

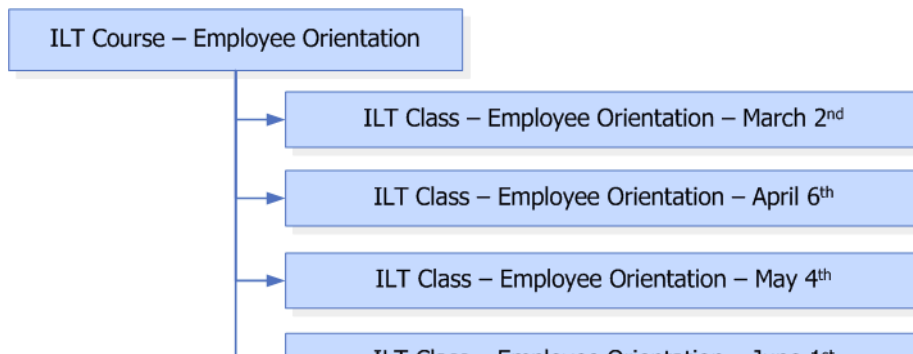
Sometimes You Feel Like a Session, Sometimes You Don't

Do you ever sit around just wishing that you had even more busy work to do at your job? Probably not. But guess what? You may be giving yourself some busy work without even realizing it. How? Using Sessions in the LMS from SumTotal. Many LMS users create one or more Sessions per ILT Class just because they think they are supposed to. Not so! In fact, the opposite is actually true--many people shouldn't be creating Sessions at all.

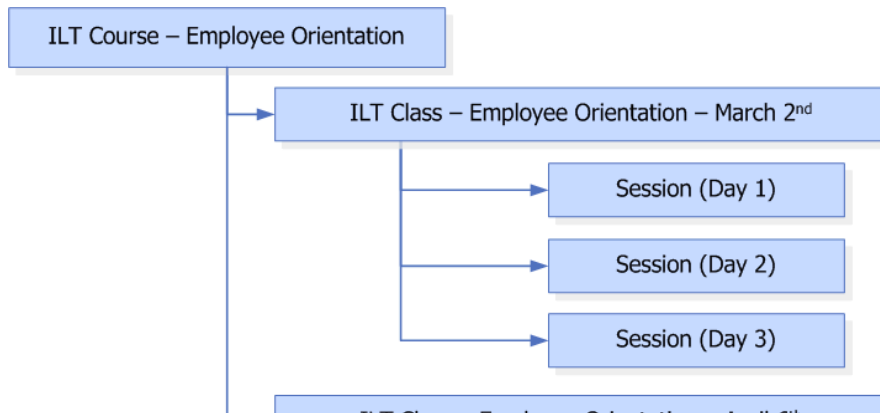
Why? Well, that takes some explaining. (If it didn't, I wouldn't be writing this article, would I?) To start, let's step back for a moment and talk about semantics--that is, defining words.

Most LMS users--including myself--refer to an in-person learning activity as an "instructor-led training course" or, more simply, an "ILT Course." An ILT Course refers to a concept or subject that users are supposed to be taught, while an ILT Class--often referred to, quite sensibly, as simply a "Class"--is the actual learning event and has a date, time, location, instructor, etc.

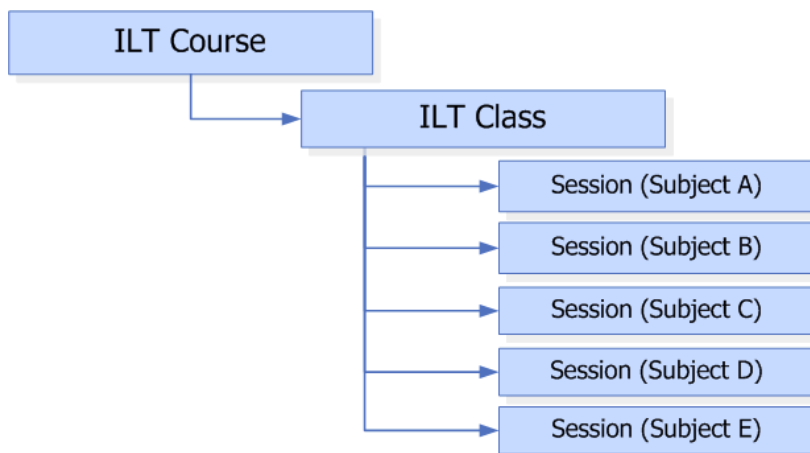
For this reason, ILT Classes are also sometimes referred to as *an offering of* an ILT Course. So, for example, if the ILT Course was "Employee Orientation," the specific ILT Class would be "Employee Orientation" on Monday, March 2nd. The idea of multiple classes per course is shown in the chart below:



Taking this one step further--you didn't think it was that easy, did you?--it is possible to further break ILT Classes into Sessions. For example, if your Employee Orientation Class is so long it takes three days (have fun!), you could have an ILT Class with three Sessions "underneath" it: one Session for each day. Again, a handy chart has been included below to better illustrate this idea:



Of course, you don't necessarily always need--or have--one Session for one day. You might, for example, have a three-day course that trains on five different subjects, with learners free to choose which of those five they want to attend. That might look something like this:



Got all that? Good--because here comes some stuff you should know about Sessions in your LMS.

