

A Practical Playbook

Why Your eLearning Doesn't Stick

And How to Fix It in 5 Brain-Based Moves



Attention

Focus on what matters most.



Prior Knowledge

Activate what learners already know.



Reinforcement & Spacing

Strengthen memory over time.



Active Engagement

Turn learning into meaning.



Context & Application

Apply it where it counts.



Design for what the learner's brain must do.



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Why We Are Here

Our challenge:

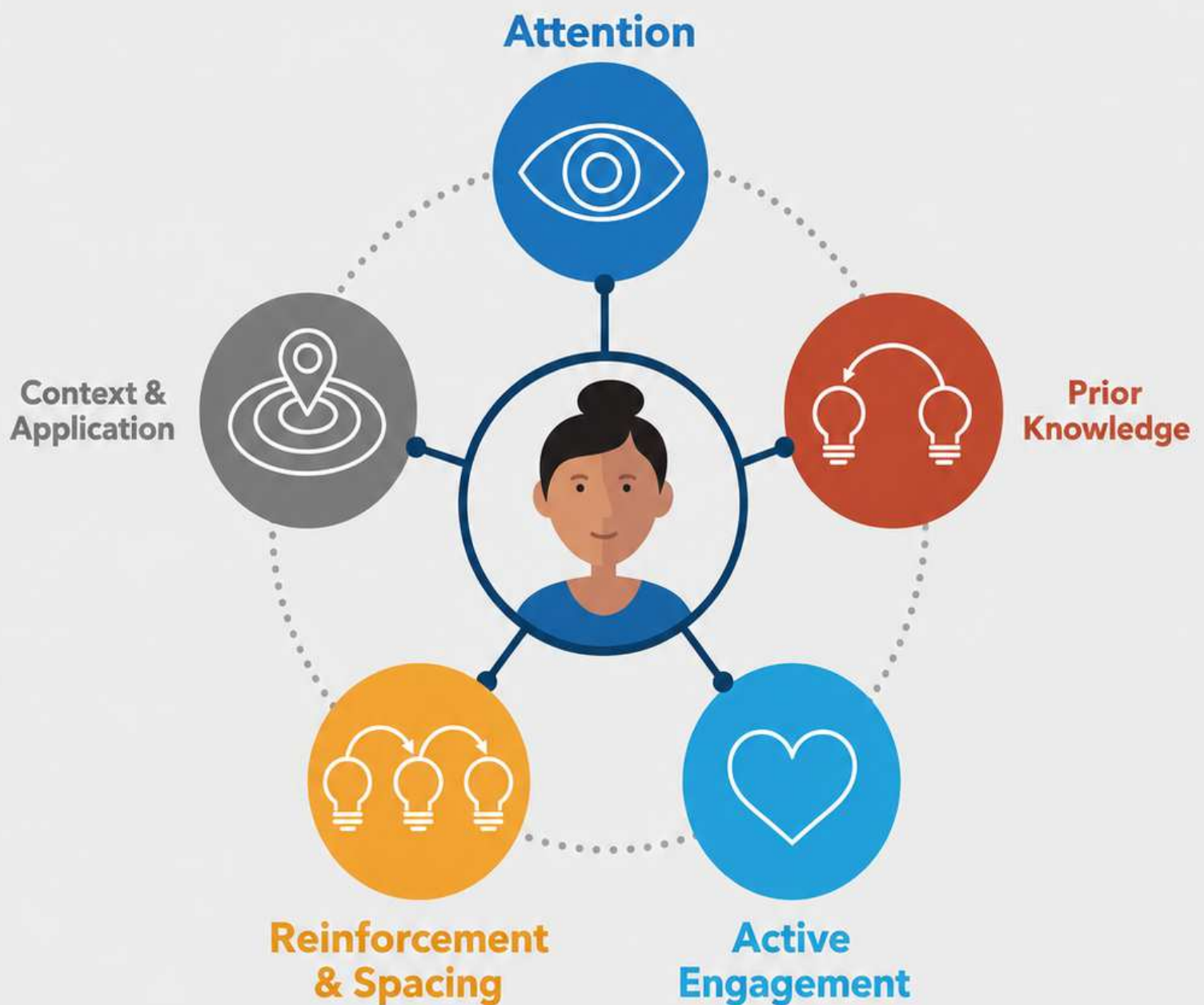
- We don't need prettier or "more engaging" modules.
- We need learning people can retrieve and use.
- Same content.
Same tool.
Different cognitive work.



