

Designing the Study Hall

By MoreSteam.com

What Is a Study Hall?

Many Blended Learning programs include “study halls” as a component of their model. At MoreSteam, we generally define a study hall as a mandatory catch-up session that supports the online training, provides examples, answers questions on recent materials, and allows the instructor to meet with students.



E-Learning often takes a backseat to the urgencies of day-to-day work, so regular study halls provide students with the opportunity to focus completely on working through content, and solving problems with classmates. Study halls can be held online, in a physical location or in both simultaneously, and can range from a one-hour session to an all-day event, depending on the needs of the organization.

Capturing Best Practices

At a recent Best Practices in Blended Learning conference, we asked participants representing over 30 diverse corporations, organizations and industries to break into small groups and answer the following questions about study halls:

- What is the best definition of a study hall?
- What topics do you commonly teach in the study hall?
- What are your favorite study hall activities (how are they effective)?
- What learning aids (media, templates, reports, tools) do you create that facilitate the study hall?
- What are other best practices or things to avoid?

This document is a summary of answers to the above questions.

Defining the Study Hall

What is it?

- Session that covers the online content, process improvement tools and software
- Must be interactive Q&A, not a lecture on materials students should be learning online
- Practice that generally lasts for about one hour
- Can be virtual online session (WebEx or other tool), but may have live classroom as well
- Timing varies depending on pacing and level of program (can be 1-6 weeks apart)
- A small, manageable group of students (maybe 5-6 people, certainly no more than 10-15)
- An opportunity for students to use a hands-on example or real project

What are the benefits of a study hall?

- Reinforces and clarifies the learning
- Provides relevant and practical examples
- Acts as a pacing mechanism for the coursework
- Augments the curriculum with additional company-specific materials
- Gives instructor the opportunity to connect with the students
- Fosters group dynamics and fills the “face time” gap from e-Learning
- Allows the students to commiserate and connect
- Answers all questions before moving to next session

Commonly Taught Topics

Study halls typically center on one or more topics that can be troublesome for students. Again, it depends on the focus and needs of the process improvement organization as to what these areas should be. Some of the top topics instructors cover include:

- Introduction to the Quality Process
- Critical thinking and the Thought map
- Process maps, value stream maps
- Project reviews and tollgates
- Charter development
- Gage R&R
- MSA
- Data collection plan
- Basic data analysis
- FMEA
- QFD
- CTQs
- Fishbone diagrams
- 5-Why
- Understanding Variation
- Components of Variance
- Process Capability
- Regression
- SPC
- Hypothesis testing
- Solution selection

Favorite Study Hall Activities

Many instructors use specific games or techniques to reinforce the learning. Here are a few favorite activities used to fill the study hall:

- Active solicitation of questions from students
- Updates on Green Belt or Black Belt projects
- Ongoing case study that ties back to the business
- Word problems
- Online, real-time quiz
- Reviewing past quizzes for gaps in students’ understanding
- Do calculations and share answers
- Students critique each other’s projects and tool usage
- Game of “Stump the Chump”
- The Jeopardy game
- Have students self-check their knowledge

Learning Aids / Tools

Instructors generally rely on phone conferencing and online meeting services to hold study halls, but they also use other tools, such as:

- Tool templates
- Real-life examples
- Software (e.g., EngineRoom® or Minitab®) to demonstrate concepts
- Tablet mouse for drawing or writing on the screen
- Video with discussion
- High Definition streaming for virtual training
- Session recordings (for absentees)
- Collaborative software (e.g., SharePoint)
- Guest presenters (such as more experienced graduates)
- PowerPoint
- Animation or pictures in the slides (vs. just text)
- Whiteboard (in classroom)
- Real-time polling
- Quick quizzes
- Materials provided in PDF format

Other Best Practices

We solicited best practices from the conference attendees, including *what not to do*. We hope that you find the following lists helpful as you create and refine your own study halls.

General Practices

- Schedule the events as is most appropriate for the pace of the online learning schedule (could be every 1-2 weeks for condensed programs or up to six weeks for more programs that run for a longer time frame)
- Alternate study halls with coaching sessions each week (or do both in one weekly session)
- Run study halls for training waves, not one-offs for individuals
- Focus on the critical questions students should be asking
- Review projects (small groups only) when necessary, but otherwise, keep the study hall topics separate from project work

Pre-planning Tips

- Plan, plan, plan
- When possible, have a classroom location available for those who want a live session
- Request questions in advance
- Use quiz results to seed questions in the study hall
- Make sure to have manager's support so students are mentally and physically present
- Mix it up ahead of time (plan a variety of activities)
- Use tools to shame students into progress (e.g., the MoreSteam Nag-o-matic)

During the Session

- Keep it to 60-90 minutes
- 3-5 students best, but definitely keep less than 15 participants
- Track attendance
- Have two instructors on the call when possible and for larger groups
- Use a good headset and mike for online study halls
- Record and curate all sessions / calls for absentees or future trainees
- Create expectations up front (time, commitment, topics)
- Engage participants by using their names, asking specific people to participate
- Allow for reasonable periods of silence for participants to think and formulate responses
- Try to give people time, especially consider your technology, e.g. technology that only allows one person to talk at a time can shut-out those who aren't persistent! The facilitator must ensure fair opportunity to participate.
- Accommodate alternative learning styles (engage all senses)
- Know your materials - don't read them from the slides
- Use a Roadmap to show where you are in the process
- Use relevant, business-specific examples
- Use multiple PowerPoint slides rather than animation or sounds, which may not work over an online connection
- Use a variety of background templates and keep the slides interesting
- Call on people by name
- "Give control" to the participants, e.g. write on the screen
- Ask a participant to summarize a section of the discussion
- Keep track of who is actively participating
- Use quizzes, even if you build them "on the fly"
- Conduct "individual" exercises or calculations on the call
- Use Homework assignments

What Not to Do

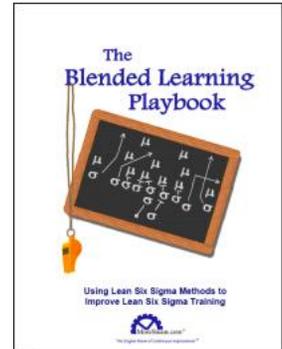
- Don't teach online materials (that's defeating the purpose of the Blended Learning model)
- Don't read the deck
- Don't talk too fast, especially with an audience from multiple language backgrounds
- Don't run for more than 90 minutes
- Don't run with more than 20 students or less than 5 students
- Don't get ahead of yourself or the students by covering materials not yet on the schedule
- Avoid single-student coaching
- Avoid one-way conversations
- No meetings at midnight (recognize and account for time zone differences)
- Commiserate, but don't allow whining!

Summary

The study hall is a critical component in the Blended Learning model, as it reinforces and clarifies the online learning, provides relevant and practical discussion, and gives the instructor and students the opportunity to connect and interact as a group on a regular basis.

If you'd like to know more about Blended Learning and deployments who use this instructional model for process improvement training, check out *The Blended Learning Playbook* by MoreSteam.com. The *Playbook* is the first and only practical guide dealing with the design and implementation of a Blended Learning model for Lean Six Sigma training.

You can download a free excerpt from the MoreSteam.com Web site: http://www.moresteam.com/blended_learning/playbook.cfm. You can purchase the full *Playbook* from Amazon.com or contact MoreSteam for more information:



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