



Learning Context and Online Experience Questionnaire

A questionnaire for your learners to fill in at the start of an online course or activity can provide you with useful information about their learning context and their online learning experience. The answers will allow you to infer such details as their online access, how busy their schedules are, their motivation for taking the course, their proficiency in digital literacy, and their attitudes towards online learning.

In online language learning, the context and the experience of the learners need to be considered continually by the facilitator because of the potential for barriers to develop and create access problems. Language learners in an online space are often relying on a second language to access content and instruction – often this means that more time and more careful consideration for space layout and instruction are needed. Language learners also bring with them into the online space unique cultural backgrounds resulting in behavior that may or may not be understood by other participants.

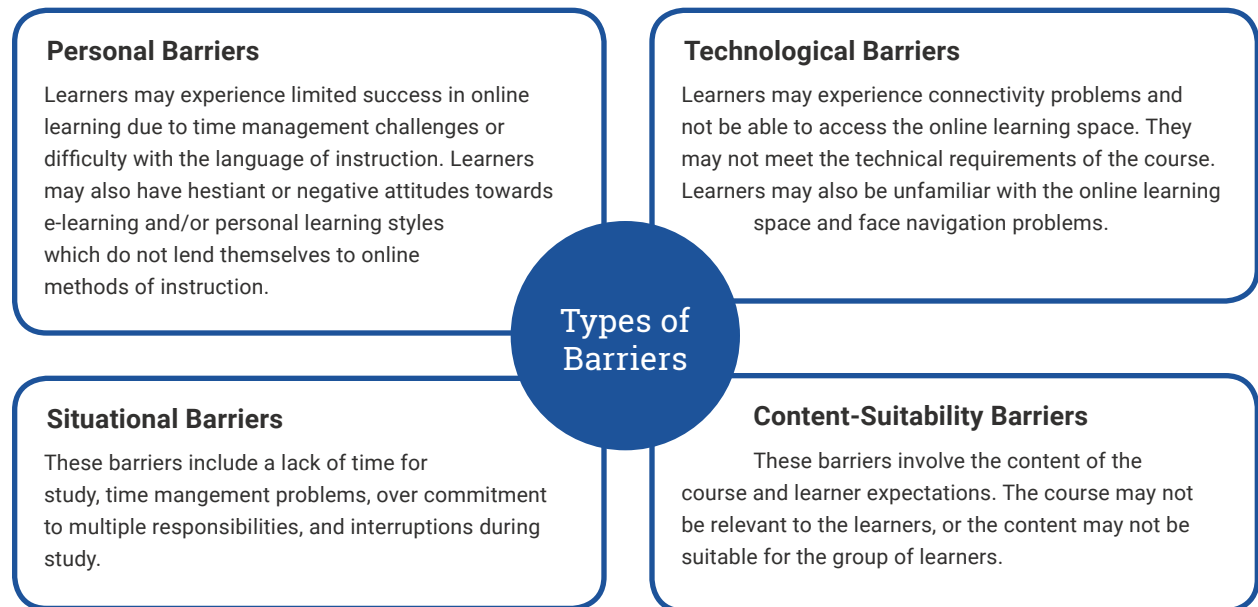
The information gained through a questionnaire can inform many decisions that you need to make as a facilitator while setting up the online space or during the facilitation of the course or activity. When your decisions are informed by your learners' own context and experience, you will be able to make decisions that better suit your learners and hopefully prevent any related barriers from causing problems.

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Barriers to Learning

In an online learning environment, there are many types of barriers that can prevent learning. Here are a few examples:



Throughout an online course or activity, if you notice access or engagement problems with any of your learners, check their answers to the questionnaire first as it may hold insights as to the source of the problem.

At the end of this document is a questionnaire that you can hand out to learners to learn about their own learning context and online learning experience. Adapt the questionnaire to suit your own situation, as open-ended questions might not be suitable if your learners have lower language skill levels. Below is a review of the questions included in the questionnaire, with an explanation for why the information may be useful.



1. WHERE ARE YOU LOCATED?

This may help you determine if there are any time zone gaps to consider (e.g., when forming groups or setting deadlines). Answers to this question may also help to identify any potential rural learners who could experience internet access problems.

2. WHEN DURING THE WEEK DO YOU EXPECT TO BE WORKING ON THIS COURSE?

This can help determine assignment due dates and availability of support. If many learners expect to be working on weekends, then early-week due dates might be suitable. Communications requiring responses may also be high on weekends.

3. WHAT ARE YOUR OWN REASONS FOR TAKING THIS COURSE?

This can help focus the target language in a course and class discussions. It may also help you to set the expectations of formality for an online discussion or activity. If many learners are studying for professional purposes, then you can expect more formal, professional communication.

4. ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING? ARE YOU CURRENTLY STUDYING IN ANY OTHER COURSES?

Online language learners will often underestimate how much time is required for online study, so having a sense of how busy they are will give you an indicator of who might experience time restraints at some point. Busy learners may need additional contact, check-ins, or motivation, especially at the start of a course.

5. WHAT DO YOU USE ENGLISH FOR IN YOUR DAILY OR PROFESSIONAL LIFE?

This will help to focus the language content of the course. It can also help in arranging group or pair work by having learners with similar goals work together.



6. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE.

It might be difficult to compare online learning experiences; however, a general sense of a learner's online learning experience may help to identify learners with low experience, and thus, those who are susceptible to confusion or frustration at the start of a course. Learners without much experience may need additional contact and check-ins especially at the start of a course.

7. HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE COMPUTERS OR SMART PHONES? WHAT DO YOU USE THEM FOR?

The frequency of a learner's computer usage may be an indicator of their digital literacy, or at least their familiarity with digital interfaces. Although digital literacy is much more than frequency of use, this can help to identify learners who do not spend much time in digital environments.

8. WHAT WEBSITES AND APPS DO YOU VISIT AND USE MOST?

Answers to this question might help to identify the types of interfaces that some students are familiar with. The answers might be useful in identifying learners who will experience digital literacy barriers or learners who are digitally savvy and can potentially act as tutors for others.

9. DO YOU ANTICIPATE ANY PROBLEMS THAT MAY MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COURSE?

Learners might be aware of their own inexperience, they might identify time-consuming commitments they have outside of the course, or they might explain situations where they will be on vacation or without internet access during the course.

On the next page of this document is the questionnaire you can hand out to your learners. Before you distribute it to your learners, please review the questionnaire and adapt it for your own context.



Learning Context and Online Learning Experience Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire about your learning context and your online learning experience. Provide short answers to the questions below. You can type your answers in this document, save the file, and attach it in an email. Or, contact your facilitator to arrange another way to respond.

1. Where are you located?
2. When during the week do you expect to be working on this course?
3. What are your own reasons for taking this course?
4. Are you currently working? Are you currently studying in any other courses?
5. What do you use English for in your daily or professional life?
6. Briefly describe your online learning experience.
7. How often do you use computers or smart phones? What do you use them for?
8. What websites and apps do you visit and use most?
9. Do you anticipate any problems that may make it difficult to participate in the course?

Thank you for your responses. Please note that our course does use some technology. If you are unfamiliar with the technology that we use, please ask for help – digital literacy and technology problems are usually not connected to your English language level. Ask for technical help right away to avoid any ongoing problems.

If you are comfortable with the technology that we are using, please offer help to any of your classmates who may be unfamiliar with the technology. You could answer a classmate's question in the discussion forum, or send a direct message to a classmate who has stated that they are new to online learning, for examples. This is a great opportunity to practice your language skills and to build relationships with your classmates.

