



# Ultimate guide on selecting an authoring tool



# Table of contents

How to select your e-learning authoring tool

02

Identify yourself: Are you new to authoring tools or are you switching?

03

Understand the problems solved by e-learning authoring tools

04

Know what sort of e-learning course you want to design

05

How to choose the best e-learning authoring tool for your company?

06

Technical aspects

07

Content creation aspects

09

Learner aspects

12

Admin aspects

13

Compare authoring tools

14

Decide on the characteristics of your partnership with your chosen tool

15

The key takeaways

18



# How to select your e-learning authoring tool

Across industries, L&D experts have embraced e-learning authoring tools to accelerate their learning and training approaches. This helps their organization stay ahead, cope with the challenges posed by quickly evolving business environments, and implement organization-wide learning. And during times of COVID-19 lockdowns, online training tools and e-learning authoring capabilities help L&D tackle remote working and training challenges. One of the key aspects of effective learning is the availability of robust and powerful training content, created with an e-learning authoring tool.

If you select an e-learning authoring tool thoroughly and with due diligence, implementing it will be painless, and integration, acceptance, and internalization will be seamless. If the software you select offers real value in sync with your business goals, your people and work processes will be positively affected. A well-researched tool will ensure that your team rallies behind your decision when they experience its change and ease.

So, how do you go about the steps for evaluating and selecting an e-learning authoring tool? There are many authoring tools and there is even more information available about them. This e-book collects essential aspects to empower you in making an informed decision and put your money on the best fit.



# Identify yourself:

## Are you new to authoring tools or are you switching?

The level of experience you have with authoring tools makes a big difference. If you are looking into software for the first time, a lot of research is required. Those who are not new know more about their requirements and needs already.

### New to authoring tools?

Are you new to the world of online learning and authoring tools? For example, because you are a classroom trainer or a subject-matter expert (SME) without didactic knowledge of creating courses? If yes, make sure to investigate the tools out there thoroughly. Also, explore what you need to get out of authoring software. Making the right choice will prove to be a tremendous economic step for your business.

### Switching to another tool?

Do you work for an organization that is considering a shift or that has already shifted to online teaching and learning? In that case, you are probably familiar with the advantages of creating learning content digitally. Your bucket list of requirements is very different from an organization implementing an authoring tool for the first time.

## Know your organization's and learners' goals

The first step for anyone looking for suitable e-learning authoring software is to find out what their organization's and learners' goals look like. Dive deep into the reasons why you are considering implementing and adopting an authoring tool. What business advantage will you gain? Will the move justify the high-level investment it calls for? Analyze your learners to identify the gap in where you are and where you want to go.





# Understand the problems solved by e-learning authoring tools

Authoring tools solve a number of challenges L&D professionals and organizations deal with. They strengthen L&D projects and strategies, reduce costs significantly, and so much more. Define what problems you are trying to solve in your organization. Knowing that helps you understand what software can best help you overcome your challenges. Here are a few examples of problems authoring tools solve.

---

## Unimpressive and non-engaging content

Thanks to authoring tools, authors can make engaging content that looks impressive. With features like adding multimedia, various question types, and the possibility to choose fonts, colors, and more, authors can produce and design content that sticks.

---

## Generic and non-specific off-shelf training content

Authoring tools allow authors to create need-based content, microlearning environments, and enhanced learning opportunities. They make generic bespoke e-learning a thing of the past. Also, they enable experienced in-house subject-matter experts to create content, which will always be valuable and specific.

---

## Slow production cycles

With the ability to co-author, review, and approve content, authoring tools allow for a fast production cycle and quick turnaround time. These tools also move away from a traditional method of content creation, iterative reviews, and approval cycles. Instead, they enable a collaborative process with version control and dynamic execution.

---

## Prohibitive training and course creation costs

Authoring tools let you reduce costs for content creation and face-to-face training. By shifting training to a digital space, you reduce not only costs for content creation and face-to-face training costs. You also reduce the opportunity cost of the learners. This frees up lots of time for your employees to focus on their KPIs.

---

## Irrelevant data reporting

With an authoring tool, you can always choose the type of data reporting you want. Irrelevant learner data reporting is no more. Choose the type of data reporting you want for analysis, decision making, and tracking progress.

