

LAA-LAA Land

(AKA Creating Learning Activity Structures in the TotalLMS™)

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Once you start using TotalLMS™, you're bound to hear talk about "LAA" and what it can do for you. Likely, the first thing it can do for you is explain exactly what it is, since most people don't have any idea of what LAA stands for. And no, it's not "Lizards Against Apes," "Languid Animals Allowed," "Large Ant Attack!" or "Lethargic Architects Association," although those are all possibilities. (Not good possibilities, but possibilities.)

In actuality, LAA stands for "Learning Activity Architecture," which--once again--probably doesn't mean much most people. Basically, Learning Activity Architecture means that within the LMS, you can make any sort of learning activity structure. That is, you can combine or blend multiple training activities or different activity types (online, in-person, etc.). Almost as if, for example, you can structure (or architect) learning activities any way you want. Imagine that.

But how about a helpful example? Suppose you have an online PDF learners need to read before coming to an in-person class, which is followed by an online assessment. With LAA, you can combine these three things so learners understand all the pieces they need to take and administrators can better track completions.

What is a Learning Activity Structure?

There are a lot of names for combined learning activities including (but not limited to):

- Curriculum
- Learning Activity Structure
- Blended Learning
- Blended Structure
- Training Structure
- Learning Plan
- Curriculum

On the plus side, we don't ever abbreviate these names--especially Blended Structures. ☺ In the LMS, learners often need to take a number of different learning activities together in order to learn about a particular concept, idea, or program. (For example, new hire training might include separate training on policies and procedures, benefits, internal tools, and so on.) With TotalLMS™, we can combine these different activities into a structure (ah, Learning Activity Architecture! Now we're in LAA-LAA Land!) so that learners know what training to take.

For our purposes, let's call this structure a Curriculum. A Curriculum can include any type of learning activity in the system such as classroom training, online training, seminars, workshops, etc., or any combination. Likewise, some elements might be required and some might be optional, depending on your needs.

So Should I Use a Curriculum?

Sometimes. Let's face it: creating and maintaining Curricula means more work for you--and who wants more work?--so only do it if combining activities will make things significantly easier for learners. If your Curriculum only needs to have a couple items, you can probably get by using a standard naming convention for the activities: Widget Training Part 1, Widget Training Part 2, and so on. Another example of a couple of items that may not warrant a Curriculum is a class with some pre-work. If the pre-work is encouraged, but not required, consider using a link inside the class description that launches the pre-work directly. This might be simpler for you as an administrator and just as easy for the learner.

If, however, there are a number of items a learner must complete and you want to be able to define which items are required and which are optional, then a Curriculum is the way to go.

What Should My Curriculum Structure Look Like?

In theory, there are an infinite number of potential Curricula. However, since discussing an infinite number of plans would make this article really, really long--infinity plus one, maybe?--and no one would ever finish it, we can probably restrict ourselves to four good representative samples.

Two types of learning activities are shown below – an In-Person Course (with classes at specific locations on specific dates and times to choose from) and Online Training (some sort of training that is online whether it's an online course, assessment, document, and so on). You can, of course, have independent learning activities stand by themselves. While they don't constitute a learning activity *structure*, I'm starting with these two just to get warmed up:

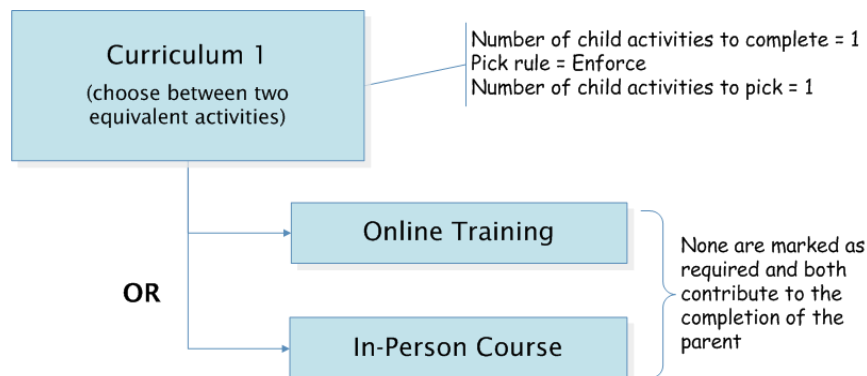


Now that we have that out of the way, let's move on to our first example.

