

Achieve Better Results With Quality Assurance

A formalized review process can save L&D teams time and ensure credibility.

BY HADIYA NURIDDIN

L&D teams create products, and like any other product, the L&D function should have quality guidelines that designers and developers must follow. Products should be error-free, and there also should be standards for functionality, user experience, visual design, and overall consistency. While your team may have an informal quality assurance (QA) process, any holes in it can put the team's credibility at risk.

What it is

People often use QA and quality control interchangeably, but the terms do not have the same meaning. In *Managing the Testing Process*, Rex Black explains that quality control is about the product, while QA is about the process.

"Quality Assurance is generally defined as the process used to ensure a product meets quality standards," he writes. "It consists of activities that occur before and during the production process. Essentially, measures to ensure a quality product should begin before the product exists."

How it works

When L&D teams build and implement a sound QA process, they can ultimately speed

up product development by formalizing standardization and reducing the amount of rework.

Guidelines

To build a solid and sustainable QA process, make sure it has the following characteristics.

Realistic. Critically think through the time and resources your team can devote to the effort needed to sustain a QA process. For example, if you institute a peer-review policy, yet everyone's workload is going to stay the same, be realistic and empathetic about how much time each person can devote to reviewing someone else's work.

One way to accomplish that is to be as collaborative as possible as you build the QA process. Ideally, a small team of designers and developers should build it. Identify a team lead who should ask for input along the way. Solo L&D practitioners may have to build the process alone but should still get input from people who may serve as reviewers. An added benefit of collaboration is that people tend to be more invested in processes they help create.

Scoped. The QA plan should specify what types of reviews will occur, who's involved, and what role each person plays. There are at



CHECKLIST Building a Quality Assurance Process



Consider the time and resources your team can devote to sustaining and executing a QA process.



Identify the problem that needs to be solved and tie it to a metric.

least three types of reviews: A content review ensures content accuracy, a design review gives the course designer or developer feedback on the instructional strategies used in the course, and a technical review ensures that learners can successfully navigate and complete the course.

Define the scope of the review processes and explain what actions each type comprises. Depending on the product's complexity, all three reviews may not be required. Proper scoping acknowledges all the necessary reviews while explaining what the team gains by conducting them and what it loses by eliminating them from the workflow.

Simple. Teams tend to ignore needlessly complex processes or make so many exceptions that team members essentially no longer use the process. Designing a sustainable method may require a few trade-offs on thoroughness, but a more flexible process is better than none.

Be sure to specify when to use the QA process. Not every job aid, presentation, or e-learning module may require this type of oversight. If the method appears to be a disproportionate response to product needs, commitment will begin to wane.

Effective. Determining the effectiveness of any process begins with identifying the problem the process is supposed to solve. Once you pinpoint the problem, tie it to a metric. Is it the number of reported errors? Time spent updating courses? Time and labor involved in the review process? After identifying the metric, determine what activities will influence it and how you can measure its movement.

Consequential. QA must mean something to your team. When team members follow the process, they must gain something. Likewise, it must cost team members something when they do not follow it. What

RESOURCES

Black, R. 2009. *Managing the Testing Process: Practical Tools and Techniques for Managing Hardware and Software Testing*. Indianapolis, IN: Wiley.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2018. "Quality E-Learning Checklist." [cdc.gov/training/development/e-learning-design/quality_e_learning_checklist.html](https://www.cdc.gov/training/development/e-learning-design/quality_e_learning_checklist.html).

Malamed, C. n.d. "Tips for Quality Control of Online Learning." The eLearning Coach. thelearningcoach.com/elearning_design/quality-control-for-online-training.

are the consequences of ignoring a QA process once it's in place—for that person, for your team, and for the products the team creates? Define those consequences, communicate them, and most importantly, apply them consistently.

Flexible. After creating one process, design a streamlined version of it, emphasizing that it's a less ideal route to take. Doing so will help secure the integrity of the full process so that its shorter version will not usurp it. Structured flexibility is key to your process' longevity.

Results

After you've designed the QA process, everyone must execute it consistently. Get an early win so that your team quickly develops an affinity for the method and sees that it's worth the time and effort. If commitment to QA begins to wane, assume that you may need to revise the process rather than abandoning it. But remember that constant changes could also diminish confidence in the process' integrity. Begin by revisiting it quarterly and then ultimately settle on a one- to two-year schedule.

Throughout the formal QA process' development, encourage team members to see it as a necessary part of product development as opposed to busy work they must complete when they have time. The method should appear on every project plan and come up in every project meeting. Change the focus of accountability from completion to quality, and support your team members as they adjust time allocations accordingly.

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Specify what types of reviews will occur, who's involved, what role each person plays, and when to use the process.



Define and communicate consequences of ignoring the QA process and apply them consistently.



Execute the process and refine as needed.



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