---

## Disengagement between learner and author

Authoring tools enable employees to reach targets. Other types of e-learning can have a high attrition rate. They come with steep learning curves and complex workflows; employees often miss their targets and call it quits. A well-chosen tool can reverse this trend.

# Know what sort of e-learning course you want to design

By knowing what e-learning projects you will be working on, you can choose software with features and capabilities that match your goals. Features and abilities like the following ones will allow you to create courses with a high degree of learner engagement.

## Rapid authoring

Template-based courses with text and images are great to have. They ensure that while the costs are kept low, development time is shorter and the quality of content remains high. Simple templates and features like drag and drop, sliders, click and reveal, etc. can help create a course quickly. SMEs do not require any special skills to start making the course.

## Video or animation e-learning

This type of course content is entirely animated. It has audio, text, and images presented with the help of animations or videos. As interactions are not required, a good video editor becomes its core requirement.

## Custom scenario-based e-learning

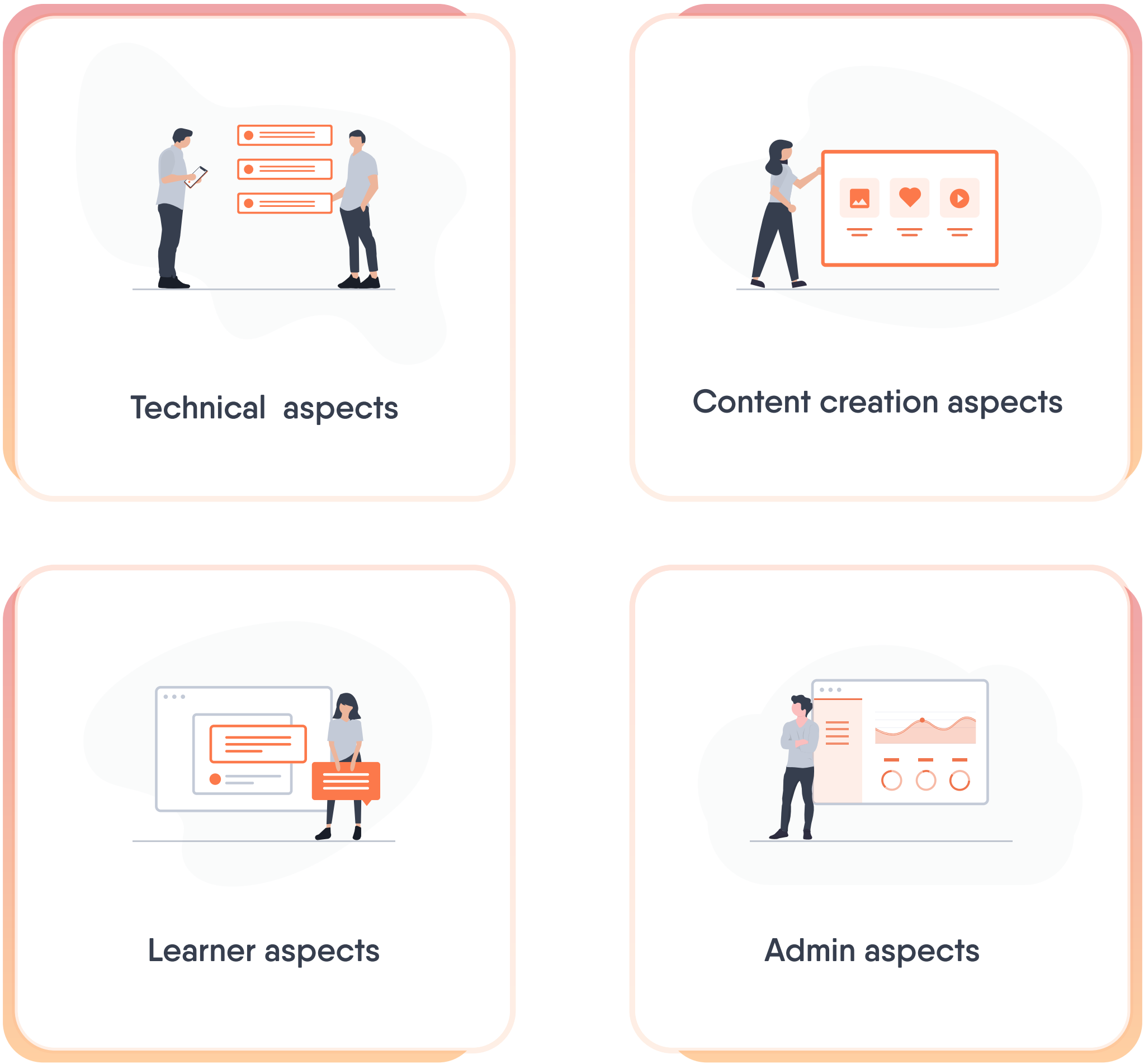
Custom scenario-based e-learning lets you produce immersive learning by making realistic simulations. Or situations where a learner can practice the core skills to gather more knowledge. Scenarios with realistic roles train the learner on probable situations leading to desirable behavior change.

