HOW TO BOOST EMPLOYEE TRAINING WITH ROLE-PLAY SIMULATIONS

PRODUCED TOGETHER WITH CLARK ALDRICH, THE WORLD'S MOST EXPERIENCED DESIGNER OF EDUCATIONAL SIMULATIONS

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Role-plays, short sims, or scenarios are learning experiences that mirror the real world and help people learn things the same way they would in real life but in an easy, safe-to-fail environment. Think of them as a "Groundhog Day" situation. Learners, like Phil (Bill Murray), make choices over and over until they get them right.

This guide is your one-stop resource for using role-plays for employee training. To make it really helpful, we teamed up with Clark Aldrich, a top expert in educational simulations. Mr. Aldrich shared his insights about existing types of role-plays, their benefits, and limitations, and helped us create a step-by-step guide to building effective role-plays.

CLARK ALDRICH

Founder and Managing Partner
of Clark Aldrich Designs

Clark Aldrich is the world's most experienced designer of educational simulations, creating short sims for clients and working across industries, from Visa and Sony to the Department of State, Harvard Business Publishing, the United Nations, Microsoft, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Center for Army Leadership.

Here's an example of a short sim he created with iSpring Suite. Check it out to get an idea of what a role-play is and how it works. [demo]

ROLE-PLAYS, SHORT SIMS, SCENARIOS...
WHAT DO WE CALL THESE THINGS?

There's a variety of terms to describe these experiences. One company calls them "rehearsals," another refers to them as "simulations," and even "learning games." "Scenario" is probably the term that most clients prefer. iSpring uses "role-plays" and "role-play simulations," while Clark Aldrich calls them "short sims."

It ultimately doesn't matter what you call them if everyone involved understands what you mean. In this guide, we'll use role-plays, role-play training, sims, and short sims interchangeably.

BENEFITS OF USING ROLE-PLAYS
IN CORPORATE TRAINING

There is a common complaint in the industry that training gets little respect from the rest of the organization. Most employees will put off most training for as long as possible. Sponsors think it's too expensive, too ineffective, and takes too long to create. But role-plays can show conclusively that these ideas are just flat-out wrong. They are easy and fairly inexpensive to create and are an effective tool for employee training and development.

Here are some of the benefits of incorporating short sims into corporate training:

01 Enhanced Learning:

Role-plays provide a hands-on learning experience that helps employees understand complex concepts and practice new skills in a realistic setting

02 Improved Communication Skills:

Simulations are like the ultimate practice arena where employees can fine-tune their negotiation and conflict-resolution skills without risking office mishaps.

03 Real-World Application:

By simulating workplace scenarios, short sims help employees transfer theoretical knowledge into practical application with ease

04 Increased Engagement:

Role-plays turn training sessions into an interactive game, making the whole thing more fun and memorable. It's like turning work into a friendly competition.

05 Confidence Building:

Sims provide a safe space for employees to step out of their comfort zone and build confidence in their abilities.

06 Feedback and Reflection:

Role-plays encourage constructive feedback and self-reflection, allowing participants to identify areas for improvement and growth.

In a nutshell, role-plays are like cheat codes for better learning, enhanced skills, and next-level engagement in the corporate world.
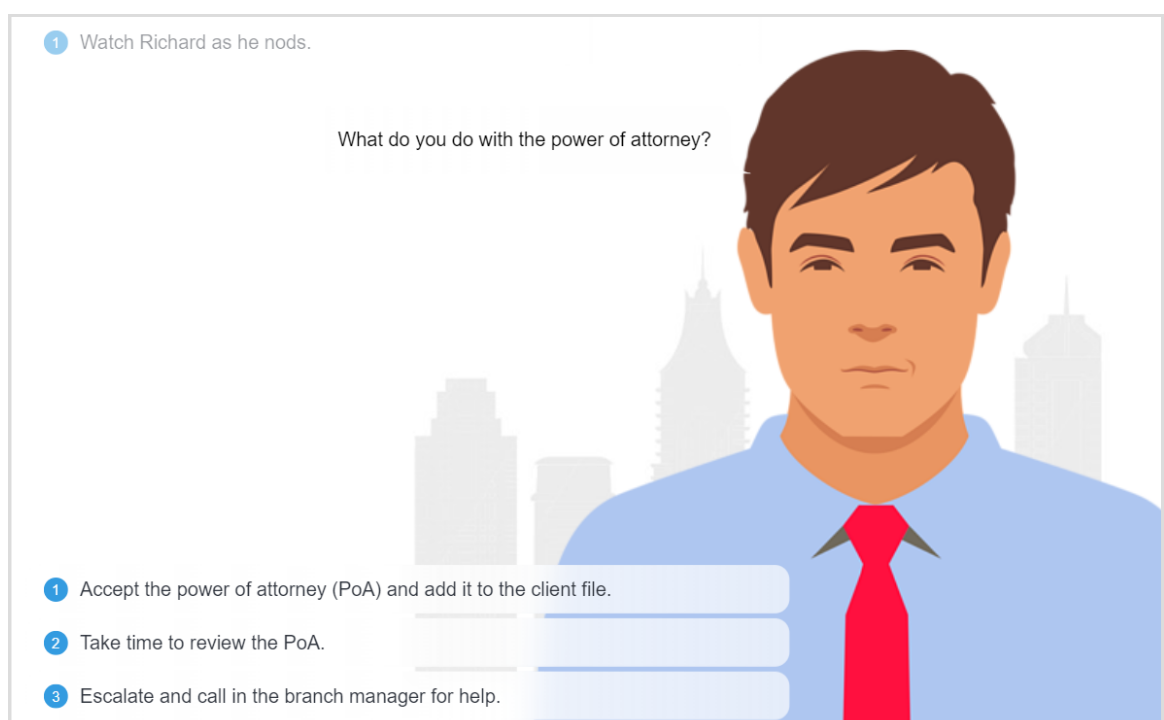
5 TYPES
OF ROLE-PLAY SIMULATIONS

