

3 Stages of Creating a Continuous Learning Journey for Your Candidates' Long-Term Success

The professional learning journey has three crucial stages: Learn, Practice, and Certify. Does your certification training program encompass all three stages?



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The great Benjamin Franklin once said that in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes. Yet if he stepped into a time machine to pay a visit to today's professional world, without a doubt he'd add a third certainty to that list: the need for continuous, lifelong learning.

Over the past few decades, we've witnessed a cosmic shift in what guarantees a successful career. The value of a four-year degree is steadily eroding and being replaced with an emphasis on growing (and proving) job-related skills to stay competitive. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation that followed have only accelerated this change. And for the associations and certifying bodies that help professionals build and boost their marketable skills, this accelerated shift presents an incredible opportunity for growth and impact.

Continuous learning is here to stay, and the organizations who understand and embrace the entire continuous learning journey for their candidates and members will be here to stay, too.

Here you'll discover the three continuous learning journey stages and how they can help candidates find long-term success.

“By taking a skills-based approach, we can remove barriers for individuals that might not have a degree, while also increasing talent pools, and helping organizations pinpoint quality candidates for hard-to-fill job roles.”

Hari Srinivasan,
Vice President of Product at LinkedIn

Source: [The Rise Of Skills-Based Hiring And What It Means For Education](#)

What Is Continuous Learning?

Continuous learning is the ongoing [expansion of knowledge and skill sets](#). Developing and honing new professional skills is the best way for people to advance their careers. Working professionals regularly seek opportunities to advance skills as their careers evolve and new technology and trends emerge, which means associations and credentialing organizations are well-positioned to help their candidates (and their candidates' employers) achieve the following:

- Fill skill and knowledge gaps
- Identify new learning opportunities
- Reinforce problem-solving and critical-thinking skills
- Stay ahead of the competition
- Nurture a collaborative culture of new ideas and perspectives



Knowledge of New Skill

Foundational Knowledge: Intermediate

Current Knowledge: Proficient

Continuous Learning Journey Stages

Through the continuous learning journey, learners rotate through three stages as they prepare to achieve their next professional milestone.

The three stages are:



Learn



Practice



Certify

Each stage is crucial in a learner's ability to absorb, retain, and apply the knowledge they've learned.

It's important for organizations to guide candidates along each of the three stages of the continuous learning journey to set their candidates up for long-term success—in turn enabling them to advance with their certifications in the professional world.

Let's dive in to discover what each stage involves.

STAGE 1

Learn

Learning is about acquiring knowledge, and in the case of professional certifications, going one step further and mastering that knowledge. If learners don't actively apply or review new knowledge, they're at greater risk of forgetting it.

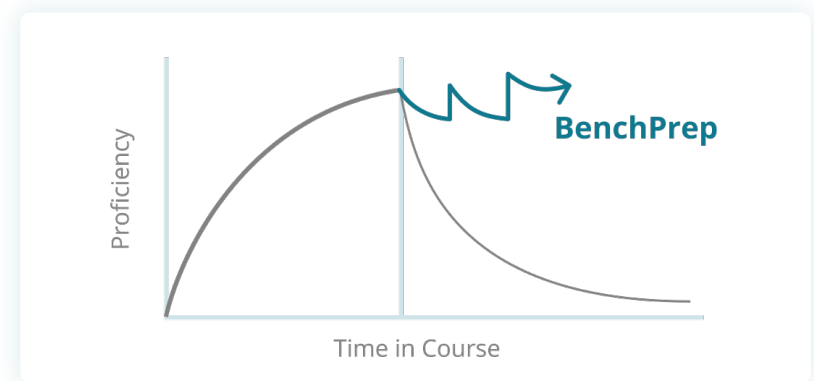
Unfortunately, according to the Ebbinghaus Forgetting curve, we forget almost 80% of what we've learned within the first month. In his book *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*, German psychologist Herman Ebbinghaus sought to discover whether humans actually memorize things.