## Custom e-learning with complex interactions and graphic design

With integrations and graphic design, you can create content with visual elements such as charts, graphs, infographics, tables, etc. You can align these visual elements to the brand image while delivering the course objectives. A higher level of interactivity like slide layers, hotspots, triggers, pop-ups, variables, etc. are incorporated for higher learner engagement levels.

# How to choose the best e-learning authoring tool for your company?

Even before you start researching and shortlisting e-learning authoring tools, it is imperative that you crystallize, list, and prioritize your needs and expectations aligned to your business's goals. Start by considering a few essential aspects that are intricately related, affected, and will, in turn, affect the objective of using the e-learning authoring software:



There are essential questions to consider early on in the choosing process related to each of these aspects. In the discovery and identification stage of planning, it is necessary to know what course customization linked to its creation, implementation, and tracking will be required for your training programs.



# Technical aspects

An authoring tool helps create digital training content with various inbuilt functionalities and design elements. However, the software used to create content can be downloaded and accessed in different ways. The tool you select impacts how you will produce and subsequently host training. It will also influence the type of devices required by authors to create content. The expertise needed for the authors to develop this digital content would also vary.



## Technical aspects of the different types of authoring tools

There are broadly three categories of available tools. Because of their technical aspects, each tool has benefits and downsides. These are the different types of authoring software you can investigate.



### Cloud-based authoring tools

With simple login credentials, authors can access cloud-based tools to collaborate across different domains and create content quickly. The software is centrally updated, and similarly, due to cloud storage, authors can create content anytime, anywhere. It is also device agnostic, which means you can use any kind of device for authoring. High-speed net connectivity is a must-have. Content is centralized on the cloud, and you can track it easily.



### Desktop-based authoring tools

Desktop-based tools are downloaded and installed on your desktop. They are the most expensive, loaded with features, highly complex, and have a steep learning curve. Also, they require trained instructional designers to use the features effectively and efficiently. Without any doubt, they deliver incredible results. However, you have to invest a lot of time in these tools. Authors are required to store their media and content on their desktops and then upload them into the courses they're working on each time, which can be very time-consuming. It's possible to review training offline on the local computer, but that requires updates to be published manually. This approach is vulnerable to data loss due to local storage on a computer.



### Hybrid models: rapid authoring tools incorporated in the LMS

Some of the latest LMS platforms have a built-in authoring tool. They are easy to use but allow you to create content pages only, instead of a complete course or assessment. These tools are still in the nascent stage, expensive, and do not have appealing content design and seamless integration. However, in the future, this software may become the trend to couple both of these modalities in e-learning.



## Features and possibilities

The technical aspects you should consider do not just consist of the types of software available. Features and capabilities of tools characters to evaluate.



### Compatibility

Test the authoring tool's compatibility with your LMS or LXP to ensure the published output maintains fidelity. The interchange of file formats is possible for exporting and importing. You should thoroughly review things like course customization and permissions for groups as well. Publishing options of HTML5, e-learning standards like AICC, SCORM, xAPI, and cmi5, MP4 for video courses should be feasible. When the course is published, it gets zipped and uploaded to your LMS. An incompatible LMS will neither deliver properly nor display content correctly, and it will fail to generate desired reports.



