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Instructional Design Using Adobe Captivate

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Title	Adobe Captivate 9
Author	Adobe
Contact Information	http://www.adobe.com/products/captivate.html
Type of Product	eLearning design software
Platform	Windows 7 or higher; Mac OS X v10.10.3 or higher
Minimum Hardware Requirements	• 1GHz or faster Intel Pentium 4, Intel Centrino, Intel Xeon, or Intel Core Duo (or compatible) processor • Windows 64-bit only. Windows 32-bit is not supported. • 2GB of RAM minimum • 5GB of available hard-disk space • Adobe Flash Player 10 • DVD-ROM drive • 1024×768 display with 16-bit video card
Price	• $29.99 Monthly • $349.00 Student/Teacher Edition • $1,099.00 Full License (Non-education institution price)

Introduction

Instructional design is a field of education that focuses on the systematic development of courses and instructional materials (Guo, 2014). The field as a whole focuses on creating instructional experiences which make the acquisition of knowledge and skill more efficient, effective, and appealing (Merrill, Drake, Lacy, Pratt, & ID2 Research Group, 1996). Adobe Captivate is an elearning design platform that can be used to help achieve these instructional design goals.

Captivate can be used to create interactive materials, more engaging lecture presentations, or to deliver tests over a course/learning management system. The program uses Adobe's proprietary Flash software, allowing it to be used in any web browser on Mac or Windows computers. While often used by Instructional Designers, Adobe Captivate can be utilized by teachers to differentiate their learning materials and to create modules for mobile and other electronic devices.

Product Description

Captivate works by allowing users to create anything from slide presentations (similar to PowerPoint) to in-depth interactive lesson materials. In fact, one of Captivate's most advantageous features is that it can be used by someone with little computer knowledge, as well as by advanced users to create detailed, scripted applications. On Captivate's home screen, the user may pick from a slide presentation or recorded screen capture, among other options, to begin the project.

To illustrate what can be created in Captivate, I will share a simple example activity focused on ordering food. Even beginning users could use Captivate to create modules similar to this one.

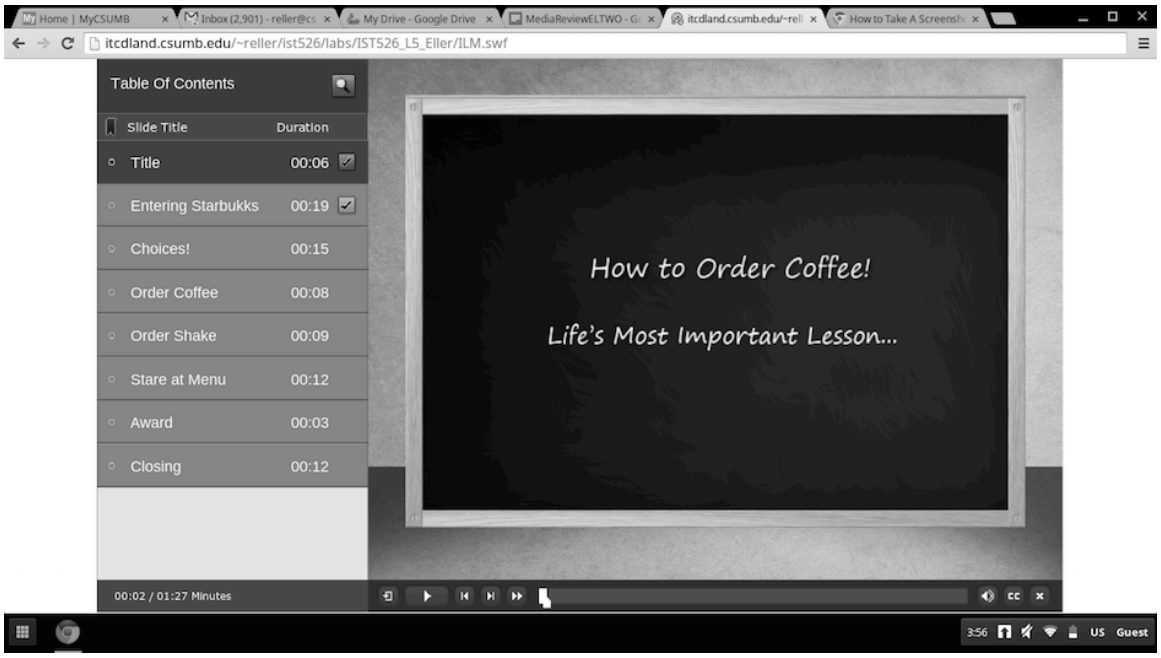

Figure 1. *Initiating an activity in Adobe Captivate*

Figure 1 shows the module's home screen. To the left is the table of contents, with a play bar at the bottom and the module content in the middle portion of the screens. This table of content feature is user-friendly in that it allows students to go back or move forward to any given slide, or to use the play bar controls for the same purposes.

