



Creating Content Using **ROPES** by Dr. Jim Moshinskie
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Instructional designers have constantly sought simpler models to follow when designing any type of instruction. One very easy-to-learn method for designing and developing courses using the **Vuepoint Learning System's Content Creator** is simply to follow the **ROPES** communication model.

ROPES is an acronym for the first letters of each step in the model. You will use these steps every time you developed a lesson within a VLS course. Specifically, **ROPES** stands for:

Review, Overview, Present, Exercise, and Summarize

Behind these five simple steps are some powerful instructional design strategies. In this VLS course on instructional design, we will not only explain each **ROPES** stage, but we will also give examples and ideas for you to bend your material to this model. In this manner, you can use the templates available within VLS to get started immediately designed corporate web-based training that can be presented anywhere, anytime over the web.

Before we start, let's cover how instruction is sectioned in **VLS**. The topic you are teaching is called the knowledge base, or if you will, the course. In **VLS Content Creator**, your first step is to give the knowledge base a name. When you type this in, this name becomes the title of your course. The next step is to break down this course into broad modules. **Content Creator** allows you to easily name each new module, and then that name will automatically appear in the Roadmap area of the **Learn** section.

Each module will be divided further into smaller sub-titles, or lessons. Every time you choose a title template and name it, that page will become the first page of that particular lesson within your module. When the trainee mouses over any module name, the title pages of all the lessons within



that module will appear in a drop down menu box on the screen. It is that easy! So here is the VLS design formula:

A Course = Modules divided into Lessons.

What follows are specific steps that you can use to design each single lesson within a module. When you use the **ROPES** model to design each lesson, your course will have a consistent pattern that the learner will appreciate.

"R" is for Review

The first step in the **ROPES** model is **Review**. In the opening stage of the ROPES model, you relate the topic to the learner and review any necessary prerequisites. The idea is to link the new topic to material that the learner already knows so the learner can build on this knowledge. Therefore, you can refer to a past topic and show how what was learned there will be used in the new lesson.

For example, if you are teaching your employees how to write collection letters, you might start off by telling the trainees how this lesson relates to your previous lessons on "What A Collection Letter Is" or you could review the company policy on "The Value of Collection Letters." Thus, the trainee begins to put into context how what they will learn in this module will apply to the overall picture of the topic.

Cognitive psychologists tell us that this relating procedure, called "*advance organizers*", is necessary because it helps the trainees piece everything together into a united whole. If you start training them on a topic and do not relate the subject to them, it may take some time before they understand how all the material fits together.

Also during the "R" step, you will want to gain the attention of the learner. Perhaps this can be done by displaying a creative graphic or using an animation that grabs the interest of the trainee. You want their full attention so they can prepare mentally for the learning process ahead. One graphic that you might also include in this step is a visual outline of the lesson that graphically shows how the topics are related to each other. For visual



learners, this one graphic shows how the whole is divided into pieces and helps them cognitively prepare for the training.

Another part of the "R" step is establishing rapport. You can do this by using a metaphor during the instruction. Perhaps, the theme could include things such as an animated cartoon figure or a theme that is prevalent throughout the instruction. For example, on one lesson that taught the "journeys" involved in change management, graphics of road signs were used on the lesson title screens to announce the topic of that particular lesson. What a neat idea! In the course you are taking now, we use a mountain climbing metaphor. Your journey through the course has been marked by reaching peaks on a mountain trail.

In creating screens for the "R" step, remember that the first thing you will need to do is use a title template and name your lesson. This name will appear under the module drop down menu when the user mouses over the module title in the Roadmap within *Learn*. After this, you can mix graphic and text screens as you build the rest of "R" screens that start your lesson. Be creative! Remember, learning is fun.