### Responsiveness

A responsive screen display is a must-have feature. Your authoring tool software must automatically adapt content to the browser and the right display size for mobile, desktop, laptop, or tablets. The tool of your choice should allow you to build your content in responsive blocks and columns. Consider that the font size must be legible on both mobile and desktop devices. If it does not happen automatically, the author spends valuable time adjusting the display. Failure of automatic adjustment can lead to overlapped text and images or make photos look compressed or out of place. An authoring tool that does not support responsive screen displays will require different versions of the content to be created separately for different types of devices and browsers, which can be costly and time-consuming.



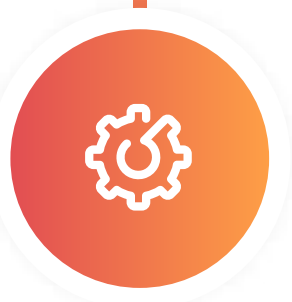
### Incorporation of existing content with full accuracy

The software you select should support porting or basic conversion capability for content legacy residing in PPT, Word, PDF, Excel, MP3, flash.wav, and more formats into HTML5, making it suitable for the web environment.



### Reporting and Analytics

All L&D departments need to make decisions regarding courses, learners, results generated, and status of progression of authors. To do so, you to ensure your authoring environment includes tracking and maintaining the learners' results. Your tool needs to support the xAPI standard to allow you to track results. With proper reporting, you can analyze how efficiently authors are using the tool.



### Understanding of the technical specifications

An understanding of the technical specifications of the systems used by your customers also requires due diligence so that you do not run up the wall when the actual business comes your way. Knowledge about the most widely used systems and how well they will mesh with the tool is an important consideration that you cannot overlook. You should be able to download the content as a zipped XML or SCORM wrapper with an embedded link that runs from an LMS.



# Content creation aspects

It's essential to make sure the skillset requirement for working with the tool of your choice against your workforce. But whether employees have experience creating online learning or not, several things can make their experience working with an authoring tool good.



## A zero learning-curve

Whether your SMEs have technical or e-learning course authoring skills, an intuitive interface is a crucial consideration. Smooth UI will ensure a quick take off for your authors. It will also ensure the optimization of existing tactical knowledge and prevent reinventing the wheel. That's why your need of the hour is an easy-to-use authoring tool with the required functionalities to build exciting and engaging courses.



## Personal onboarding

Quick in-app onboarding and personal onboarding is essential to get SMEs well versed in creating content with your new authoring tool. Even for those who have worked with authoring tools before. A new tool comes with a new way of working.



## Simple features that enable creating resourceful content

It is purposeful to create focused and specific content using basic content blocks in authoring tools. However, easy to create interactive content makes a big difference for author's experience of content creation and immensely impacts the learner experience as well. Moreover, incorporating and integrating multimedia will empower course authors to create highly engaging learning scenarios.



## Different types of tests and assessments

The ability to create basic and advanced assessments, quizzes, branching modes for adaptive learning, and the options for creating different test modules or scenarios is mandatory. You engage and motivate learners when you test them in different ways. When quizzes, true or false questions, multiple-choice questions, and fill-in modes of assessment are among the most common testing modes, e-learning does not offer variety. Shuffling the sequence of questions enables you to make multiple assessments without creating different sets of questions. Qualitative assessments allow learners to demonstrate their skills in a realistic scenario-based e-learning environment. A branched scenario in adaptive learning ensures a different outcome or a path which trains the learners to practise the common work-related scenarios.





### Gathering data about learners

The authoring tool of your choice should be able to gather plenty of data about learners. Analyzing their performance on assessments will give authors valuable insights into the learners' progress and help measure the course content or assessments' effectiveness.



### Content design

Standard templates with baked-in didactic components make authors feel confident and ease their experience in creating content. Much more so than being given too many options. Especially if these authors are new to the world of authoring tools. After choosing and customizing a template with branding colors and company, he can create quality and immersive content. Didactic support in terms of availability of templates for question types, course and assessment templates, resources, or a learning objective maker empowers the authors.



