What is Microlearning? Everything You Need to Know

When you're trying to wrap your head around a huge amount of new information, it's easy to feel overloaded. It's much more effective to break up learning materials into small, digestible segments. This approach is called microlearning. It provides learners with the flexibility to learn at their own pace and grasp important information in short periods of time. Let's take a dive deep into how you can start using microlearning to your advantage.
Microlearning is a learning approach that focuses on small doses of training material that learners can comprehend fairly quickly. It takes a topic, skill, or idea, breaks it down into its most vital parts, and teaches them individually.

Compared to other learning approaches — like macrolearning — that are more comprehensive and focus on the big picture, microlearning exposes learners to only the most applicable concepts for their current needs. It’s no surprise that research has proven that microlearning drives over 20% more information retention than long-form training.

Also known as nanolearning, microlearning may be delivered through a variety of content including text, infographics, audio, presentation, and interactive games. Since it involves small chunks of information, microlearning fits in naturally with mobile learning, where learners consume the knowledge they need through devices like smartphones and tablets.

Microlearning’s use cases are nearly endless. If your organization has recently released a new product, you can use microlearning to train your employees on it. Rather than going over every single feature at once, each feature can serve as its own learning segment that employees can easily retain. If your employees need to obtain compliance certificates, you can break up the complex information they need to understand and quiz them on each segment individually to improve retention. This makes it much more likely that they’ll get certified within your required timeframe.
Advantages of Microlearning

There are some compelling reasons to make microlearning part of your learning ecosystem:

- **Fast Delivery**: Microlearning and shorter course delivery times go hand-in-hand. This learning approach can allow you to create a course with many segments in an hour or less. It’s ideal if you’d like to respond to ever-evolving business goals and training demands quickly.

- **Cost-Effective**: Microlearning lets you focus on the key points you need to impart, improving efficiency. Additionally, you can use a traditional learning management system (LMS) — a software application specifically designed for the delivery and management of eLearning content — to create your content, so you don’t have to invest in fancy microlearning tools.

- **Increased Engagement**: When content is delivered in small, bite-sized pieces, learners are more likely to stay engaged. They may feel like they’re simply exploring their favorite app on their phones rather than learning in a formal environment.

- **Improved Retention**: Microlearning makes it a breeze for learners to retain what they’ve learned. They only have to remember small, useful learning segments rather than a lot of detailed information that they may or may not use.

- **Flexibility**: With microlearning, learners can engage with the material on their terms whenever they have time. All they have to do is take out their mobile device and dive in — as long as you’re delivering your content through a learning management system (LMS) that provides a seamless mobile experience.
Every learning approach comes with some challenges, and microlearning is no different:

- **Communicating Complex Concepts**: Microlearning is designed to deliver straightforward pieces of information. If your goal is to educate learners on complex concepts, however, you’ll need to invest the effort needed to break down the concept into the many small segments that microlearning requires while still providing your learners with a cohesive experience.

- **Low Commitment**: Since smaller lessons don’t require as much dedication, some learners may not commit to them in the way you’d like them to. They may start a lesson but never actually finish it, or fail to move through the lessons in a timely fashion. The good news is that providing engaging material like videos and infographics can keep them engaged.

- **Not a Substitute for In-Person Training**: Some things are better learned in an in-person, hands-on environment. Microlearning is best when it’s delivered online via an LMS, but it may be a part of a blended learning program that includes in-person elements.

- **Inconsistent Messaging**: Due to the fact that microlearning involves many small learning segments, you risk delivering inconsistent messaging. For this reason, it’s important to make sure your segments have a similar look and feel and that they provide a sensible learning path from start to finish.

- **Content May Be Difficult to Create**: While it may seem like small segments are easy to create, the reality is that microlearning content can be quite challenging to come up with. You have to properly distill information into useful chunks and really think about what you’re presenting to the audience. Varying how you present the information and focusing on the core lesson you’re trying to impart can help.
If you’d like to use microlearning to meet your training goals, be sure to keep the following best practices in mind.

**Tailor Content to Your Audience**
The content you deliver should be ideal for your particular audience. Ask yourself how they usually learn and whether they have experience with similar learning formats. You can also send them a survey and then continue to gather feedback as they complete lessons in order to key in on exactly what information they need to succeed.

**Define a Clear Objective for Each Segment**
Before you create the content, figure out your objective for each segment. This way you’ll be able to keep things concise and laser focused on what you hope to impart.

**Incorporate Different Types of Media**
What sounds better to you: reading two solid pages of text and then answering questions on it, or watching a video with an engaging host and then testing your knowledge through a quick game? Learners won’t be as likely to engage with your content and complete each segment if it’s all text. Mix things up and incorporate various media types to keep your audience interested.

**Remember to Keep It Simple**
When it comes to microlearning, less is more. The less clutter you have, the more likely your learners will stay engaged. Avoid distracting images and filler text. Only use content that adds value.
Add a Social Element
Microlearning doesn’t have to be an isolated activity. Incorporate online communities and discussion boards that enable peer-to-peer collaboration and support. If someone is having trouble seeing how certain lessons connect, for instance, they can quickly reach out and obtain guidance from other learners, rather than waiting for an instructor to assist them.

Constantly Evaluate and Change
Your microlearning segments are not set in stone. After your learners complete them, prompt them to provide feedback to figure out what you can do to improve. Don’t be afraid to change your segments to accommodate learner needs and preferences. You can also take advantage of the reporting capabilities of an LMS to track key performance indicators (KPIs), like assessment scores and failure rates for certain lessons.
An LMS is the ideal choice for managing and delivering your microlearning content. With searchable course catalogs — and sub-catalogs — together with customizable user dashboards, per-catalog privacy settings, and multilingual support, an LMS can create an exceptional front end experience for your users. There's no easier way to incorporate multiple types of media — like videos, assessments, games, and more — while supporting all mobile devices and reducing management overhead through automating many administrative tasks.

The benefits of an LMS don't stop there. Ad hoc reporting capabilities let you quickly grab the data you need and build reports covering all your KPIs that can provide you with guidance on how to fine tune your microlearning approach. If you’re also interested in selling your quality learning content to third parties, an LMS lets potential students easily find and purchase your courses while integrating with popular payment gateways like PayPal.

While some LMSs can be expensive, there are options available that provide all the features and benefits described above at an affordable price — like Inquisiq. Inquisiq gives you the capabilities you need and doesn't charge you for ones you’ll never use. It also supports the most popular technical eLearning specifications, like SCORM and xAPI.

Interested in realizing the benefits of microlearning today? Try Inquisiq for free.