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# CONSUMERS GUIDE TO e-LEARNING

Prepared for the Canadian Association for Community Education  
by FuturEd Inc., January 2002

# WHAT IS e-LEARNING?

**The word “e-learning” is used to mean learning using both a computer and the Internet.**

E-learning products or services take various forms. They may be:

- single courses and/or entire programs
- course units, lessons or components
- aimed at individuals or entire groups in classes
- instruction with or without various support services, such as access to a library
- offered for credit at an education institution and/or for general interest without credit
- very expensive, free of charge, or consistent with other public education tuition fees
- aimed at specific age groups and/or any age group
- offered by public and/or commercial education and training agencies
- really effective or of questionable quality

This consumer's guide is best used with e-learning at the post-secondary and adult education level – college and university level, continuing education or work-related skills training. It will help you choose the right e-learning for you by examining one product or service at a time.

**Before you sign up for an e-learning course or program, ask yourself these questions.**

- What is my purpose for taking this course? Do I know what I want or need to learn?
- Do I need a credit or certificate when I finish it, or do I just want to know more?
- How much can I afford to spend? How much time can I invest?
- What hardware and software do I have, and is it enough?
- Where will I access the Internet, what will it cost, and how convenient will it be?
- Are my computer and Internet skills good enough for the course I have in mind? Will I need technical help?

You will need a lot of information to make an informed choice. Good e-learning products and services will provide you with written information and a “demo” to help with decision making.

*This guide is based on the Canadian Recommended e-learning Guidelines.*

# LET'S GO

The background to this Guide is available online at  
<http://www.futured.com> and many other websites.

These questions are designed on three levels to help you select the best e-learning option for you. The first level are the basics – the most important questions. You will progress to levels two and three if the products and services you are looking at meet the basic quality requirements.

For help to understand education terms, go to the glossary at:

<http://www.canlearn.ca/english/help/glossary.html>  
<http://www.canlearn.ca/francais/aide/glossaire.html>

For help to understand technology terms, go to the glossary at:

<http://wombat.doc.ic.ac.uk/foldoc/index.html>

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

Exactly what you are expected to learn – the “intended learning outcomes” – and entry level knowledge or skills necessary for your success

Is this what I want or need to learn? Do I have the entry requirements so that I stand a reasonable chance at success?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

What you get when you finish and who it is recognized or awarded by – e.g., a college credit, completion certificate or professional designation

Can I do anything with this course? Will it be recognized by an education institution or by an employer? Is it a good investment of my time and money?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

How skilled you need to be at reading, taking exams, managing your own time – the learning skills you need for success

Do I have the preparation to do work at this level? Can I get help in this course/program if I need it?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

**Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is NO to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.**

The type of material you'll cover, why it is important and where it has come from

Is the content current and relevant, either to real work or advanced education? Is it well-organized, credible and complete?

**YES / NO**

**Your Comments:**

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

How you will learn – the format for instruction and assessment – e.g., individualized or in a group

Can I learn this way? Would I prefer to learn on my own or in a group? By reading or by listening? By myself or in a group?

**YES / NO**

**Your Comments:**



# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Who will be teaching and assessing you – if actual people are involved (e.g., sometimes the instruction is imbedded in text and exams are computer-marked)

**Your Comments:**

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

Is the instructor / assessor qualified and credible? How important is it that I have a person to communicate with?

**YES / NO**

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

**Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is NO to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.**

How you will be assessed – the criteria for evaluation and success

Is it clear how I will be tested and can I perform my best that way? Are there options? Do I know what is expected for success?

**YES / NO**

**Your Comments:**

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

When you can expect to complete – mandatory and/or flexible timelines

Does the timeframe and schedule work for me?  
Do I have the flexibility I need to do the work and to finish?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

What you need in terms of minimum computer and operating system requirements – with options where they exist

Do I have the equipment and software I need?  
Am I willing and able to buy more?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

What you need to be able to do  
– your technical competence

Do I have the skills to use the computer and Internet? Is there an orientation to get me started?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

What you will pay in total – registration, tuition, books and materials, equipment, other

Can I afford it? Exactly how much is this going to cost? Is everything included, like access to technical assistance?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

**Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is NO to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.**

How credible the product/service is – the qualifications of the content, design and delivery personnel and objective evaluation reports

Does this supplier have a good reputation?  
How do I know? What do other students think?  
Can I see an objective evaluation report?

**YES / NO**

**Your Comments:**

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

How to get started and connect with the supplier – complete registration procedures and services

Is it easy to get started? Do I need transcripts or pre-tests? Is the registration process clear?