### Built-in didactics

Authoring tools with features that cater to the requirements of performance support to empower employees are most desirable. That way, SMEs can create bite-sized content for focussed learning required for a specific need. Mini-modules for curating, procedures, checklists, etc. can be authored by SMEs on the go. This is especially desirable because it makes your L&D strategy future proof. Bear in mind that it's still welcome to have software that lets authors drag-and-drop content. Authors will have an easier time accepting and integrating that rather than a tool with bells and whistles.



### Advanced functionalities for content creation

Are you an experienced authoring software users? Look at tools with advanced functionalities like screencasting, text to speech, video editing, simulations, and augmented reality. They let you create immersive training.



### Content reuse feature availability

A content reuse feature availability is a much-desired requirement of authors to take advantage of the existing content available as PPT, PDF, Word, and media files. You can either convert them into course pages or embed them in the course without much effort. The tool should also support video embedding, curation, etc. to create courses in different permutations and combinations efficiently and in a cost-effective way.



### Collaborative working

By collaborating, co-authors can create rich course content. Sharing knowledge and creating a course can hardly be a solo effort. It requires a team of people with different skillsets to work together and integrate their knowledge into one piece. An authoring tool demonstrating easy, seamless collaboration and version control for quick updates will work great for experienced and less experienced authors. Holiday handovers, reviews, co-authoring, and sick cover becomes much more manageable and smooth thanks to convenient collaborative features. These types of features also allow authors to request reviews from peers or external collaborators. Comments and feedback speed up fixes and reduce turnaround time significantly.



### Integration with third-party applications

Integration with third-party applications for more complex and comprehensive content design takes content quality to the next level. Social media is an example of such a third party. Millennials are making a sizeable population of the corporate workforce. They are highly networked and quickly adapt to social learning. Integration with applications like social media, Dropbox, Google Drive, and Slack will offer new avenues to collaborate and co-author or review content and promote knowledge sharing on the go. Videos, images, screen recordings, etc. can be shared in a time-efficient manner to create effective training content.



### Multilingual capabilities availability

For large organizations with a global presence or organizations that aim to reach a global audience of learners, it's crucial to have the capability to use different languages. It is needed to make courses contextualized and available in local languages. There are authoring tools that have various possibilities and support a varying number of languages.



### Flexible publications

It's crucial to have a tool that facilitates flexible problem-free publication externally. A few tools support direct publication processes without the requirement of an LMS. Users can have many options to suit their needs, such as:



publishing  
courses to  
cloud



publishing to  
the company's  
hosting directly



uploading to  
the corporate  
LMS



embedding  
publications on  
their websites  
or selling them



### Accessibility standards

In today's highly inclusive work environment, you may have to consider your learners' special needs. Design features such as choice of colors, interaction types, audio support, and the pace of the narrative can help avoid problems learners may have with vision, motor, or other learning disabilities. The tool you select should be compliant with accessibility standards like 508-compliant, WAI-ARIA, and WCAG AA Level 2.0.



## Learner aspects

Since you mostly create e-learning for learners, it is essential to put yourself in their shoes to understand their perspective. If the user experience is not delightful, investing so much time in picking, implementing, and using the right authoring tool will be in vain. Listening to your learners' requirements play a key role in achieving success.



### Learning on the go

With a highly mobile workforce, the days of the desktop-only work habit are passé. It's vital to know what devices employees use to access learning. Whether the content is accessed through an intranet or over the web will impact selecting the tool. Responsive content that adapts to screen sizes also becomes an essential consideration. When the learner frequently accesses the course on the go, you need to make sure he can have an uninterrupted experience without content having to buffer, for example. This will ensure that learners do not frequently go off- task.

As learners are likely to access their courses across devices, there is a definite requirement to have some specific features from the learners' point of view, including:

- save and sync progress across-device
- facilitate login via social media

### Facilitate offline study

In some cases, learners study offline because they work in spotty network areas. Having the possibility to download content as a PDF or other formats facilitates offline study.

### Leveraging social media

In today's networked workspaces, where knowledge sharing is the most rewarding strategy for L&D, the scope for social integration attains a lot of importance. The authoring tool that offers a way to leverage social media for co-authoring, reviewing, and knowledge sharing will help open up new collaboration lines. Chat options, notifications, discussion boards, or forums to post queries and solve problems, and similar features help create higher engagement and a collaborative learning environment. The value-added here will be a well-oiled and teamwork quotient on thrusters.