Source: [Conquer the Forgetting Curve with Microlearning Strategies That Work blog](#)



In his experiment, Ebbinghaus tried to memorize a list of meaningless three-letter words like DOK and EHD. He then tested himself over different intervals—without reviewing the list—to see how well he could remember them. After the first 20 minutes, he'd forgotten 42% of the list. Within 24 hours, 67% was gone. And a month later, he could only remember 21% of the three-letter words.

During this experiment, Ebbinghaus discovered some vital—and still used—lessons about learning and remembering. Upon reviewing his words at key points on the curve, he could drastically reduce the rate at which he'd normally forget.



There are several ways certification training programs can leverage these methods to enhance their candidates' ability to learn and remember crucial information. For high-stakes, critical learning strategies such as spaced learning, microlearning, omnichannel delivery, and personalized learning pathways are all methods of enhancing recall and memory of key points required to master an area of study.



Spaced Learning

One proven strategy for conquering the forgetting curve is spaced learning. Spaced learning demonstrates that repeated exposure to information over designated periods helps you retain and store more knowledge in your memory. Flashcards are a powerful tool for learning and a prime example of using repetition to memorize key phrases or terminology.

Spaced learning requires several repetitions. When designing a certification training program with spaced learning in mind, you'll repeat the following process many times:

- **Introduce a concept to your learners**
- **Allow some time to pass (hours, days, months)**
- **Present that content again to reinforce the lesson**

One widely used practice involves repeating new and more difficult concepts more often while limiting repetition for older, easier topics. Of course, those old and easy topics were new and challenging at one point. But thanks to spaced repetition strategies, learners will have committed the information to their long-term memory.

DID YOU KNOW?

BenchPrep's configurable, cloud-based learning platform leverages the best research-based practices in spaced repetition to deliver maximum learner engagement. One of these practices involves sending learners notifications on their mobile devices with daily questions regarding their most recent lessons. Those questions also provide valuable feedback—whether right or wrong—explaining why the correct answer is such and where they can review the necessary information.

Source: [How Spaced Repetition Helps Learners Achieve Mastery.. blog](#)



Microlearning

Microlearning breaks long-form content into bite-sized modules, ranging up to 20 minutes at a time.

The International Journal of Educational Research Review found [microlearning makes knowledge transfer 18% more effective](#). And according to Software Advice, [58% of workers said they'd use their company's learning resources more often](#) if they were in manageable, bite-sized chunks. Finally, Ray Jimenez, author of 3-Minute Learning, found microlearning can lower development costs by 30% [while increasing development speed by 300%](#).

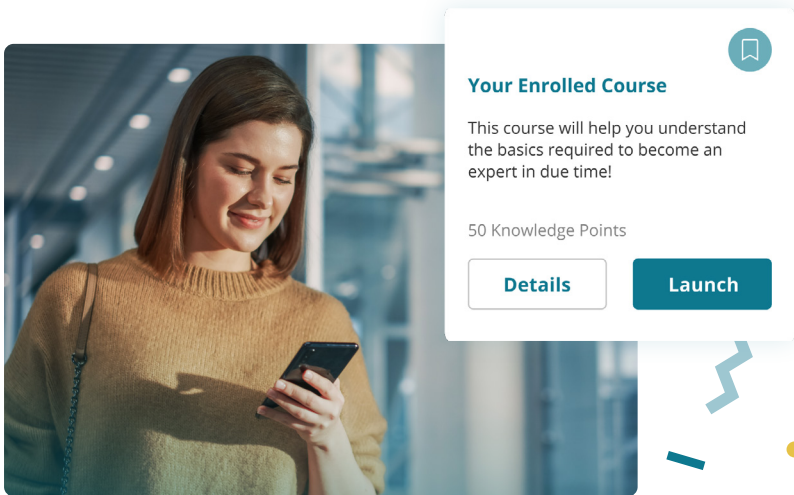
There's more to **microlearning** than simply chopping your long-form courses down into smaller chunks. If you have any unnecessary content, cut that first and then chunk out what remains. If everything seems essential, dial into a few [microlearning best practices](#) to assist you further.