Clark Aldrich has identified five major types of role-play simulations to build. They range from soft skills to certification skills. Let's look at each type so you can figure out which ones are most useful for a specific case.

01 Interpersonal processes (with clients, patients, and coworkers)

Probably the best-known type of role-play is asking learners to use conversions and other actions to implement a process with a single person. This type of role-play is a good fit for call centers, doctors, client-facing services, and the hospitality industry – wherever you need to train people on how to engage with other people most effectively.

The earliest examples of such role-plays are what Mr. Aldrich called "branching stories" in his book Learning by Doing, and the name stuck. These are when a learner faces a situation like an angry customer and is given a variety of options on how to behave and what to say in order to resolve an issue.
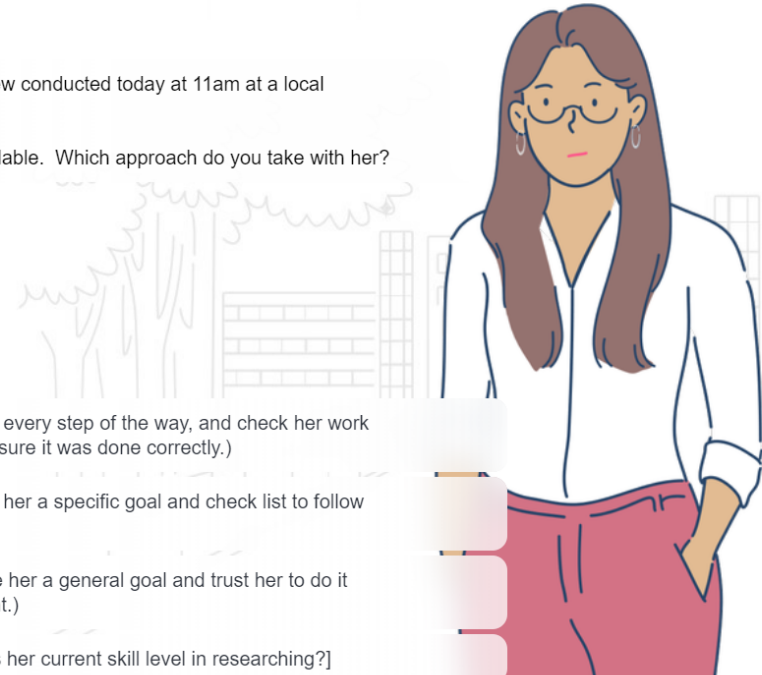
02 Dynamic interpersonal skills (such as leadership)

The second type of role-play focuses on dynamic interpersonal skills, such as leadership. This is also in the area of interpersonal skills, but with less formal rules and more judgment. The assumption is that learners need to process the content in a way that they can improvise and adjust in the real world – not just follow policies.

This approach is mostly experiential, with the theory integrated into the graphics and design. Instead of lecturing people about leadership – what leaders need to do, what they shouldn't, etc. – we create examples of the challenges that they'll soon be facing.

03 Certification skills using props

Another kind of sim is about certification skills. These role-plays help learners develop specific, more practice-related skills.
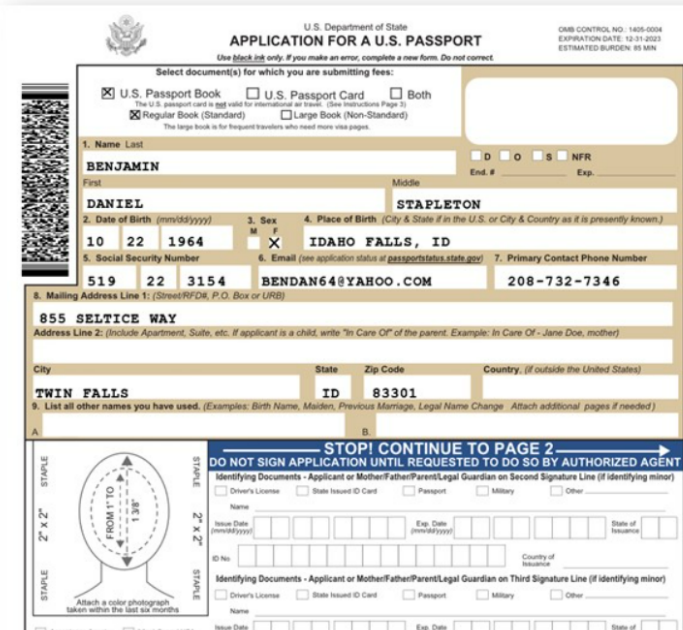
For example, if you work in a government organization, you can train people on how to work with documents. Learners meet applicants and are to check their documents for mistakes and other problematic elements.

