



Subscriptions: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

So you've created a Curriculum (or, technically, "a learning activity structure containing two or more learning activities") and figured out how it will be structured. Congratulations--you're almost there! You'll notice, of course, that we said almost there, as in "you've still got one more thing left to do". You need to decide on whether your structure will be created using a subscription (a Curriculum with direct, subscribed child activities) or a fulfillment model (a Curriculum with placeholders that point to activities that fulfill it).

Once you begin to become familiar with subscription and fulfillment models, the choice may not seem to be a hard one. After all, Curriculums that use subscription links make things easier for everyone. Not only do they allow learners to register for everything at once, making the entire process simple, but they are also relatively easy for administrators to create. Of course, as with most things, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is, and that's unfortunately the case with subscription-based Curriculums.

But what, exactly, is the problem? The problem occurs if a learner takes a specific training and then later registers for a Curriculum that contains the completed training. If this sounds like the sort of thing that will never come up, then you're in luck: you can stop reading this article and go on with your day. For the rest of you poor saps, well, you should probably keep reading

Note: This article applies to SumTotal's TotalLMS™ versions 7.0 through 8.0.

The Issue: the Short Version

Basically, if a learner has completed an element of a Curriculum (online course, seminar, training, etc.) and then later registers for a Curriculum that includes the same, already completed element, the already completed element doesn't count toward the completion of the Curriculum.


The Issue: the Long Version

A learner registers for a Curriculum that includes a class or other learning activity that he or she has already completed. While the LMS recognizes that the activity has already been completed and warns the learner, if the course is a *required* part of the Curriculum--and it often is--the learner is still forced to register for the already-completed course because it's required. And, to add insult to injury, once the learner has re-registered for the training, the LMS expects the learner to complete the same course again. The learner can finish the rest of the assigned Curriculum, but until that previously-completed course is finished for the second time, the Curriculum remains incomplete.



A Closer Look



How about a specific example of what happens in this situation from the learner's perspective. The screenshots below show a Curriculum called Designing Fantastic Widgets (it's always widgets, isn't it?), which we created using subscription links to three activities.

In this example, our user--let's call her Lisa Learner--has already completed the first element in the Curriculum, Introduction to Widget Design, at some point in the past. (Lucky her ...) Because of this, when Lisa goes to register for the Curriculum, a warning icon  is shown next to that completed activity.

Name ^	Start Date	Training Organization	Region	Code	Language
<input type="button" value="Register"/> <input type="button" value="Register Others"/>		Curriculum: Designing Fantastic Widgets	Amway US		
To register, select your options. When you are done, click Submit or if payment is required, click Purchase. <input type="button" value="Submit"/>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum : Designing Fantastic Widgets Required: 3					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Web Based Training : Introduction to Widget Design*	Status: Registration allowed Already completed Show Details		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Instructor Led Training : Optimizing Your Widget Design*	Status: Registration allowed		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Web Based Training : Assessment for Widget Design*	Status: Registration allowed		
You must register for activities marked with an asterisk (*) in order to meet the completion requirements.					

Learner Mode – Registering for the Curriculum

If Lisa clicks on the warning icon (or the "Show Details" link available versions 7.6 and 8.0), a pop-up box tells her that the course is "Already completed." This warning is shown because the LMS knows that Lisa has already completed that element of her Curriculum.

Name ^	Start Date	Training Organization	Region	Code	Language
<input type="button" value="Register"/> <input type="button" value="Register Others"/>		Curriculum: Designing Fantastic Widgets	Amway US		
To register, select your options. When you are done, click Submit or if payment is required, click Purchase. <input type="button" value="Submit"/>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum : Designing Fantastic Widgets Required: 3					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Web Based Training : Introduction to Widget Design*	Status: Registration allowed Already completed Show Details		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content;"> Already completed Close  </div>					
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Instructor Led Training : Optimizing Your Widget Design*	Status: Registration allowed		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Web Based Training : Assessment for Widget Design*	Status: Registration allowed		
You must register for activities marked with an asterisk (*) in order to meet the completion requirements.					

Learner Mode – Warning message during registration

However, since Introduction to Widget Design is a required element of the Curriculum, Lisa must select it (or it is selected for her) before the Submit button is enabled. In other words, in order to register for the Curriculum, Lisa is forced to *re-register* for Introduction to Widget Design.



Once Lisa clicks Submit, she is navigated to the Activity Details page. Notice the status of the completed activity is now "Registered" since Lisa was forced to re-register for the activity during the curriculum registration process. So the LMS *knows* Lisa completed Introduction to Widget Design and has records of her completions, but the status of the *latest attempt record* is now "Registered" when it used to be "Attended".

In versions 7.6 and 8.0, the Activity Details page shows no indication Lisa ever completed Introduction to Widget Design. The attempt history is not displayed on this page.

Activity Details
Designing Fantastic Widgets

Cancel All

Name	Status	Date and Time	More Information	Required by Parent	Actions
Curriculum : Designing Fantastic Widgets			Summary		
Web Based Training : Introduction to Widget Design	Registered		Summary	Yes	Cancel
Instructor Led Training -Course: Optimizing Your Widget Design	Registered		Summary	Yes	Cancel
Web Based Training : Assessment for Widget Design	Registered		Summary	Yes	Cancel

Learner Mode versions 7.6 and 8.0 – No attempt history link for previously completed activities

However, in versions 7.0-7.5, this Activity Details page does display Lisa's attempt history. This means that in these versions, Lisa sees both that she has a status of "Registered" and completed attempt history on the same page. Confused yet? She is.