Take a step back to define your course objectives, tie all your content to a specific objective, and then classify which information is essential to understanding each objective. Include only the most pertinent information in the course. Cut out any unnecessary fluff, and ensure your learners aren't distracted by lessons they don't need. Keeping an eye on your business goals and learner outcomes can guide you toward developing [the most effective microlearning courses](#).



Omnichannel Delivery

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced the entire world online, we learned a valuable lesson in the power of omnichannel delivery for continuous learning.



For instance, people spend far more time on their mobile devices than on their laptops or desktop computers. Therefore, mobile-friendly modules may be the only effective way to reach most learners where they are—on their phones.

According to Towards Maturity's InFocus report titled [Mobile Learning at Work](#), 47% of organizations currently use mobile devices in their training programs.

Mobile capabilities encourage learners to engage and study when they have spare time.



Personalized Learning Pathways

Imagine for a moment, a traditional in-person classroom where the instructor doesn't lead the entire class on a one-size-fits-all learning journey. Instead, the teacher hones in on each student individually, taking them on a personalized continuous learning journey that aligns with their unique strengths, skills, interests, and needs.

While this isn't practical in a physical classroom, it is possible to achieve in a digital certification training program. Digital training programs encourage learners to choose how and when they learn, thus providing a more personalized experience. Learners determine the skills they wish to strengthen rather than being lumped into the rest of the class.

Personalized learning is also more engaging. Letting learners decide where to start is often more effective than dictating it to them.

It's no secret that too many learners click through training modules they deem irrelevant just to get them over with. On the flip side, personalized learning plans intend to keep adult learners engaged with the information that is the most important to help them achieve mastery of the subject at hand.

Two World Bank reports, [Remote Learning During the Global School Lockdown](#) and [Remote Learning During COVID-19: Lessons from Today, Principles for Tomorrow](#), determined that remote learning isn't going away any time soon, especially in the business world. Future generations will move toward a mix of in-person and online education. Professional associations and credentialing bodies must learn to embrace this trend to deliver effective programs.

STAGE 2

Practice

Learning new content alone is not enough. Candidates also need to leverage practice questions, self-assessments, and mock exams to put their new-found skills to the test. Ideally, these practice scenarios help build confidence—confidence in the material they need to know to achieve their career goals, and confidence that they'll pass the final examination with flying colors.

Psychology writer Malcolm Gladwell suggests dedicating 10,000 hours of practice toward a skill to master it. While learners likely won't have to allocate 10,000 hours toward a certification training, they'll still need ample time and opportunity to practice the material they've learned before test day.

Source: [The 10,000-hour rule](#)



Benefits of Practice Questions

Practice questions are crucial to reinforcing the learning experiences from the Learn stage. Practice tests ease learners' stress and anxiety on exam day while providing them with valuable feedback in a mock exam atmosphere. Certification training providers must provide learners with as many practice opportunities as possible to set them up for success.

Practice helps learners pass their certification exams

Mock exams allow learners to self-assess and redirect their focus toward the subjects they're struggling with. Ensure you're mixing practice tests and quizzes into the continuous learning journey to help candidates retain and apply what they've learned in your modules.

Practice helps learners feel prepared and confident on exam day

Learner confidence is one of the most important metrics you can track as candidates move through your training program. When taking practice exams, have learners denote how confident they are in a given answer on a scale of very confident to not confident.

While a good guess can still be a correct answer, it indicates a lack of knowledge retention. Depending on the subject matter, incorrect answers could be as costly as life or death, such as in the case of a medical certification.

Practice experiences are what learners want, demand, and crave the most

Your learners want to put their knowledge to the test before exam day. Whether they grew up playing sports or studying hard in school, they know the value of practice.



Practice Test Strategies

Employ these practice test strategies to maximize learner outcomes:

Use mixed-format practice tests

Mixed-format refers to tests with various question types, from multiple choice to fill-in-the-blank. [Research shows](#) that mixed-format tests are the most effective for preparing learners for the final exam, even if the exam is in only one format.

Leverage distributed practice

Several short tests conducted over time, specifically after the learner diverts their attention elsewhere, require mental processing and recall, leading to deeper learning and retention.