YES / NO

Your Comments:



# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

How to get help – contacts for technical assistance and content expertise

Is assistance available 24/7? How do I access technical and content assistance?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 1

## GETTING STARTED

Suppliers of all e-learning products and services should tell you, **IN WRITING**:

Ponder these 15 important questions. If your answer is **NO** to any category of question, consider moving on to another e-learning option.

How to get out if you're not satisfied – policies for withdrawal and refunds

Can I get my money back if this doesn't work for me?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

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Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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YES / NO

The system works for the learner.

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Does the demo or the system work consistently?

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Your Comments:

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# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

Navigation is logical and well-organized.

Can I navigate my way in to and out of the online system? Can I make my way through the materials and find what I need?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

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Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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Content is relevant, well-organized and presented in an interesting manner.

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Does the organization make sense? Is there a logic that I can relate to?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

---

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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YES / NO

Materials are updateable and frequently updated.

Is the content updated, or the same thing year after year?

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Your Comments:

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

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Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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The learning package has options for individuals.

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Can I personalize the course for maximum benefit?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

**Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:**

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A package includes all institutional services (registration, payment, advising, tutorial assistance, library services).

**Your Comments:**

**Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?**

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Do I have access to the learning resources and advice that I need around organizational requirements? Does the system appear to be organized and efficient?

**YES / NO**

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# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

**Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:**

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Online instruction and communication are conducted in "real time" (synchronous) or more flexible (asynchronous) for a reason.

**Your Comments:**

**Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?**

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Do I have to meet specific schedules or can I access the course as and when I am able to? What is the reason that there are scheduled expectations?

**YES / NO**

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

---

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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Everything learners realistically need to succeed is easily and accessible online.

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Am I able to efficiently access the course and the assistance I need online or do I have to find other ways?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

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Communication and interaction opportunities with teachers, content experts, process experts, and other students are provided.

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Your Comments:

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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Are there ways for me to feel connected to the instructors and to other students? Are they convenient and effective?

YES / NO

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# LEVEL 2

IF YOU STILL HAVE MORE THAN ONE e-LEARNING OPTION TO CHOOSE FROM, APPLY THESE CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

---

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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Assessment of learning takes a variety of forms and is against clear, achievable criteria.

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Will I be able to successfully demonstrate what I've learned?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of  
e-learning means that:

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Is there evidence of good e-design  
and e-delivery?

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Treating students as important individuals.

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Am I made to feel like a valued customer?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of  
e-learning means that:

Is there evidence of good e-design  
and e-delivery?

Flexible scheduling and learner-centred  
approaches.

Can I register, learn and be assessed  
when and where I need to?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of  
e-learning means that:

Is there evidence of good e-design  
and e-delivery?

Materials that are appealing and user-friendly,  
well-organized, current and affordable.

Are the materials interesting and motivating?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

---

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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Approaches and materials that are free of cultural, racial, class, age and gender bias.

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Is there any obvious insensitivity to different cultures, sexual orientation, ability, race or gender?

YES / NO

Your Comments:



# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

---

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

---

An understanding that you already know some things and shouldn't have to relearn them.

Is there a Prior Learning Assessment process?  
Do I have the chance to demonstrate my current skills and knowledge so that I can get advance credit or a shortened training program?

YES / NO

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Your Comments:

# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

**Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:**

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A statement of acquired skills and knowledge – what you've learned – that is as important as a completion certificate.

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**Your Comments:**

**Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?**

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Will I be able to add a new body of skills and knowledge to my learning portfolio?

**YES / NO**

# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:

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Various approaches to meet different learning styles – learning best by reading, doing, listening, viewing, demonstrating.

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Your Comments:

Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?

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Will I be able to learn in a way that works for me? Are there options for learning and testing?

YES / NO

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# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

**Good design and delivery of e-learning means that:**

---

Regular, systematic and objective evaluation of all components – instructors, curriculum, student success, processes and resources.

**Your Comments:**

**Is there evidence of good e-design and e-delivery?**

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Do I have access to evaluation reports and references? Is there an efficient approach to delivering a quality service?

**YES / NO**

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# LEVEL 3

STILL CAN'T DECIDE? WANT THE VERY BEST?  
HERE ARE SOME ESPECIALLY DETAILED CRITERIA.

Good design and delivery of  
e-learning means that:

---

Is there evidence of good e-design  
and e-delivery?

---

Demonstration of return on investment  
– a favorable comparison of the benefits  
to the costs for the student.

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Will the benefits of taking this course justify  
the expense? Is it a good investment?

YES / NO

Your Comments:

**If you have suggestions or comments,  
please contact us at: [e-learningguide@futuresd.com](mailto:e-learningguide@futuresd.com)**

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Canadian Association for Community Education  
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