Sample #1 – Choose Between Activities

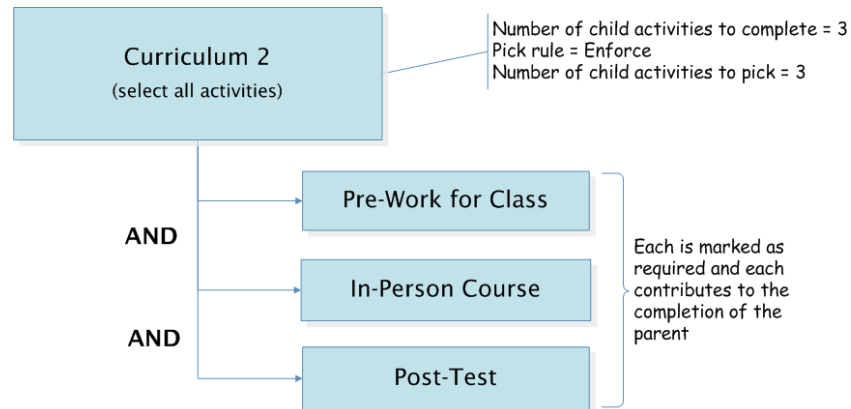
The Curriculum below has been created to give learners a choice between two equivalent activities. In this case, one activity is online and the other is an In-Person Course. One common reason this structure is used is to allow learners to either take a course or test-out of it. Another example might be to allow learners to choose between a course offered in different languages.

Since this example only has two pieces, you could consider not creating a Curriculum and leave the pieces separate. But, again, you'd want to create this if it is easier for learners or if it makes it easier for you to track compliance.



Sample #2 – Select All Activities

This next Curriculum was made to combine several learning activities. In this example, learners must take all of the activities in order to complete the Curriculum.



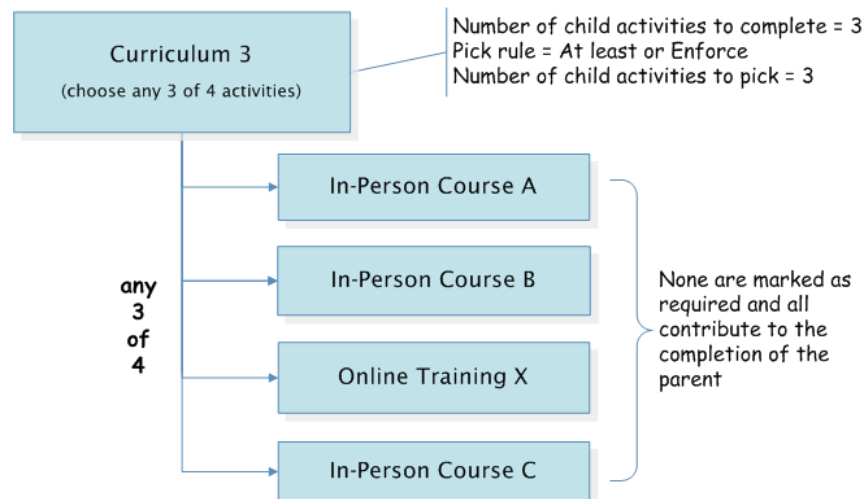
In this case, the learner must complete some work prior to attending class. Once class is complete, a post-test must be taken. Only once all three pieces are complete (at least, for this example) is the Curriculum considered complete.

It is certainly possible to build off this Curriculum and, for instance, make the Pre-Work optional while leaving the In-Person Course and Post-Test as required. To do so, at the Curriculum level the number of child activities to pick and complete would be 2 with a Pick Rule of "At least."

