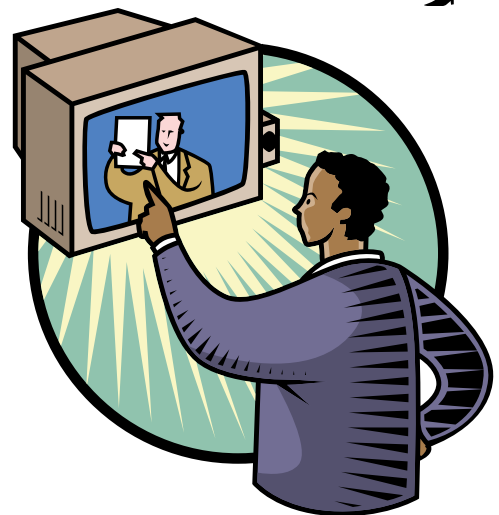
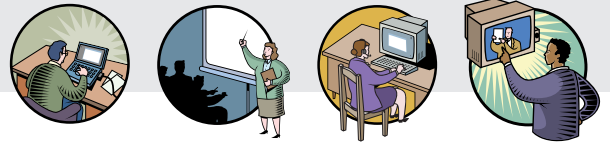


Linking to External Materials





Linking to External Materials

One of the things you will need to consider when repurposing materials is whether you want to embed the materials in your learning package (see **Embedding Materials** guidelines for issues regarding this approach), or create a link to where the materials exist. You may choose to embed some materials but link to others in the same learning package.

By linking to external materials, we mean providing a link to materials that are not actually contained in your learning package. The main focus here is linking to websites, but much of this advice can apply to references to other external materials.

Tutor Quote

Linking vs. Embedding

“For my money linking wins every time. It cuts down the size of the product - why store the same information in a thousand different servers? - it takes up space and you end up with multiple copies that are difficult to update. Also, with linking I think we avoid one of the bogeymen of Web-assisted learning; copyright.”

Advantages

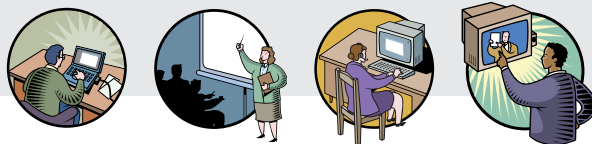
- Technically, linking to websites is quite easy to do.
- Copyright clearance is less of an issue (compared to **Embedding Materials**).
- Web site may be updated regularly which means that your learning package is always up-to-date. For example, learners can get access to the most up-to-date statistics.

Disadvantages

- Learners may get lost on the Web and be distracted by other things.
- If the owner of the website removes or renames their web page then your link to it will become broken.
- Web site may be updated so, for example, the content would become unsuitable for your students.

You will note that the fact the web site can be updated regularly is listed both as an advantage and disadvantage. In general it is probably more of a disadvantage, as you have no control over that Web page.

When you are including a link to a website, try to make it clear the link is going to an external site. You can do this by making the external links look different from any other links in your learning package. For example, quite often the text in the external links is italic. Depending on your learning scenario, it is usually good practice to give the link as much context as possible. For example don't just provide an address for a website, say who publishes the website and what you might find there. One of our tutors provided a list of possible websites for her learners to support a problem based learning scenario. The list included a brief description of each website. This proved to be very popular with the learners who liked being able to see a review of the websites before deciding whether or not to view them.



It is good protocol to have the external web site appear in a new Web browser (i.e. Internet Explorer or Netscape) window. There can be problems if you do not do this. If the external web site does not appear in a new Web browser window then it must appear in the Browser window where the external link is. This can happen in one of two ways:

- 1) the external web site completely replaces your learning package. The user can only get back to your materials using the back button of the browser and they are unable to simultaneously view the external website with any instructions or questions your package may give.
- 2) If you are using a frameset (and many Virtual Learning Environments do) the external Web site will appear in the same frame (a sub-window of your Web browser) as your link, leaving other parts of your site intact (for example, VLE navigation tool bar). This has legal implications: To have an external Web site appear within your own frameset makes it look like you are publishing those materials; presenting them as your own. This is taken very seriously and court cases have been won on this matter.

While copyright restrictions are not such a worry for linking to external web pages, some web sites may have restrictions regarding how you can link to their website. For example, some web sites insist that any links to them go directly to their front page and not a page deep within the website. It is our opinion that you should only worry about this if the web site specifically says not to do this. To find out more about copyright issues, please look at the **Copyright issues** guidelines.

These guidelines were produced as part of the JISC-funded project X4L Healthier Nation. You can find out about JISC at <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/>, the X4L Programme at http://www.jisc.ac.uk/index.cfm?name=programme_x4l and X4L Healthier Nation at <http://extranet.lauder.ac.uk/x4l/>.