Which document do you want to examine?

1 [Examine Form DS-11.]

2 [Examine passport photo and ID.]

3 [Examine evidence of U.S. citizenship.]

4 "I am done reviewing the documents."

They can scroll down documents, zoom in or out, flip to another page, go back and read it over, and then examine other documents.

1 [Scan down.]

2 [Go back.]

The result is that you can completely replicate what used to be an incredibly expensive training process. There's no need to create actual printed sample documents; just design digital versions of these docs once and use them from then on.
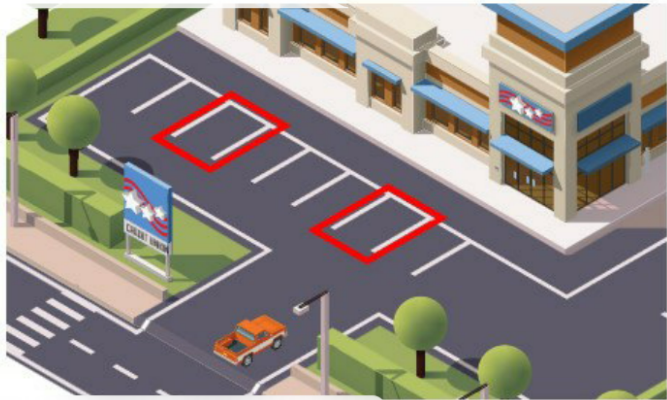
04 Activities in physical space using isometrics

The fourth type of sim uses isometric graphics in safety training. This sim type borrows visual elements from computer games and focuses the player's attention on the setting.

If you're on an oil rig, and everything is on fire, how do you escape? Or how do you deal with a hostile robbery situation?

For example, in this short sim on hostile robberies, learners need to make decisions, most of which relate to the surroundings, such as where to park a car when you are opening up a bank or what you should do first when the robber leaves: set off an alarm or lock the door.


05 Abstract relationships using conceptual props

The final kind of sim is even more game-like and conceptual. It's perfect when you need to teach people things like mathematical concepts and relationships. In other words, something abstract that can be difficult for some learners to follow and digest in a purely theoretical form.

For example, the following sim teaches people how the demand curve works. A learner owns a food truck and changes the prices of drinks to see how it affects demand.
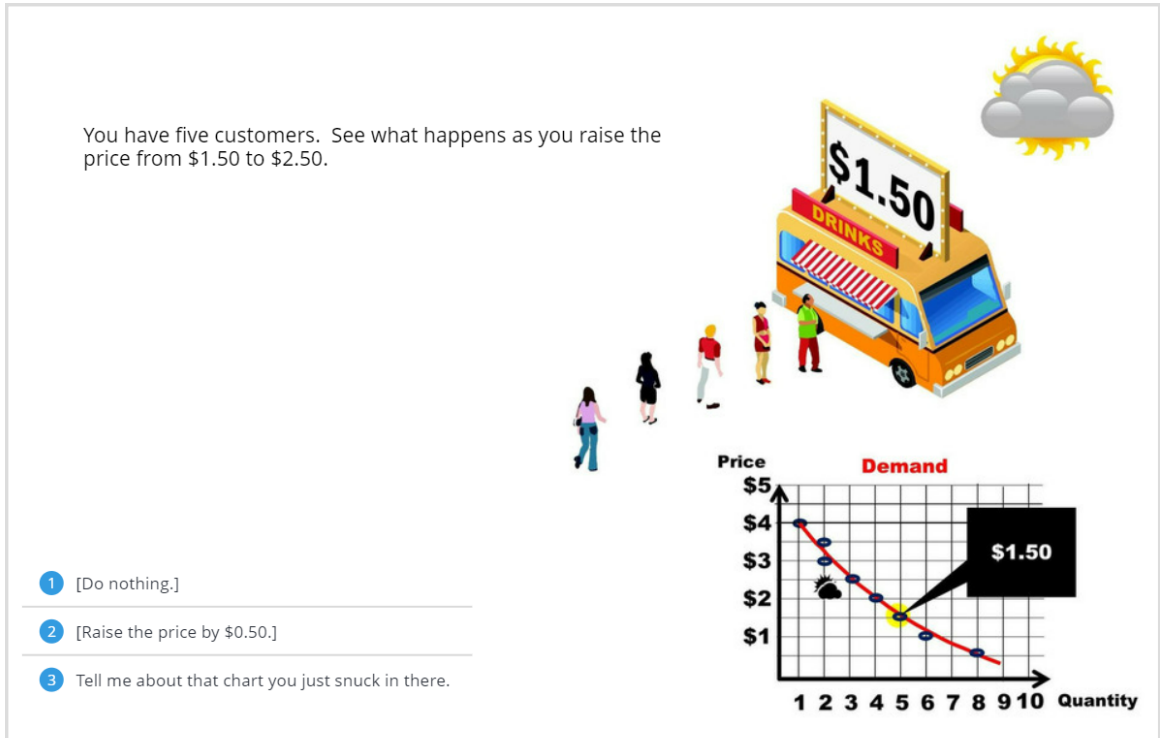
7 STEPS
TO CREATE AN EFFECTIVE ROLE-PLAY

