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Scenario Design Worksheet

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Print this or fill it in digitally. Work through the sections in order. By the end you will have a complete scenario outline you can hand to an SME for review or start building right away.

1. Action map starter

Every scenario starts with a business goal and the actions that drive it. If you cannot name the goal, stop here and go get it from a stakeholder.

Business goal (one sentence, measurable):

> **Tip**
> A good goal names a metric and a direction. "Reduce onboarding support tickets by 20% in Q3" works. "Improve product knowledge" does not.

Now list what people need to **do** on the job to hit that goal. Actions are observable behaviors, not knowledge or attitudes.

#	Observable action (starts with a verb)	Priority (High/Med/Low)	In the scenario? (Y/N)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

> **Rule of thumb**
> Only High priority actions earn a decision point. If everything is High, ask your SME which mistakes cost the most money or risk, then re-rank.

2. Scenario framing

Answer each prompt in one or two sentences. This becomes the opening of your scenario.

Element	Prompt	Your answer
Audience	Who takes this scenario? What do they already know?	
Context	Where and when does the story take place?	
Character	Who does the learner play? First person as themselves, or a named role?	
Trigger event	What happens in the first 30 seconds that forces a decision?	
Stakes	What goes wrong in real life if the character chooses poorly?	

> **Tip**
> Pick a trigger event that your audience has actually faced. Ask your SME for a real story and change the names.

3. Decision-point planning table

Fill in one table per decision point, one for each action you marked High priority in section 1. Three to five decision points is typical for a single scenario; three tables are below, so print page 3 again if you plan more.

Decision point 1

Field	Your plan
Action from section 1	
Challenge (the situation that forces the choice)	
Best choice (what a skilled person does)	
Distractor 1 (a real mistake, see prompts below)	
Distractor 2 (a different real mistake)	
Consequence of best choice (what the learner sees happen)	
Consequence of each distractor (shown in the story, not told)	
Feedback style (immediate, delayed to end, or consequence only)	

Decision point 2

Field	Your plan
Action from section 1	
Challenge (the situation that forces the choice)	
Best choice (what a skilled person does)	
Distractor 1 (a real mistake, see prompts below)	
Distractor 2 (a different real mistake)	
Consequence of best choice (what the learner sees happen)	
Consequence of each distractor (shown in the story, not told)	
Feedback style (immediate, delayed to end, or consequence only)	

Decision point 3

Field	Your plan
Action from section 1	
Challenge (the situation that forces the choice)	
Best choice (what a skilled person does)	
Distractor 1 (a real mistake, see prompts below)	
Distractor 2 (a different real mistake)	
Consequence of best choice (what the learner sees happen)	
Consequence of each distractor (shown in the story, not told)	
Feedback style (immediate, delayed to end, or consequence only)	

Distractor-writing prompts

Distractors fail when they are obviously wrong. Base every distractor on a mistake real people make. Use these prompts with your SME:

- What do new hires get wrong in their first month on this task?
- What shortcut do experienced people take that backfires?
- What would someone do if they misread the situation in a plausible way?

- What did the last incident report or support ticket say actually happened?
- What advice do veterans give that beginners ignore?

> **Warning**
> If you cannot trace a distractor back to a real mistake, cut it. A two-option decision built on real mistakes beats a four-option decision padded with filler.

4. Consequence-design checklist

Run every consequence you wrote in section 3 through this list. Check each box only if it is true for all of your decision points.

- [ ] The consequence shows a real-world outcome (an angry customer replies, the report bounces back, the machine faults) instead of a mentor saying "That's incorrect."
- [ ] The learner sees the consequence before any explanatory feedback appears.
- [ ] No choice triggers an instant correction that erases the mistake. The learner lives with it for at least one beat of the story.
- [ ] Poor choices lead to a recovery path, a degraded-but-continuing storyline, or a clear failure state, and I chose which on purpose.
- [ ] Consequences differ by choice. Two different choices never produce the same generic result screen.
- [ ] The severity of each consequence matches real life. Small mistakes get small consequences.
- [ ] Delayed consequences reference the earlier choice so the learner can connect cause and effect.

5. Pre-build QA checklist

Complete this list before you build anything in your authoring tool. Fixing an outline costs minutes. Fixing a built scenario costs days.

- [ ] An SME has reviewed every challenge, choice, and consequence for accuracy.
- [ ] An SME confirmed each distractor is a mistake real people actually make.
- [ ] I did a plausibility pass: every choice is something a reasonable person might pick.
- [ ] I sketched the branching map on paper or a whiteboard and every path reaches an ending.
- [ ] Each decision point maps back to a High priority action in section 1.
- [ ] The opening scene sets context in under a minute of reading.
- [ ] I know the feedback style for each decision point and wrote it in the table.
- [ ] A stakeholder has signed off on the business goal wording in section 1.

Keep this worksheet with the finished scenario. When you revise the course later, it tells you why every decision point exists.

Have any questions? Email me at devlin@devlinpeck.com