Sample #3 – Choose Any 3 of 4 Activities

The third sample shows a Curriculum created to combine several learning activities. In this case, learners must complete any three of the four available activities. One point to notice:

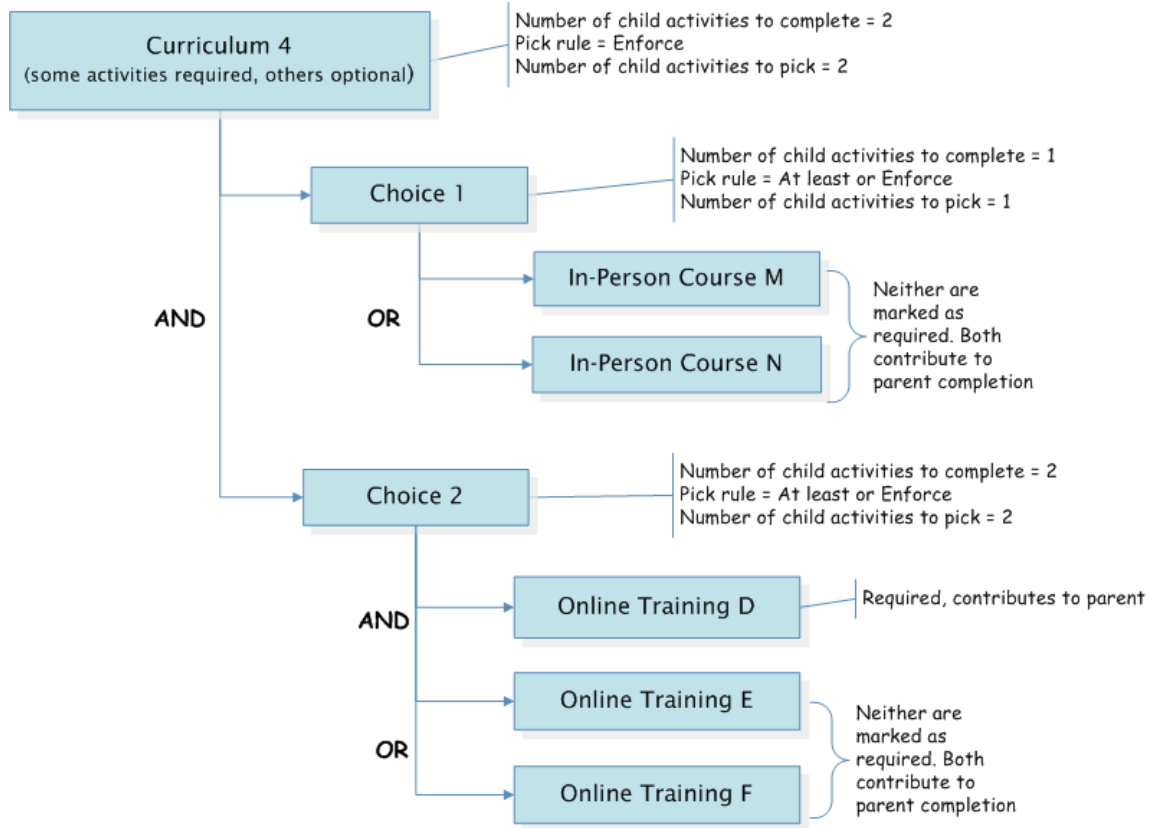
- If the learner must take exactly three activities, the pick rule at the Curriculum level is set to "Enforce number of child activities to pick." (That is, a learner can only take three activities – no more, no less.)
- If the learner must take *at least* three activities, the pick rule at the Curriculum level is set to "Select at least the number of child activities to pick." (A learner must take three activities, but can take all four, if desired.)



Sample #4 – Some Activities Required, Others Optional

For this final example below, the Curriculum combines several learning activities. In this Curriculum, learners must take some activities, but for other activities they have a choice. A few important points:

- There are many ways to create this type of Curriculum, but the sample shown below is a pretty common way.
- Notice that pick rules are set at the Curriculum level as well as the Choice placeholders that allows learners to choose between optional activities.
- Also note that while only *some* activities should be marked as required, *all* contribute to the completion of the parent activity.



So now that you know what LAA actually is, hopefully these samples will help you get started developing your own!

Irene Campbell began working with SumTotal products over 15 years ago, including their very first LMS: Librarian. (Anyone else remember that?) Because of this, she not only knows what LAA stands for, but loves helping clients define their unique learning activity structure. In fact, figuring it out is one of her favorite LMS brainteasers! Luckily, Irene's had the benefit of working with clients over extended periods of time and seeing first-hand how these structures work for them over time.

If you have any comments, questions or suggestions on this article, please structure your thoughts (you might want to make them required), and then send them to articles@terrabia.com.