With practice, you should be able to create an entire role-play in about 40 hours over two weeks. If you are going over that, you're probably overthinking or over-executing it. Remember that you need to keep it simple.

Here's a step-by-step guide on how to create a sim from scratch, provided by Clark Aldrich.

Step 1	# Pick a topic and narrow it down ## 1 hour

Pick a topic for your sim. Narrow it down and narrow it down again. Who are the people that need to know how to do something or are doing something wrong? It can be tactical or strategic.

Step 2	# Interview an SME / Review the recording ## 1 hour / 3 hours

First, ask a subject matter expert (SME) questions about the correct way of doing something. For example:

- How do you delegate authority?
- How do you allocate resources in a dynamic situation?

But what's even more important is to ask the SME about common mistakes. In the real world, where do people make mistakes when applying this? If you're landing an airplane in a blizzard in the mountains, where do pilots make mistakes? If you're a first-time manager inheriting an unhappy team, where do most people make mistakes? Then ask, "Why do people get this wrong?" What are the wrong goals or the incorrect understanding of the situation?

Step 3	# Create a high-level structure ## 7 hour

Once you identify the right way and common mistakes, you can build your sim around them. Your goal will be to come up with a specific situation that allows learners to play through one example, complete with the opportunity to make these common mistakes. When they make a common mistake, they can learn from it quickly and then get to make that choice over again.

To do that, follow these steps:

1. Ask yourself, "What is a simple situation that represents the content?"
2. If you can, break that simple situation into three or four sections of the experience. (For a sim on group problem solving, the three sections might be: prepare for a meeting; understand the problem in the

meeting; solve the problem in the meeting.)

3. For each section, write down where people commonly make mistakes.

For the setting of the sim, make sure you can articulate the setup to your players in the form of "You are a __ and you have to __." (For example, "You are an experienced manager, and you have to help an underperforming team member.") This approach helps you give a player a clear idea of the game's rules from the very beginning.

You can do all the above in a simple Word document, but, at this stage, you'll also need to start developing your sim in an authoring tool. There aren't many options that help you design this type of content easily. And the perfect tool for doing this is iSpring TalkMaster, which is a part of iSpring Suite.

Once you've done all the above, create a linear storyboard that includes all the steps and all the common problem decision points in iSpring Suite. The sim development process in Suite is intuitive and illustrative and will save you a step as compared to doing it anywhere else.

After that, you need to start building out the actual rough decisions by inserting branches. So, if a common mistake is described by a subject matter expert as: "When a bank manager opens a bank in the morning, they may not be aware of their surroundings. A bad guy can be lurking about and force them to open up the bank at gunpoint, which is called a 'morning glory robbery.'"

The placeholder's rough decision may be:

You have to open the bank. Do you:

A. Just focus on opening up the bank. (incorrect)
B. Look around the parking lot for bad guys. (correct)

After laying out the storyboard and making rough decisions, you should be able to click through your entire short sim.
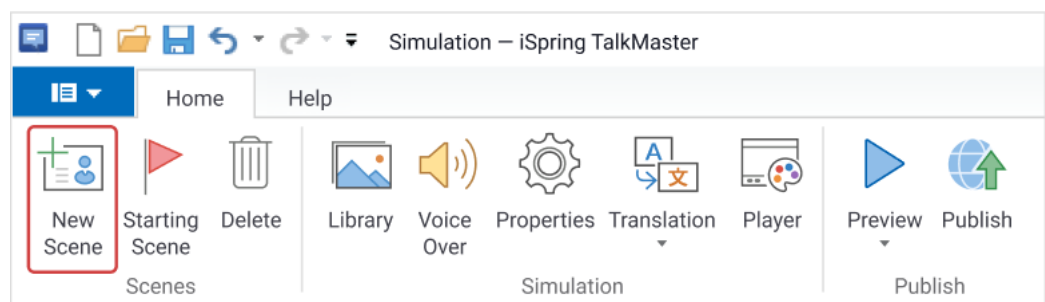
How to do this in iSpring Suite