Sessions Are Created Automatically

Out of the box, the LMS is set to automatically create a Session whenever an ILT Class is created. (You can turn this off and we'll talk about that later). However, unless there is a compelling reason to do so, I rarely recommend making use of Sessions. Why? Because creating and maintaining them is a lot of extra work, which is great if you either a) truly need Sessions, or b) wish you had more busy work in your job. (Some people choose A; I've yet to have someone choose B ...)

Sessions = More Work ... A Lot More Work

When you create Sessions, you have to set the properties for each and every Session. This means that you'll need to determine whether each notification should be active or inactive at the Session and/or ILT Class level. While you're at it, you also have to determine if evaluations should be at the Session and/or Class level, and then set appropriately. Oh, and you'll have to set the dates, times, locations, and instructors for each Session, of course. The list goes on, but I think you get the idea. Essentially, every Session you create takes just as much work as creating a single ILT Class. In other words, you are doubling, tripling, or quadrupling your work (or more) depending on how many sessions are involved.

Of course, if you truly *need* Sessions, it's worth the extra effort. If you don't, that's called busy work.

No Session Required: When You Don't Need Them

Some folks feel Sessions need to be created to support certain situations. However, in many of these cases, Sessions are not truly *required* ...

Multiple Dates and Times

Many people assume you have to have Sessions for Classes across multiple days, particularly to clarify dates and times. Suppose, for example, you have a three-day Class that goes from 8 am till 4 pm each day. Without Sessions, it initially looks like the Class goes from 8 am on Monday till 4 pm on Wednesday. However, most users will obviously understand that they won't be spending the night. If you need to clarify the schedule, consider doing it through the description rather than through Sessions.

Multiple Locations

What if there are different locations for a single Class? This still doesn't mean that Sessions are a must. Again, consider using the description and/or notifications to let learners know location details. Also, don't forget that you'll have the instructor there to remind users of the location.

Since creating and maintaining Sessions is a lot of extra work, using them simply to clarify a location is typically not enough of a driving force.

Multiple Instructors or Evaluations

Okay, what if there are multiple instructors and I want to track evaluations on each one? Sessions are a must, right? Nope! Instead, you could always modify your evaluations to support that. You create the evaluation once and use it many times rather than creating Sessions each time.

Now, some of you might argue that any one of these reasons is indeed compelling enough for you. And guess what? You're right. If date and times block learner schedules and non-Class times *must* be specific, then create Sessions. If locations are reserved or controlled only through the LMS, then Sessions may indeed be required. And if getting evaluations per instructor is mandatory, well then, you're stuck with making Sessions.

But if none of these is the case for you, then ditch the busy work of creating and maintaining Session altogether. Then you can sit back, sigh, and enjoy the simple life.

When You Need Sessions

Some folks feel Sessions need to be created to support certain situations. And, in fact, some folks are right ...

Track Sessions Attendance

If you have to track *exactly* which Sessions learners attend, then you have to create Sessions. For example, in the health care industry, when training nurses—who may be called away at any time—training administrators need to track which pieces of training a nurse has attended and which still need to be completed.

Choose Optional Sessions

If you want learners to choose between certain Sessions for a single ILT Class, then creating Sessions make sense. In this case, sessions will allow learners to choose which topics they will attend as well as know the dates, times, and locations per topic.

Turning Off Automatic Sessions

So if you've decided that you plan to avoid making Sessions most or all of the time and you don't want Sessions created for you automatically when you create a Class, you can turn off it off. (Smart move, BTW). Or, more accurately, a System Administrator can turn it off for you. Keep in mind this setting is global for the entire system, so any changes made affect everyone using the system.

To no longer have Sessions created automatically when a Class is created:

1. In Administrator mode, under the Learn menu, choose Learn Configurations, then Activity Types.
2. Click the pencil icon associated with ILT Class (or your equivalent).
3. On the Set Activity Type Properties page, under “Children created by a wizard will be of type,” choose None.

That’s it--you are session free! That should leave you with more time to concentrate on the rest of your busy work ...

Irene Campbell has spent countless hours creating learning activities. In fact, over the course of her 20 years working with SumTotal products, she’s created a number of streamlining best practices throughout the LMS. Her clients range from companies with small, phased-approach rollouts to clients with huge projects involving international LMS rollouts in multiple languages to hundreds of thousands of learners.

If you have any comments, questions, or suggestions on this article, don’t bother creating a special Session, just send your thoughts to articles@terrabia.com.



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