### Quick dashboards

Every learner expects to get a snapshot of their learning engagement in the authoring tool they use. The features that are must-have from that perspective are:

- number of courses accessed
- completion status of current course
- courses completed
- assessment completed with their grade report
- assessments and quizzes that are due

A simple-to-understand and clutter-free dashboard UI is fundamental in deciding on a tool.



## Admin aspects

The effectiveness of any training program tool depends on how it monitors results and collects and shows data. To manage L&D activities, you want to be able to track and report learners' behavior, progress, and assessment results. Also, you want to be able to measure how efficient authors think the tool is. Remember to be led by your identified needs and not by whichever platform gives you the most bells and whistles.



### Learners' behavior, progress, and assessment results

The e-learning authoring tool you pick should have features to analytically identify each learner's strengths and weaknesses based on their assessment results. This helps you update training based on learners' needs. It also helps to improve courses, for example, by turning low performing content formats into more popular ones. And it helps you to keep content up-to-date and relevant and align training to business goals. Overall data and statistics on learners your tool of choice should collect:

How many times learners accessed a course.

How much time learners devoted time to each page or segment.

How many attempts learners made to answer questions correctly.

Should you limit the number of attempts a learner makes.

### Management by admins

Do you manage multiple teams of authors working on different courses? An easy-to-use authoring solution to produce content and monitor results will do wonders. As authors will be collaborating, make sure your tool allows authors to assign the rights and permissions per author and user.

To make your case for the budget you need for the tool, you will need to showcase how often and effectively it is being used. This calls for a serious data presentation. Your chosen tool should provide for it.

### Author focus

Various aspects make authoring tools efficient and effective for authors. It's crucial for them to have suitable features for collaboration, file management, and more. Look out for the following:

- Get a tool that allows you to use tags to manage and organize courses and make navigation smooth.
- Assigning roles and permissions should be easy. You may need to have the functionality to switch positions or block permissions to individuals, teams, or organizations.
- The ability to download add-ons or plugins that amplify and stretch the capability is helpful. It lets authors meet the future requirements of administering and managing different courses and different clients.
- Do look for auto-recovery and backups features to not lose the content in the rare event of a software crash.
- It's not always best to spend on a separate LMS to do all the tracking and reporting for you. Put e-learning authoring tools with such in-built capabilities should be on your radar.



# Compare authoring tools

Once you have defined technical requirements and learners', authors', and admins' needs, defined business goals and accounted for the skill set of your team members, you can have a clear view of your tool's must-haves and good-haves. Now it's time to do a comparative study of the key authoring tools to find the best fit. Look at the table below to find out the differences between Articulate 360, Adobe Captivate, iSpring and Easygenerator. For a more detailed comparison, please visit the landing page where compare our competitors.

	<div></div> <div>Easygenerator</div>	<div></div> <div>iSpring Suite</div>	<div></div> <div>Articulate 360</div>	<div></div> <div>Adobe Captivate</div>
Free trial	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Resources	Live online, Customer Success, Webinars, FAQ, Help center, Templates, Blog articles	Live online, Webinars, FAQ, templates, Blog articles	7+ Million course assets, Templates, Webinars, E-learning Heroes Community	FAQ, Templates, articles, etc. Adobe Support, E-learning Community
Drag & drop interface	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Content import/export	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Interactive content	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
PowerPoint conversion	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Co-authoring	<div></div>	<div></div>	Limited	<div></div>
Quiz creation	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Multimedia	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Assessments	10 question types	Limited	Limited	Limited
In-app feedback and reviews	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Result tracking	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
Interface languages	Afrikaans Arabic Bangla Bulgarian Chinese (Simplified) Chinese (Traditional) Croatian Czech Danish Dutch English Finnish French German Hungarian Italian Japanese Latvian Norwegian Polish Portuguese Russian Slovakian Slovenian Spanish Swedish Ukrainian	English French German Portuguese Russian Spanish	Chinese English French German Spanish	Chinese (Simplified) Chinese (Traditional) Czech Danish Dutch English Finnish French German Hungarian Italian Japanese Korean Norwegian Polish Portuguese Romanian Russian Spanish Swedish Turkish Ukranian
Tailored onboarding	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>

## Decide on the characteristics of your partnership with your chosen tool

Do you feel like you have found the tool that is right for you, your organization, learners, L&D projects, and strategy? That is great news. You can make sure the tool is the best fit by trying it out with a trial. In this period, it's crucial to test several things:

- The speed of creating a test course from scratch or with existing material. Use all the interactive elements that have been identified in the blueprint stage.
- The pace and quality of translation into multiple languages.
- The time taken in changing white labelling into your brand.
- The time period in which new authors are trained and onboarded.
- The use of a course in multiple ways.