Here are step-by-step instructions on how to execute the practical side of this stage in iSpring Suite:
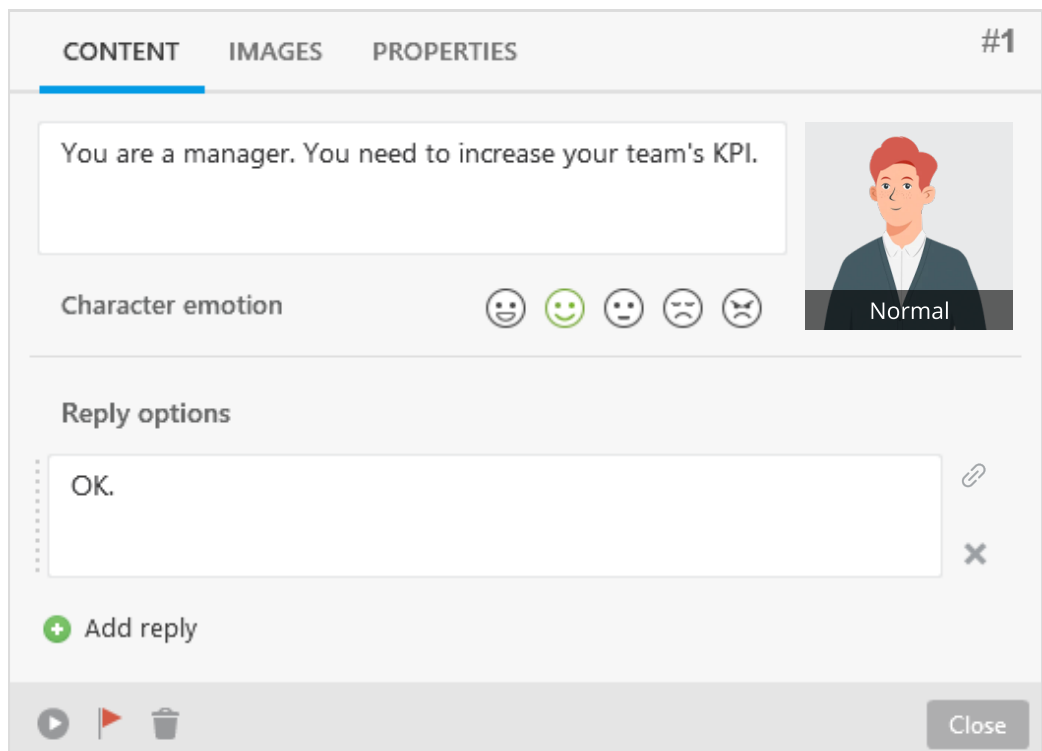
1. Open iSpring Suite. If you don't have a subscription yet, download it and get started for free.
2. Click on Role-Play on the iSpring Suite tab.
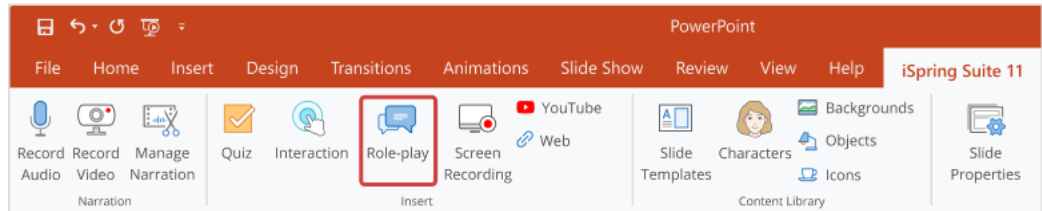
3. In the opened window, select New Role-Play. Then click New Scene.