Activity Details
Widget Making 101

General Details

- Progress Details
- Activity Details

I Want To...

Progress Details

Below are the details about your registration and progress towards completing this activity.

Curriculum : [Designing Fantastic Widgets](#)

Web Based Training : [Introduction to Widget Design](#)

Status: Registered
[Cancel my registration](#)

Attempt History:

- Completed on 6/23/2007 Passed (via activity)

Instructor Led Training : [Optimizing Your Widget Design](#)

Status: Registered
[Cancel my registration](#)

Web Based Training : [Assessment for Widget Design](#)

Status: Registered
[Cancel my registration](#)

Learner Mode versions 7.0-7.5 – Status is "Registered" while activity completion displays



After Lisa has completed the second and third activities in her Curriculum, the first activity is still waiting to be completed. Again. On the Activity Details page for the Curriculum, Lisa's two completed activities now have a status of "Attended", while the Introduction to Widgets course still has a status of "Registered," that is, not complete. As a consequence, Introduction to Widgets will appear on Lisa's Training Schedule (in the current registration view) and on her home page (assuming the home page displays current activities). The first activity will remain open (with a status of "Registered") until Lisa re-completes it. You probably don't need us to tell you how happy Lisa is with this situation

Activity Details
Designing Fantastic Widgets

You are currently registered for one or more of the activities below. To register for the other activities, click Register.

Register Cancel All

Start	Name	Status	Date and Time	More Information	Required by Parent	Actions
	Curriculum: Designing Fantastic Widgets			Summary		
	Web Based Training: Introduction to Widget Design	Registered		Summary	Yes	Cancel
	Instructor Led Training -Course: Optimizing Your Widget Design	Attended		Summary Attempt History	Yes	
	Web Based Training: Assessment for Widget Design	Attended		Summary Attempt History	Yes	

Learner Mode versions 7.6 & 8.0 – All Curriculum elements complete, but registration remains open

Activity Details
Widget Making 101

General Details
Progress Details
Activity Details

I Want To...

Progress Details
Below are the details about your registration and progress towards completing this activity.

Curriculum : Designing Fantastic Widgets	Status: Registered
Web Based Training : Introduction to Widget Design*	Cancel my registration
	Attempt History:
	Completed on 2/22/2007 Passed (via activity)
Instructor Led Training : Optimizing Your Widget*	Status: Attended
	Cancel my registration
	Attempt History:
	Completed on 8/1/2007 Passed (via activity)
Web Based Training : Assessment for Widget Design*	Status: Attended
	Cancel my registration
	Attempt History:
	Completed on 8/2/2007 Passed (via activity)

Learner Mode versions 7.0-7.5 – All Curriculum elements complete, but registration remains open

The Administrator's View of Things

So we know what Lisa sees in this situation, but how about the administrator? If the administrator looks at Lisa's Curriculum, the two activities Lisa completed *after* registering for the Curriculum are marked as "Attended." However, the first activity--which Lisa completed before registering for the Curriculum--shows the latest attempt record is "Registered." Naturally, since that activity remains incomplete, the Curriculum itself remains incomplete.



Now, you might think that you could simply mark the Introduction to Widget Design activity as complete to send Lisa on her merry way. Unfortunately, doing that would mean you were falsifying data, which not only makes it difficult later on to figure out what data is "real" and what data was entered just to solve this problem, but it can cause even bigger problems if your organization is ever audited. Not surprisingly, for both of those reasons, we don't recommend fixing the issue in this way ...

LISA LEARNER
Designing Fantastic Widgets

Activity Type: Curriculum Location: None
Code: None Instructor: None

Note: Completion information that comes directly from the content can override manual roster changes for some online activities.

Instructions

Update the completion details for this user as needed.

Click Transfer Registration to transfer the seat to another user.

Latest Attempt

Records: 4

	Name	Registered	Status	Status Date	Score	Passed	Completed
<input type="checkbox"/>	Curriculum Designing Fantastic Widgets						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Web Based Training Introduction to Widget Design	Yes	Registered	5/5/2009 1:58:04 PM EDT			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Instructor Led Training - Course Optimizing Your Widget Design	Yes	Attended	5/1/2009 2:00:00 PM EDT			Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Web Based Training Assessment for Widget Design	Yes	Attended	5/1/2009 3:00:00 PM EDT	100	Yes	Yes

(Clear value)

Administrator Mode – Curriculum roster

What It All Means

Basically, if you think that your learners have completed some activities in a Curriculum *before* registering for the Curriculum, you might not be able to take advantage of subscription links to create the Curriculum itself. Of course, the only other option is to use fulfillment links, which fixes the problem described in this article, but only for versions 7.0 through 7.5. However, using fulfillment is significantly more cumbersome for your learners during the registration process. To figure out what's best for you, you'll have to find the right balance between how often such out-of-curriculum completions might happen, how many learners you have, how feasible it would be to train those learners on the registration process, and how difficult a fulfilled Curriculum would be for them to use, etc. While there is no hard-and-fast right answer, there is a right answer for you---you just have to find it.

Irene Campbell has been using fulfilled and subscribed Curricula for as long as they have existed. Since she began working with SumTotal products more than 14 years, she's helped with everything from small, phased-approach rollouts to huge projects involving international LMS rollouts to over half a million learners. One of her favorite tasks is helping folks define their unique learning activity structures. In fact, figuring it out is one of her favorite LMS brainteasers! (As you can imagine, this makes her the life of pretty much any party she goes to ... Okay, maybe not.)

If you have any comments, questions, or suggestions on this article, please mark them as required (subscription or fulfillment--it's up to you) and send them to articles@terrabia.com.

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