Users can also see the CC (closed captioning) button at the bottom, though this function in Captivate does not work seamlessly with voice recognition software, nor does it do a good job of recognizing recorded voices (in terms of providing a slide's subtitle). Users can manually type in subtitles for their module, but this is a time-consuming process and must be time-matched unless the teacher provides a large paragraph with small text (versus timed sentences that match spoken word associated with the slide). An example of the CC subtitling issue is shown in Figure 2. Even in full screen mode, this CC text is rather small and there is no way to increase its size manually.

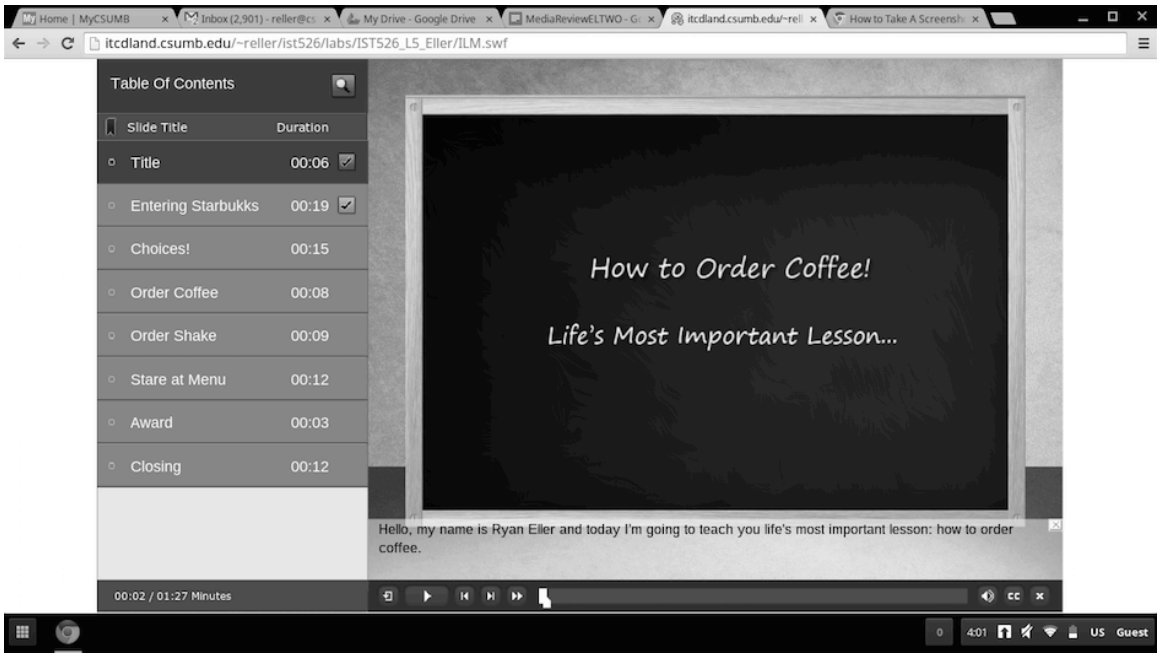

Figure 2. *Slide showing closed captioning*

In Figure 3, two additional features are shown. Firstly, the characters used to portray the on-screen interactions are clip art provided by the software. Utilizing the clipart provides benefits to both the teacher and student. Teachers can use the clip art characters to accentuate realistic emotions of characters so that students get a richer understanding of the lesson plan, as the intonation (if using speech), body language, and mood can all be reflected appropriately in the provided visuals and audio. Another feature shown in Figure 3 is the clickable "Make Your Choice!" button in the bottom right hand corner of the screen.