"O" is for Overview

The second step in the ROPES model is overview. This step has three specific functions:

Present the objective of the lesson:

This is simply done by writing a sentence that tells what the trainee can expect to learn during the course. "At the end of this course, you will be able to write collection letters faster and efficiently" is an example. That example is quite formal. An informal example might be "This course prepares you to write collection letters -- faster and better."

Give the agenda for the course

This explains everything the trainees will be doing during the VLS course. You can explain how Assess presents a pretest, how Learn presents the new material and allows them to practice, how Research includes documentation for the course, and how Communicate provides electronic avenues for students and trainers to talk with each other – synchronously (in real time) or asynchronously (in delayed time).



Tell why this lesson is important

In a brief paragraph, tell the trainee why it is important for them to spend their time taking this particular lesson. Example:

This lesson is important because it gives you the only three ways that the company allows you to write a collection letter. This is essential because crossing these boundaries may result in a costly lawsuit for our company."

"P" is for Present

The third step in the **ROPES** model is **Present**. In this step, you will present the information to the learners. This is the new knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they need to acquire to become competent in the topic you are teaching over the web. If the learner does not understand and learn these competencies, the web-based training fails. First, we will discuss the types of information that corporate trainers can present to employees, then secondly, we will tell you the various ways that the **Vuepoint Learning System** can be used to present the instruction properly.

Basically, there are five (5) types of "information" that you can share with your trainees. Knowing this is important because it allows you to prepare VLS screens that get the message across to learners loud and clear.

Verbal Information

This type of instruction presents the basic information about the topic you are teaching the employees. Using our collection letter metaphor, this would include such things as "The parts of a collection letter; why the company writes collection letters; and the types of collection letters that the company allows." This is all verbal information that the trainee should be able to recall or state after the training is over. To devise questions to determine if the trainees know the verbal information, you could ask them "to describe --," "to name --," "to list --," or "to state --." Name the capitals of the 50 states would be an example of testing a learner on verbal information. Using our collection letter example, we could ask the learner to name the five parts of a letter.



Intellectual Skills

This type of instruction allows the trainee to put the verbal information into use on the job. This includes such things as "When to use which type of collection letter" or be able to look at a customer file and determine if a collection letter is even necessary. Intellectual skills give your employees the ability to apply the information to real situations so you can determine if they understand what they are learning. Examples of questions you could ask trainees include: "distinguish between --," "classify examples and non-examples of --," "design the ideal office," "determine if a customer's response is legitimate or not." For our collection letters, you could ask the trainee to read over a past due customer's file and determine which type of collection letter would be appropriate to send.

Cognitive Strategies

This type of instruction requires that the trainee reflects on what you are teaching them and apply their new knowledge, skills and attitudes to new situations. You want the employee to be able to think and devise new solutions and solve problems that will make them more effective. For example, suppose the situation arises where the customer needs a special collection letter written -- one that does not fit the three models that the company uses. Maybe the customer can not pay the bill because they have lost their job or have had a death in their family. You certainly would not want them to send a strongly-worded collection letter for these exceptions. By helping the trainee think up solutions to unique problems, they are able to become more valuable to the organization. Examples of testing cognitive strategies include: "Invent a new way to make a --," "Determine alternatives to --," or "Think where you may have lost your keys." For our collection letters, you could give the trainee a situation they have not encountered in training so far and ask them to compose a new type of collection letter.

Skills

This type of instruction presents procedures necessary to do a job well. It would explain the techniques of good letter writing such as the importance of using simple to understand words or keeping sentences short and to the point. If you are teaching a physical skill, the program could show an animation of the skill being done or a picture of someone doing the skill



correctly. To test collection letter writing skills using VLS, you could devise a scenario using the Essay template. Have the trainee write the body of a collection letter, then in feedback, let them compare their response to what the expert might have written.

Attitudes

This type of instruction addresses the behavioral aspects of a job. It tells the employee how they should act when confronted by an angry customer or how to get along with other employees. It addresses the social aspects of our jobs, and how we feel about the job we are doing -- and the importance of doing it right every time. In collection letter writing, you could stress the importance of writing the letter correctly every time, making sure that the customer's name and address is correct and that the facts are accurate.