Provide feedback

Feedback is crucial to achieving your learning outcomes. This is especially true for the window immediately following the practice test, as researchers found that [delaying feedback was not as helpful as instant feedback](#).

Spaced repetition vs. cramming

Spaced repetition involves breaking practice tests into shorter sessions over a longer period. You're more likely to remember information that has been spaced out and repeated.

The opposite is massed practice, which involves fewer, longer sessions. Cramming the night before an exam would be an example of massed practice. It might help candidates remember lessons in the short term, but they won't retain them long term.



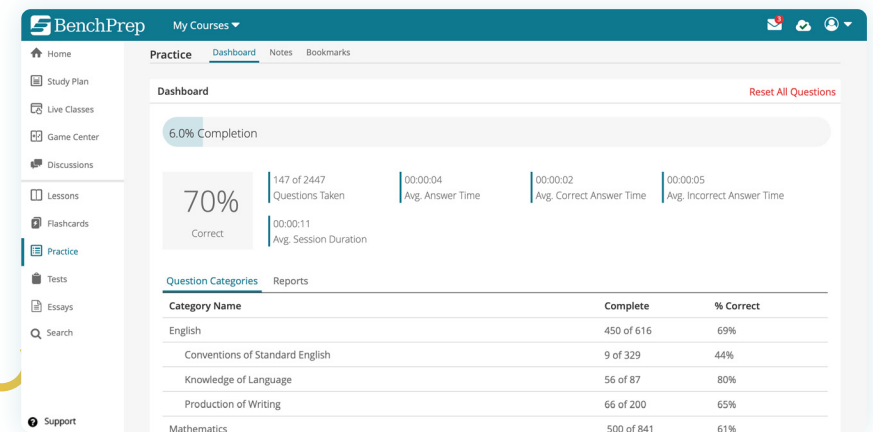
Additional Benefits of Practicing

Learners that feel prepared are significantly less likely to drop out of a course. And by providing online practice tests modeled after the real exam, you'll also be able to [boost learner confidence](#).

Furthermore, the benefits of practice tests don't end with the learner. [Real-time data](#) tells you how your learners interact with and perform on their practice tests. You can easily identify trends among your learner base and see where you can make changes in the lessons to help convey information more effectively.

Practice tests help learners identify their strengths and weaknesses, adding another layer of personalization to the entire certification program.

[Self-assessment](#) is the final critical piece of practice and has the learner go back to review their test. When learners have to grade their work, they can identify where they went wrong and which parts of the lesson they misunderstood. Stumbling upon your own mistakes is the best way to correct them.

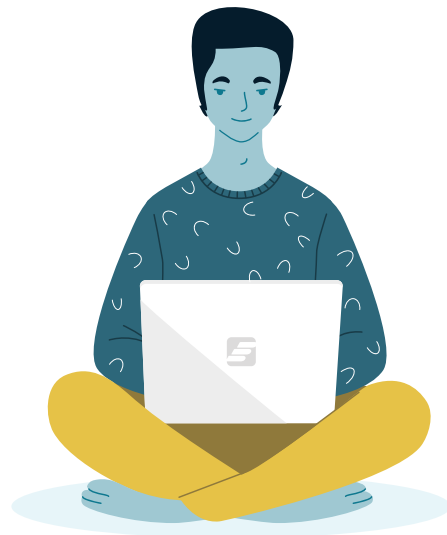


Why Investing in the 'Practice' Stage is Essential for Continuous Learning Success

Think back to Gladwell's 10,000-hour sentiment and imagine reading a book called *How to Play Baseball* before being thrown into a major league game. You probably wouldn't last very long. But if you had adequate time to practice, you might stand a chance. You might not feel like they set you up to fail.

Put yourself in a frustrated learner's shoes. Imagine if the certification training program you're paying for isn't giving you ample opportunity to practice and apply the lessons you're learning. Unfortunately, too many business leaders and educators believe an intellectual understanding is all a learner needs and discount the importance of practice.

Why wouldn't you offer your learners practice opportunities? Doing so provides them many advantages. Don't look for ways to cut corners around practice. Instead, invest in filling gaps with more practice opportunities.