Design for what the
learner's brain must do.

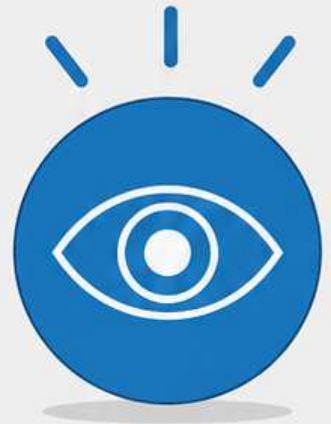
5 Brain-Based Moves

A lens for designing what the learner's brain must do.



Move 1 | Attention

Earn attention before explaining



Why it matters

- Learning starts with attention.
- Relevance, tension, and curiosity beat introductions.



Design moves

- Open with a question, problem, or consequence.
- Use real scenarios and tight chunks.



Before / After



Attention is the gateway to learning.

Move 2 | Prior Knowledge

Connect before expanding



1) Why it matters

- New ideas stick when they connect to what people already know.
- Prior knowledge includes assumptions and misconceptions.



2) Design moves

- Ask learners to recall, compare, or predict.
- Surface what feels familiar or questionable.



3) Example

- Instead of defining phishing first, ask:
“What made you hesitate?”



**The brain
learns by
connecting,
not absorbing.**

Participation beats presentation



1. Why it matters

- Clicking isn't necessarily thinking.
- People learn by deciding, predicting, and generating.



2. Design moves

- Ask before telling.
- Use scenarios, judgments, and explanation.



3. Example

- Swap click-to-reveal for a decision with consequences.



People learn
more by **doing**
than by watching.

Move 4 | Reinforcement & Spacing

Retrieve—don't just repeat



Why it matters

- One exposure rarely becomes memory.
- Retrieval strengthens recall and transfer.



Design moves

- Revisit key ideas in different forms.
- Use memory anchors and short booster prompts.



Encounter



Retrieve



Apply



Retrieve Again



Memory is built, not downloaded.

Make application unavoidable



Why it matters

- Knowing in the course is not the same as using at work.
- Practice should mirror the real decision.



Design moves

- Use realistic, ambiguous scenarios.
- Vary the context, not just the wording.



Example

- Email → Teams message
→ DocuSign request



Can they use it when the situation doesn't look like the training?

Worked Example

**Same content.
Different cognitive work.**



Same content. Same tool.
Better cognitive work.

Design Tools & Quick Start

eLearning Design Canvas



Learning Objective



Audience & Assumptions



Attention Hook



Prior Knowledge Bridge



Active Engagement



Reinforcement & Spacing



Context & Application



Takeaways

eLearning Evaluation Scorecard

- 1 Learning Objective Clarity ☆☆☆☆☆
- 2 Attention & First Impression ☆☆☆☆☆
- 3 Connection to Prior Knowledge ☆☆☆☆☆
- 4 Active Engagement ☆☆☆☆☆
- 5 Reinforcement & Spacing ☆☆☆☆☆
- 6 Context & Application ☆☆☆☆☆
- 7 Overall Learning Impact ☆☆☆☆☆



Start here tomorrow

- 1 Identify the target behavior.
- 2 Replace one passive moment with a decision.
- 3 Add retrieval.
- 4 Add a transfer scenario.
- 5 Score the experience.



Digital toolkit: sample module, canvas, scorecard, and slides.



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