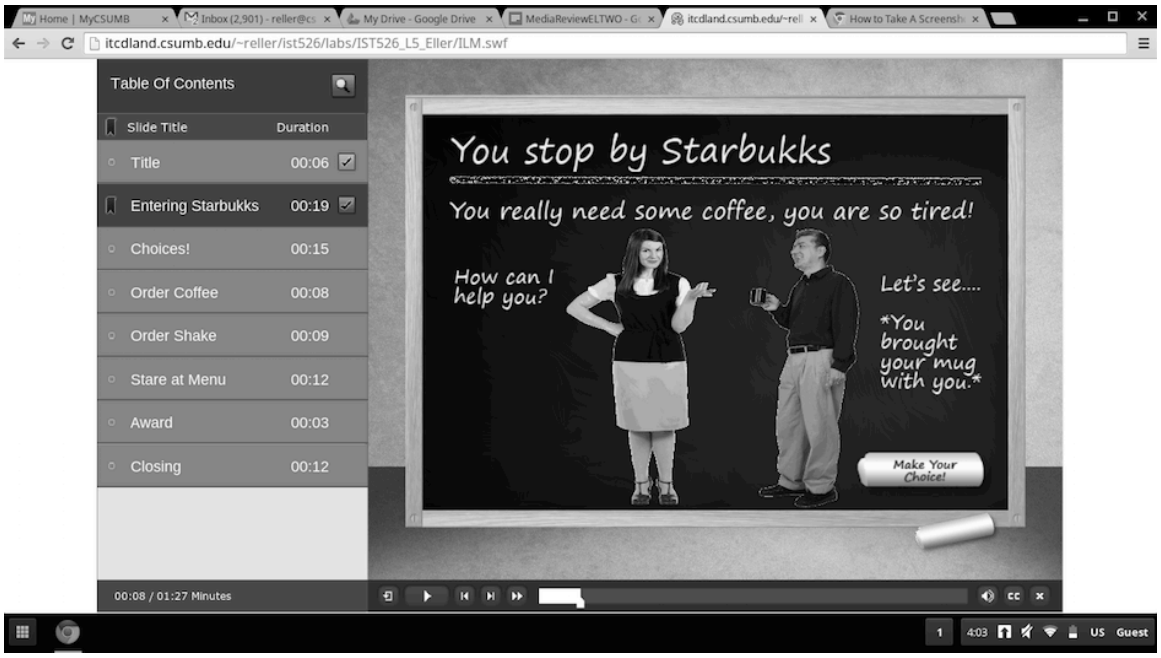

Figure 3. *Slide showing characters and the action button*

Buttons increase user interactivity with the module, as students are given a choice of when or how to proceed with an activity (see Figure 4).

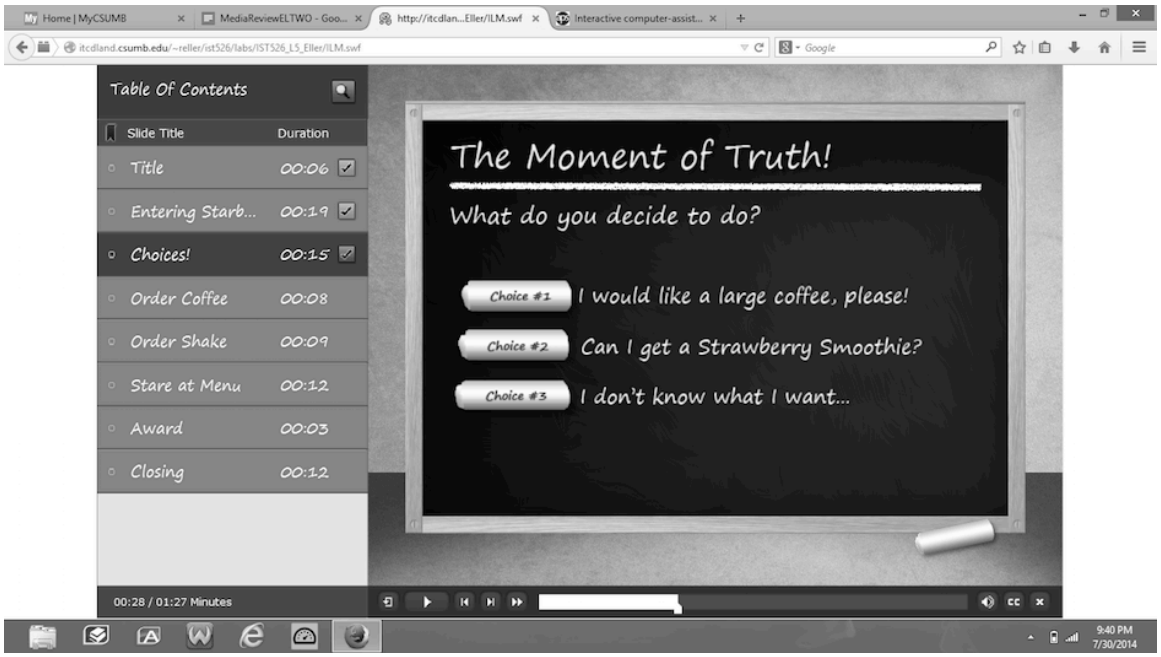

Figure 4. *Slide providing students a choice on how to move through the lesson*

Figure 5 shows a student's selection of the "correct" answer by the slide depiction of a cheerful customer and a happy salesperson. At this point in the activity, the student is allowed to print a certificate of completion with her or his personal data, if desired.