Doing so enables organizations to:

- Build certifications around products, services, or intellectual property (IP)
- Support candidate career goals
- Achieve revenue growth by taking a slice of the external training pie

STAGE 3

Certify

Once learners migrate through the Learn and Practice stages, they will be ready to take (and pass!) the certification exam.

The certification and credentialing industry must be amped and ready to pick up speed as we adapt to the new skills-based economy. Now is the perfect time for associations and credentialing organizations to [capitalize on a wide-open market](#).

[Industry-leading learning companies](#) have already made significant headway in a growing market. Such companies see the increasing evidence suggesting strong interest in skills-based, digital credentials, especially among [diverse adult learners and lower-income backgrounds](#). And since four-year degrees have recently taken a back seat to job-specific skills training, learners enrolled in such programs will have a leg up on the competition.

Certification Exam ⌚ Total: 01:05 Done

Question 100 of 163

How does BenchPrep prepare learners with the skill, knowledge, and confidence required to pass difficult entrance licensing exams?

A
B
C
D



[According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), over 46% of civilian workers were required to have a credential, nearly 6% had a certification requirement, and over 19% required a professional license. The demand for **alternative professional credentials** far outweighs that for higher-education degrees.

In addition, 87% of executives believe people with alternative credentials bring value to the workplace. They also believe alternative certifications are crucial to professional development, and those who earn said credentials gain more credibility. **In their minds, credentialed professionals are better performers.**

Source: [The Rise Of Alternative Credentials In Hiring ebook](#)



Building Trust and Reputation

When professionals are approached for the first time regarding a new career opportunity, their credentials and certifications provide an extra layer of trust and expertise. One unique strategy we have seen work well is called ‘stapling’, where professionals staple a certification to a degree or staple a certification to a job.



Standing Out in the Crowd

Verified credentials and certifications have become a form of currency, especially for professionals looking to stand out in a highly competitive workforce.

Even if their field doesn't require special certifications, learners who take the time to earn one will remain one step ahead of the competition. If you were a hiring manager looking at two identical candidates, but only one earned a professional certification in their field, who would you choose?



Increased Earnings Potential

Professionals can easily use their certifications as a bargaining chip to negotiate higher salaries and career advancement. On the flip side, employers can rest assured knowing their credentialed employees will bring in more revenue for the company—a win-win for everyone involved.

Management	Basic	Proficient	Expert
Finance	Basic	Proficient	Expert

Certifications Save Time and Money

The transferability of industry-recognized certifications is highly valuable, especially as professionals switch jobs at a rapid pace. The time-to-value ratio of such programs is also impossible to ignore. Candidates would rather spend a few months in a certification course than several years seeking a degree.

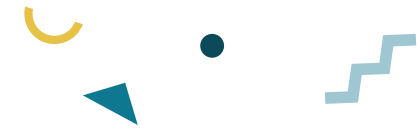
Now is the time for **organizations offering high-stakes certifications** to double down and grow their programs in this skills-based economy.



How Associations and Credentialing Organizations Address the Current Skills Gap Through Continuing Education

Once candidates take the final steps toward achieving their professional certifications, taking and passing their certification exams, they then loop back into the Learn stage as they seek to sharpen skills or develop new ones with continuing education opportunities.

And organizations are making great strides in looking to bridge the skills gap between themselves and professionals by offering continuing education pathways, additional certification training, credentialing, and more.



It's also imperative that organizations highlight credentials during the hiring process. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), most applicant tracking systems (ATS) used by hiring managers don't account for credential information. In fact, [SHRM Foundation President Wendi Safstrom](#) found only a small percentage of HR professionals use ATS screening systems that recognize alternative credentials.

According to McKinsey, 87% of global companies either "have a skills gap, or expect to within a few years." Organizations across every sector struggle to find talent with the most in-demand skills. These businesses must discover more efficient solutions to meet the growing need.

Source: [Mind the \[Skills\] Gap article](#)

Continuous Learning Journey with BenchPrep

There's an increasing demand for licenses, certifications, and credentials over four-year degrees. Organizations must adapt to and realize the holistic value of a continuous learning journey to best align themselves with and bridge the current skills gap.