4. In the pop-up window, create your scene by adding a character, a background image, texts, and reply options.


iSpring Suite has an extensive built-in library of ready-made content that includes all sorts of characters, their emotions, and backgrounds. So, you can simply select the images that fit your sim the best. Or you can upload yours, if necessary.
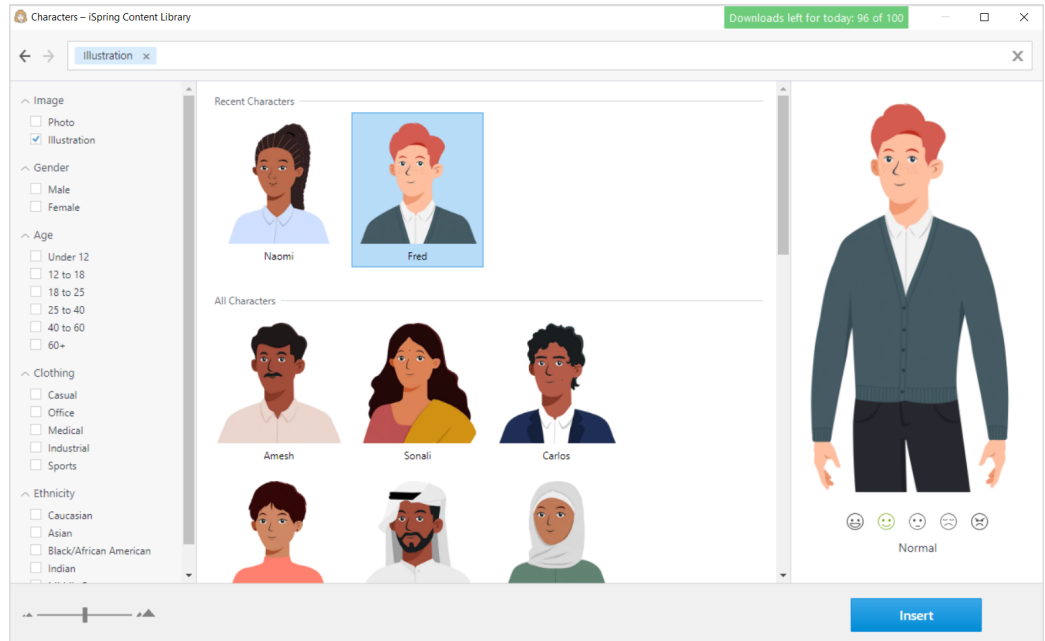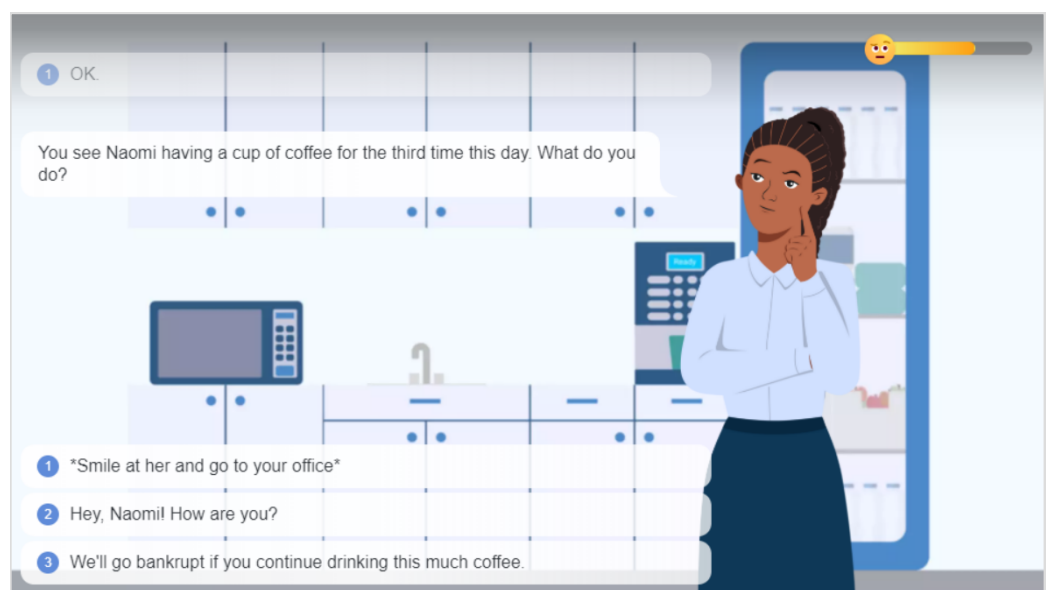
5. Create the next scene in the same manner. Then link them together. To do this, click on the link icon in the upper-right corner.
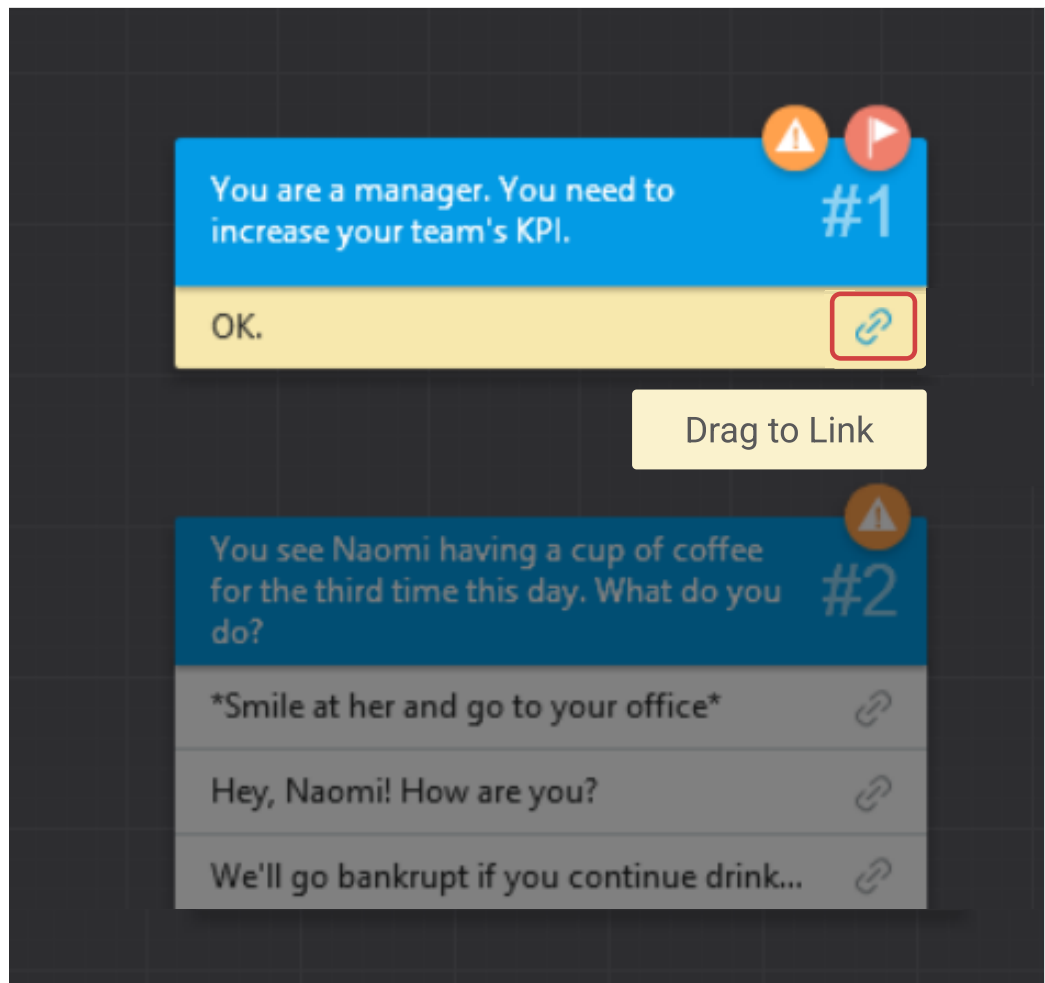
And drag the arrow from the first scene to the second one.
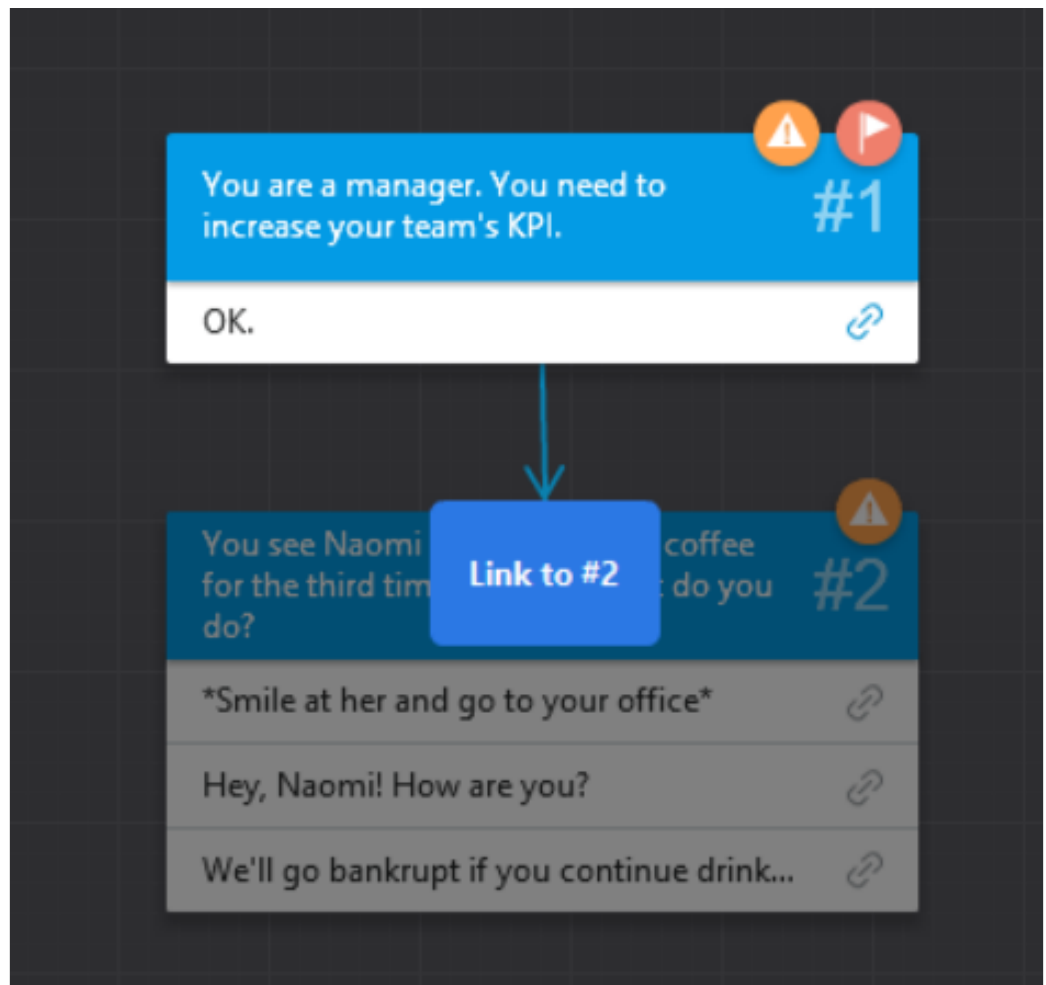
To make sure everything works exactly as you want it to, click on Preview.

