

The global virtual classroom requires learning delivery that is free of cultural clichés and abundant with options for every scenario. Five important practices can help facilitators and designers zoom in on what works.

# A Harder Focus on the Global Classroom

By Darlene Christopher

Imagine yourself in a virtual classroom. The instructor puts an image of a game of cricket on the screen and says, “Sometimes dealing with pressures at work may feel like a game of 20/20 limited cricket, where you are chasing a score of 220 and it’s the last over. You have the best fast bowler to face and only one wicket in hand!” If you are an American, the analogy to cricket would probably fall flat. You wouldn’t know what the instructor was talking about.

Or, take another scenario: You want to take work-related training offered in a virtual classroom, but it’s offered only on weekends because you work in a country in which the official work week is not Monday through Friday (the case in many parts of the Middle East).

Either of these scenarios would leave learners feeling excluded and thinking that virtual classroom training is not going to meet their needs. But when virtual classroom training includes global participants, these kinds of scenarios happen all the time. So when you

prepare for a global audience as a facilitator or designer, you need to think globally about *every* aspect of the training from the learner perspective, and make adjustments geared to those perspectives. Following are five key areas to consider.

## 1. Logistics

When you select the time and date for the training, keep in mind time zones, national holidays, and the official work week. First, determine the location of your participants, then create a table

with start time and end time to see if you can complete your training during work hours for all participants. The more global locations you need to include, the more complicated the time and date selection becomes. Your table may reveal that you may need to deliver the same training twice to reach participants who are widely dispersed around the world.

Next, use websites such as [qppstudio.net](http://qppstudio.net) to check for national holidays. You’ll want to confirm if the local office observes the national holiday (for example, Martin Luther King Day in the United States: Some organizations observe it and others do not). Finally, confirm the official work week for participants since it’s not Monday through Friday for the entire world. In parts of the Middle East, for example, the weekend begins on Thursday or Friday.

## 2. Content

In a physical classroom, you can easily spot cultural misunderstanding—quiz-zical looks staring back at you—and be

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able to quickly clarify. However, since the facilitator cannot make eye contact with participants in the virtual classroom, it's critical to comb through your materials and adjust or remove culturally inappropriate content or examples. References to sports, politics, television shows, and pop culture don't always have meaning across cultures.

Next, review the images in your slides and other digital materials to ensure that they suit the global audience. Finally, if your slides include images of people, ask yourself if they reflect the cultures represented by your audience. If not, make adjustments as necessary.

### 3. Learning styles

An exciting aspect of a global audience is the diversity in the virtual classroom. Keep in mind that people raised and educated in different parts of the world will come to your virtual classroom with a variety of learning styles and perceptions about what is expected of the instructor and the participant.

Set expectations beforehand with clear instructions about how the session will run and the types of exercises, with an emphasis on how the participant will benefit from the session. Then match diversity with diversity by offering participants a variety of exercises, and giving them options for responding, such as typing in a chat or verbalizing. Participants will select what feels right for them.

Use polls and instant feedback tools to engage participants and overcome shyness around speaking or typing in a non-native language. Remember, there

is no magical solution for addressing culturally diverse learning styles. What is important is the facilitator's *awareness* of different learning styles and the incorporation of a range of activities to meet the diverse needs of a global audience.

### 4. Rehearsal

One of the easiest ways to identify and correct unsuitable content in a global training program is to rehearse with a mock audience. Include participants from the target country(s), and instruct them to listen and look for items that are not culturally appropriate or that won't have meaning for a global audience. If your mock audience identifies problem areas, ask for suggestions or brainstorm ideas on how to adjust and improve your materials to make them culturally appropriate.

If you can't rehearse with someone from the target country, look for someone who has experience living or working in the target country. As a last resort, rehearse with someone who did not grow up in the same country as you. This person will be able to spot the most egregious errors.

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### 5. Facilitation

Once you've adjusted your material, it's time to think about the spoken word. As you facilitate, use "international" English that is free from slang, idioms, and references that only people from one

country would understand. I'm assuming that you will deliver the training in English, but this rule applies for any language. To help participants whose first language isn't English, speak clearly, and slow down your speech.

In a face-to-face setting, learners can rely on body language, facial expressions, and a bit of lip reading to fill in language gaps. In a virtual classroom, these cues are limited or absent, so adjust your speech to compensate. Another technique, if you are co-facilitating, is to agree in advance with your co-facilitator the key messages from each section of your course, and type them into a text file. Then, the co-facilitator can copy and paste those key messages into the chat area for emphasis as the facilitator speaks. Posting key messages into the chat area provides reinforcement and helps to clarify meaning for non-native speakers.

Follow these tips to ensure you hit a *home run* with your global virtual classroom, or rather, that you are *successful* in the global virtual classroom. By accounting for the participants' perspectives and making adjustments based on them, you will make participants feel included, maximize learning transfer, regardless of their location or cultural background, and make them eager for more.

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