It's important for associations to support the entire candidate journey, from the Learn stage to helping candidates prepare within the Practice stage, to ultimately setting them up for success in the Certify stage.

By honing in on the three stages of the continuous learning journey—Learn, Practice, and Certify—associations and credentialing bodies can help candidates master the most sought-after and desired skills.

Lean on an LMS like BenchPrep to achieve your business goals and learning outcomes. BenchPrep is the industry-leading digital platform for associations and credentialing bodies to provide learning opportunities for their candidates.

Upon partnering with BenchPrep, the team will pose two simple questions:

What do you do for your learners? and **What do you do for practice?**

These two fields showcase BenchPrep's dedication to learner outcomes and their confidence in microlearning and practice scenarios. Improve the overall learner experience for all your association and certification training candidates with BenchPrep on your side.

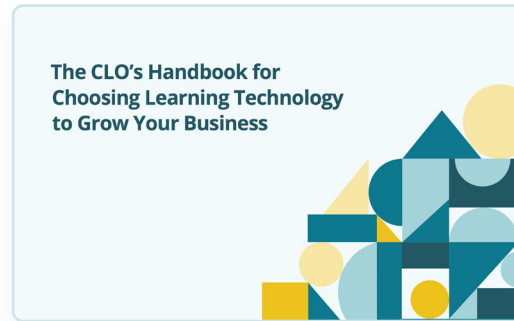


Additional Resources

We hope you find this eBook useful and encourage you to explore more great BenchPrep thinking and content on our [blog](#) or in the many case studies, guides, infographics, webinars, and videos you can find on our [Digital Learning Resources](#) hub.



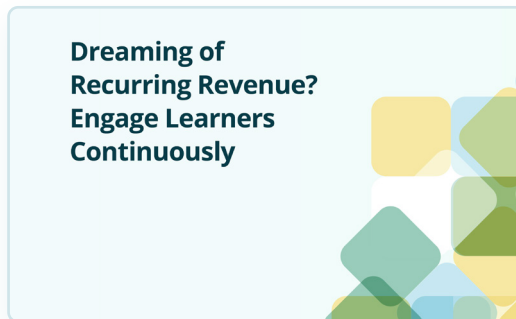
[4 LMS Superpowers Every Association Needs](#)



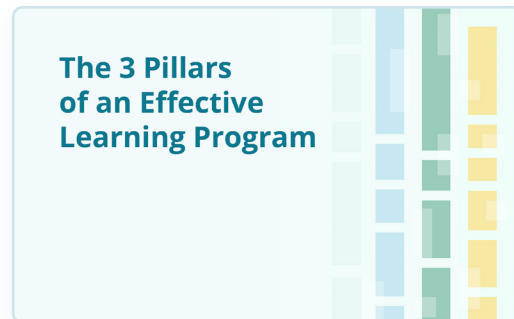
[The CLO's Handbook for Choosing Learning Technology to Grow Your Business](#)



[How to Reduce Dropout Rates for Your Certification Candidates](#)



[Dreaming of Recurring Revenue? Engage Learners Continuously](#)



[The 3 Pillars of an Effective Learning Program](#)



[CLO Secrets Revealed: 5 Learning Leaders Share Secrets to Transforms Your Certification Program](#)

About BenchPrep

BenchPrep is an award-winning learning platform that accelerates revenue growth for companies. We help you bring new online test prep programs to market and unlock insights to keep learners engaged and drive program growth.

BenchPrep helps companies monetize test prep content and drive high-margin revenue by creating a high-quality, interactive test prep experience your customers want to buy. With BenchPrep, you can bring test prep products to market effectively to attract and retain more customers. BenchPrep also unlocks insights into content and learner behavior so you can get a 360-degree view of your learners.

Many of the world's leading test providers and training companies trust BenchPrep to power their online study programs, including ACT, McGraw-Hill Education, C2 Education, OnCourse Learning, Springer Publishing, AccessLex, and more.



[Schedule a demo](#) today and learn how the BenchPrep digital platform can guide your professionals along the continuous learning journey.