When you have finished the trial period and experienced it as successful, it is time to decide on the characteristics of your partnership with the organization behind the tool you chose. That includes talking about and coming to an agreement regarding the pricing of the tool, too. Asking the right questions will help you define the partnership's critical aspects. Use this list of top considerations that we have created based on our clients' experiences and expectations. Use it to your benefit and to make the right decision for your organization.

- Make sure to get the evaluation of the price point in black and white.
- Find out about the different kinds of pricing, licenses, ownership of content, and assets created.
- Find out how much support and onboarding you and your teams will get.
- Get to an agreement on what features you can use, and how that will affect the pricing.
- Mutually decide on milestones and checkpoints. This is important for smooth implementation and maintenance.
- Make sure you can get an introduction to the setup process and demonstrations with key team members.
- Ask what the availability is of add-ons and other complementary resources and templates, including built-in libraries of videos, images, sound files, characters, backgrounds, and more.
- Discover what training videos, procedures, manuals, and demonstrations are available.
- Find out more about the availability of an online knowledge base, FAQs, help features, and troubleshooting guidance.
- You want to know what the plan is for regular software-updates, so they don't disturb the content generation process.
- Find out which support manager will handle queries and troubleshoot, and agree on a timeframe.
- Find out about the terms and conditions to future proof content development and its maintenance.
- Find out about any additional costs that may come your way, for example, cloud storage charges, add ons, and updates.
- Understand what the terms of scaling up are.
- Know which preparations need to be made by both sides before rollout.
- Find out about the scope for a full-featured trial to test all scenarios and turnaround time for course creation.
- Find out if there is a period where you can retrieve important projects when your license/subscription expires. And if your work becomes available again in case of a future renewal.
- Find out if you will get a joint evaluation of all the findings and experiences.

Have you come to mutual agreements on how you can use the tool of your choice?

**Congratulations. Here are a few things to consider before making a final call.**



- ☐ Ask for recommendations and testimonials.
- ☐ Read online reviews and ratings from the industry and users. Pay attention to details and concrete facts, rather than being limited to a 'feel-good factor'.
- ☐ Take expert opinions about the platform performance.
- ☐ As technology changes quickly, check the frequency at which updates are released to make yourself future proof.
- ☐ Pay attention to the quality of the company's relationship with existing clients.
- ☐ Do quiz tool users on the impact on the company's bottom line and ROI. How did they start and how was the ramp-up planned?
- ☐ Study the kind of success the existing users are enjoying with relation to your objectives.
- ☐ Query about the nature of failures and hurdles encountered in the tool.
- ☐ Keep an eye on the track record of the tool and Consumer Experience (CX) quotient.



# The **key** takeaways

Whether you know all about online learning and content creation software or are just dipping your toes in the water, there are various steps you should take to select the right authoring tool for you. Start by understanding what goals your organization and learners need to reach. It's also essential to get a grip on what problems you are trying to solve at this stage. And if you can solve those problems with an authoring tool.

Every authoring tool comes with technical aspects that affect content creators, learners, authors, and admins. Ensure you have a clear understanding of the technical aspects of the authoring tool you may select. Also, learn how these aspects will affect everyone working with the tool.

When you have your eye on various software, look back at your goals, challenges, and needs, and compare the software to see which one would support you best. Try out the tools for a few weeks, so you and your team can produce training and see what learners think.

Have you decided on a tool? It's essential to form and shape your relationship with the company behind the software. Negotiate about your contract, what features you will be able to use, your onboarding period, and everything else crucial to you.

When it's time to implement the authoring software and let authors and learners get going, there are only two things left to do: sit back to enjoy your success and pave the way for even more.