"E" is for Exercise

The fourth step in the ROPES model is Exercise. In this step, trainees get to explore, practice, and interact with the material. They become active participants in the instruction instead of passive readers who can become quickly bored. It is your duty as a designer of web-based instruction to purposely plan meaningful interactions and use them continuously. It is as simple as providing true-false and multiple choice questions (to test verbal information and intellectual skills) or getting the trainee involved in real life simulations that make them think up solutions to new problems (cognitive strategies).

VLS allows exercises in two ways. First, during a Learn lesson, the students can respond to any of the many types of interaction templates that VLS provides. These include true-false, essay, multiple choice, drop down lists, fill-in-the-blank, or ranking. By allowing your trainee to answer these questions during the Learn section, they begin to remember and understand the topic better. Be sure to include elaborative feedback that reinforces correct answers. Secondly, VLS allows you to develop a more formal test that can be included in the Assess

VLS uniquely allows you to involve the learner in very interactive question and answer activities. By using the Communicate section of VLS, the trainee can exchange ideas, opinions, and solutions directly with the trainer and other students online. In the Bulletin Board section of



Communicate, the trainer can establish specific topic areas. During Learn, the trainee can be given an assignment and then told to post his or her

answers or comments on the Bulletin Board under a specific topic area. Each trainee comment is listed by title, author, and date so other trainees can read each others messages and add comments. In such a process, your corporate training begins to go global – and every one learns together.

In the Bulletin Board environment, trainees and trainers can post and exchange messages anytime they wish – day or night. We call this an asynchronous environment – that is, time-delayed. But VLS also allows you to establish chat areas addressing specific topics. You can pre-establish regular times when you will be available for "Live Chats" so trainees can join in and interact synchronous – that is, in real time. You and the learners can exchange comments, ask questions, write answers, and discuss topics.

And VLS also includes a Push feature that allows you electronically to send, or push, remediation screens to help you make a point during chat discussions. This push can be done to all students simultaneously – or to one specific student who needs guidance on a topic. Using your imagination, you can design many types of interactions to make your trainees active participants during web-based training. That is why VLS is so effective in presenting instruction and assuring that the new knowledge, skills and attitudes are transferred to the workplace so that employee performance will improve.

"S" is for Summarize

The final step in the **ROPES** model is **Summarize**. Before allowing the trainee to take the final exam in each module, you will want to summarize – and emphasize – the key points of the lesson. This can be done by listing the key points in a bulleted text format. Also during this stage, you can explain how this lesson ties into the other lessons in the course, and advise the trainees what lesson they should branch to next. So let's summarize:



The R Step:

You relate the topic to the learner so they will understand how it fits into the things they already know. You establish rapport by using a theme and making the learning fun and exciting.

The O Step:

You present the lesson objective and tell why it is important for the trainee to take this lesson.

The P Step:

You teach your topic. You can let the trainee read in the **Research** section or you can present information and graphics on screens within the **Learn** section. After they read part of a document or read information from a single screen, you can include interactive experiences such as multiple choice questions or give them assignments in the **Communicate** section of VLS. Make sure that you cover the five learning areas as appropriate:

1. Verbal Information – *facts*
2. Intellectual skills – *decision making*
3. Cognitive strategies – *problem solving*
4. Skills – *procedures*
5. Attitudes – *behavior and social skills*

The E Step:

You will allow the trainees to practice and interact further. This includes giving the trainees questions with appropriate feedback or you can encourage them to send and receive messages in the **Communicate** section of VLS. After the trainees finish all of the lessons within a module, they can be directed to the **Assess** section to take the final exam for that module.

The S Step:

You will summarize the lesson's key points, emphasizing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for the trainees to become competent. Then you will tie the material to other topics within the course and suggest what module they should take next.