Figure 5. *Slide showing successful completion of the activity and the "award" button*

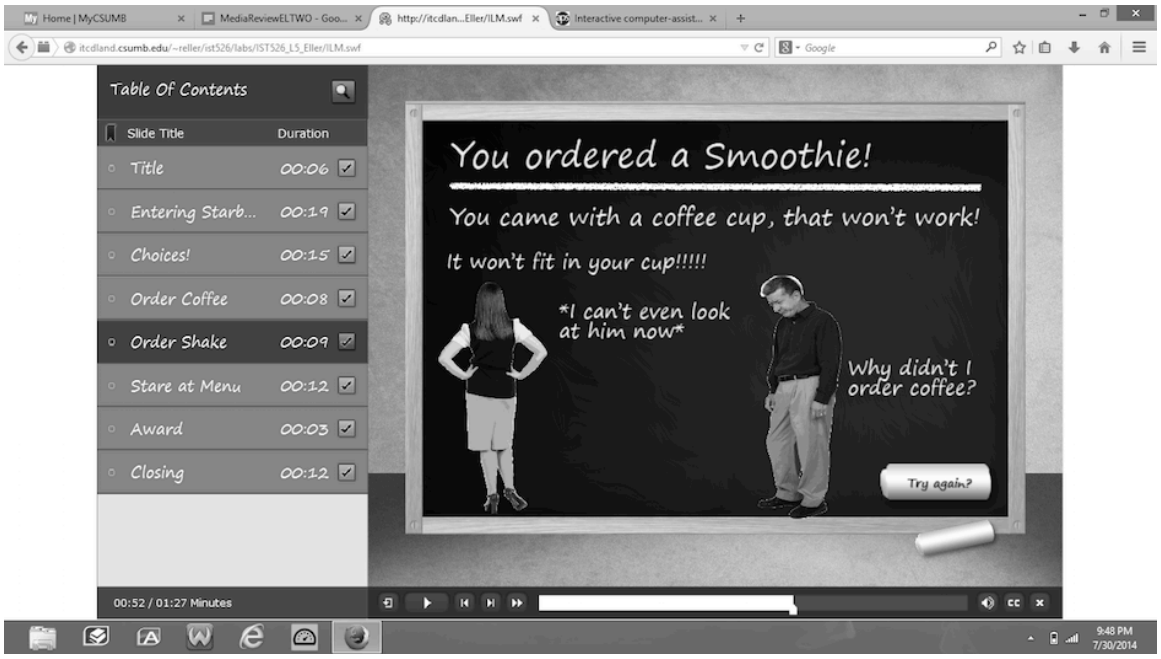

Figure 6. *Slide indicating incorrect choice and "Try again" button*

A sample of what appears when a user selects an incorrect choice is shown in Figure 6. Here a "Try again" button is available to students to return back to an earlier slide that presented additional choices. Navigation options like these give users more than one way to get to a specific slide as needed. This could be even more helpful for a more factual-based learning module, where a student could review module material as needed.

Product Evaluation

As hinted at above, there is a vast number of design options available in Adobe Captivate. This sample activity was created much like a PowerPoint presentation and then given navigation and functionality post-slide creation. As such, Captivate's greatest assests are the easy pick-up-and-go design features, simple navigation, closed captioning, emotion/body language enabled clip art, and the capability to record one's voice. Instructors using Captivate can also record a video using the software or record directly from their desktop so they could model a new program for students. For example, a course professor could record themselves using Anki (a flashcard program commonly used for language study) on their computer and Captivate will detail each button click for the user and provide pointer arrows showing students where to click to perform actions mimicking those of the professor.

Captivate does have some limitations. Firstly, its closed captioning function is not intuitive. Unfortunately, while the program does try to sync written captions with spoken words, this process becomes tiresome, as Captivate relies on the user to double check that everything is synced appropriately.

Another issue revolves around module navigation. While it is easy to navigate using Captivate, students can gloss over slides by fast forwarding or skipping slides altogether. Though there is an available function that forces students to access and interact with each slide completely to continue, if an instructor employs this, it will force students to do this every time they visit a slide (even if they are just reviewing it).

Lastly, Captivate has many great features that can be used to create learning materials for any subject. However, many of the more complex features (such as the recording of student information) do require some advanced application knowledge; with this in mind, designing a module for every class lesson would be time consuming, and to ensure functionality with a course management system (such as iLearn or Moodle) would be even more tedious. This point is made even more evident in the examples shown above. The provided example shows only a few options available to the module designer; there are hundreds of alternatives for designing activities like the one above, and there are numerous other features and options that could not be illustrated in this review.

Conclusion

In short, Captivate is a program that is worth an educator's time. An instructor may try Captivate on a trial basis and make a further decision from there, but the ability to tailor

the options to fit the needs of the learning environment makes it an incredibly useful pedagogical tool. However, new users—instructors and students alike—should expect to spend a considerable amount of time if they wish to master the program. Naturally, language teachers should gauge their own comfort level with simple presentation design, their students' projected comfort level using the program, and if or how use of the program would benefit the class as a whole.

References

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Merrill, M. D., Drake, L., Lacy, M. J., Pratt, J., & ID2 Research Group. (1996). Reclaiming instructional design. *Educational Technology, 36*(5), 5-7.

About the Reviewer

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