

Assumptions and Distance Education

Michael Simonson

An assumption is a position taken until something is proven or, stated another way. Assumptions are ideas without evidence—things taken for granted.

Assumptions seem to be the antithesis of the systematic design of instruction—the systems approach generally, and instructional design specifically. The sys-

tems approach is based on a premise that aspects of any system should be correctly defined, clearly understood, and well documented. And, distance education programs are usually planned using the systems approach (Dick, Cary, & Carey, 2015; Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015).

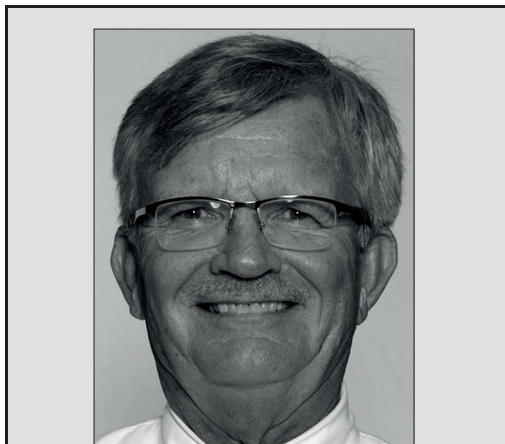
Instructional designers do not like to talk about assumptions—about what they “take for granted.” However, in the privacy of the design studio, all who plan instruction make assumptions and take things for granted. Okay, what are the types of assumptions that form the basis for designing instruction, traditional or online? There are seven:

1. Learners
2. Structure
3. Communication
4. Technology
5. Interaction
6. Literacy—visual and verbal
7. Learning

1. ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ONLINE LEARNERS

Assumptions about learners are what is taken for granted about them. Standards

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