoP)*
Few time constraints *(All)*	Potentially inefficient if used as a primary mode *(All)*
Low cost *(All)*	Limited sources of motivation *(Self-directed learning)*
Highly convenience *(All)*	
Participation is open to many *(CoP and Self-directed)*	

Questions to consider:
- When is the flexibility of online learning a benefit? When is it harmful?
- Online learning eliminates travel costs, but can it increase development costs?
- What creates limitations to class size for online and classroom courses?
- In what ways can an online course be more interactive than a classroom course? In what ways can a classroom course be more interactive?
- What advantages does asynchronous online learning bring?
- Is taking a course in a non-native language harder online or in the classroom?
- Can a community that is built fully online be effective? Can a community that begins face-to-face survive online?
- Is a community built in the work environment stronger than one built in a formal learning environment?
- How can learning during the context of working make learning more effective?
- What costs are saved and not saved in using informal learning approaches?
- In what ways is self-directed learning more effective than structured learning events?
- When can a community of practice (for example, a professional society) meet learning needs better than formal learning events?
- Which form of learning can carry higher relevance to workplace challenges?