

How to Choose Between Curricula and Programs

When you want to group learning into a syllabus, you use either programs or curricula.

When you want to set up a group of learning assignments for users, you can choose to create programs or to create curricula. Each has their strengths, but in general, the difference is about compliance:

- If your courses lead to compliance through a regulator who audits you, choose curricula.
- If your courses do not lead to compliance through a regulator but are a syllabus of courses, choose programs.

Compliance applies to regulated industries, like life sciences. An auditor can look through a company's training records to check that employees have been properly certified for their jobs. If an employee is not certified, then the regulator can fine the company.

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Advantages of Curricula

Curricula are designed to be strict for compliance, regulators, and audits.

We designed curricula with compliance in mind: curricula support detailed tracking of compliance and qualifications for highly regulated industries. If a regulator can fine you because an auditor discovers that your worker is not certified, then curricula are designed for you.

If you need workers to pass learning audits, then you need strict standardization. Curricula are designed to require every user to complete his or her assigned curriculum in the same exact way as all other users assigned the curriculum. They face the exact same retraining rules, the exact same prerequisite rules, and the exact same schedule.

Curricula are highly flexible when you design them. You can design a curriculum, for example, with different retraining triggers and retraining periods, with unique prerequisite rules, and with different requirements. But after you implement the curricula – after you assign it to the very first user – the curriculum becomes rigid to assure standardization: every user must follow the same rules as you designed the rules.

If you are regulated and audited, you want your compliance system to be rigid during its implementation. If you are not regulated, however, that rigidity becomes a burden.

Advantages of Programs

Programs are designed to be both flexible and structured.

Learning programs afford flexibility to organizations that want to design a timeline of learning, or a syllabus of learning. For example, during an onboarding program, an organization might want to provide users with a link to a welcome video from the company CEO. The organization is not interested in tracking users' correct viewing of the document, or testing the users after they have viewed it to assure that they can be certified. Instead, the organization would like to order the content so that it makes sense. They want the welcome video to come first.

Programs do have tracking capability at the cost of a little more configuration. Your learning administrators can create a learning item (a trackable unit of learning) in a program and track who has completed that learning item. Continuing the onboarding example, an organization might want to track users' completion of their employee handbooks: they might want users to acknowledge that they have received the handbook. The organization can create a handbook learning item and assign it to the program, which in turn assigns it to the users in the program.

We created programs because we found that some customers were using curricula to group courses into a syllabus, but the customers were not regulated. Instead, they wanted to create a structured learning experience for users, but they wanted it to be flexible. They were create structured learning experiences like an onboarding program or a company policy/ethics program. Because curricula are intentionally designed to do the opposite, customers were frustrated with the rules and rigidity of curricula.

Curricula and Programs Feature Comparison

Use this table to compare individual features of the system and to understand how the feature works with curricula and how it works with programs.

Table 1:

Feature	Curricula	Programs
Learning Item Prerequisites	Govern when a user can participate in the learning item by checking to see if the user has completed the prerequisites.	Any prerequisites set at the learning item are ignored.
Learning Item Approvals	Govern when a user can participate in the learning item by seeking approval (for example, from a supervisor).	Any approvals set at the learning item are ignored.
Learning Item Due Dates	Govern when a learning item is due.	Any due date set at the learning item level is ignored. Due dates are set implicitly based on the duration of the program.

Feature	Curricula	Programs
Completion and Compliant	In curricula, a user can be compliant but not complete and that state can change over time for reasons of retraining.	In programs, users have either completed or not completed the program.
Certificate of Completion	Users can only obtain certificates of completion at the learning item level, not at the curricula level.	Users can receive a certificate of completion for the program.
Learning Content	Learning content must be internal to the Learning Management System (LMS): learning items and other curricula.	Learning content can either be internal (items) or external (links, or custom activities).
Retraining	Curricula fully support retraining to stay current on compliance.	Programs do not support retraining. If you want a user to repeat a program, you must assign it again.
Credit for past completion	Users can obtain credit for past item completions based on a curriculum-level configuration set by the Learning Administrator.	Users can obtain credit for past item completions based on an item-level configuration set by the Learning Administrator.
Order of Assignments	All learning items are assigned at once with different due dates so that users can see the entire compliance regimen.	Activities are revealed to users as they enter the timeframe that the activities must be completed in so that users are not overwhelmed.
Requirement Pools	Curricula support requirement pools, which is a way of saying that user must complete requirements from a group (pool) of requirements.	Not supported.
Change Control	Any change to a curriculum is driven to all users to enforce standardization of learning.	Changes can be sent to users who are currently assigned the program or you can grandfather the change so that only newly assigned users see the change.
Registration	Users must register for upcoming learning scheduled offerings in the curriculum so that approvals can be met and prerequisites checked.	Users can be auto-registered into scheduled offerings when they are assigned to a program.
Commerce	Supported.	Not Supported.

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