Feel free to customize the sim, including removing the emotion meter.

6. Create all the scenes of your sim in the same way and link them together.

Regardless of whether you create a simple or complex sim, it all comes down to this: create a new scene and link it to the other scene(s). The final result might look something like this:
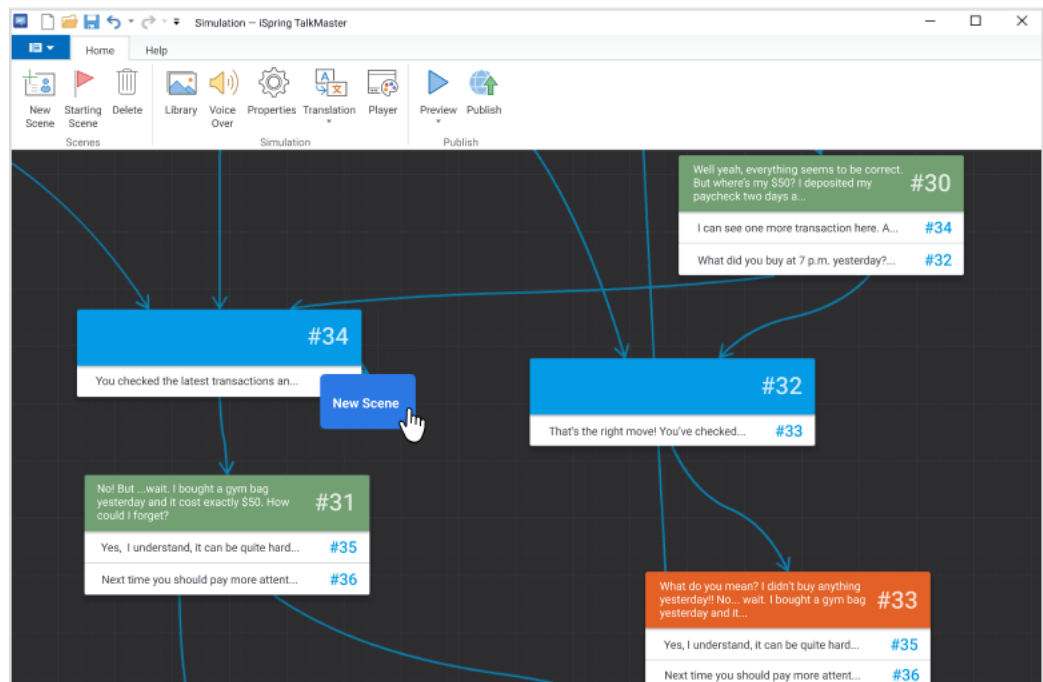
✳ ispring suite

Create engaging role-plays quickly and easily

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<table>
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Step 4

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Work on the Interface
8 hour

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Now that you have the foundation of your sim, it's time to polish it. First, smooth out the language. Then build out all the decisions.

Allowing learners to make mistakes

Your sim has to mirror the real world in terms of the mistakes people make. You should try to focus your decisions on common mistakes that accurately represent the thinking that leads people down incorrect paths.

So, if you're making a healthcare sim about washing hands, you might construct this choice:

You're leaving one patient's room and heading directly into another patient's room. What do you do?

A. Wash your hands twice. Once when leaving, and once when entering.

B. Wash your hands once, when entering the new patient's room.

The incorrect decision is not obviously incorrect, and it is even understandable that a person might make a mistake. In a perfect situation, a novice should be confused, while an expert recognizes an absolutely correct and incorrect answer.

After these decisions are done, you might then choose to add some more decisions to your sim. If, for every example in your sim, the right answer is "wash your hands," you can include a few decisions where the right answer is not to wash your hands. For example, "You leave a staff meeting and head to your car. Do you wash your hands or not?"

Then add a coach character to give feedback.

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Step 5

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# Design graphics
11 hour

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First, check the library of ready-made content in iSpring Suite. There, you can find the characters and backgrounds for most cases. Feel free to switch backgrounds for a sense of movement. You can start in your office (background: office), drive to a customer location (background: road), and then go visit a client (background: meeting room).

But the more you build sims, the more you'll want to add custom graphics. This might be a chart or graph that changes during the course of your sim. It may be a single object against a white background. Or it might be both. Again, iSpring Suite makes this very easy.

If you want to add custom characters that match your brand identity to your sim, you can use iSpring Suite's built-in Character Builder. To create a character, you just need to select a preferred appearance and clothing. The entire process takes just a few minutes.
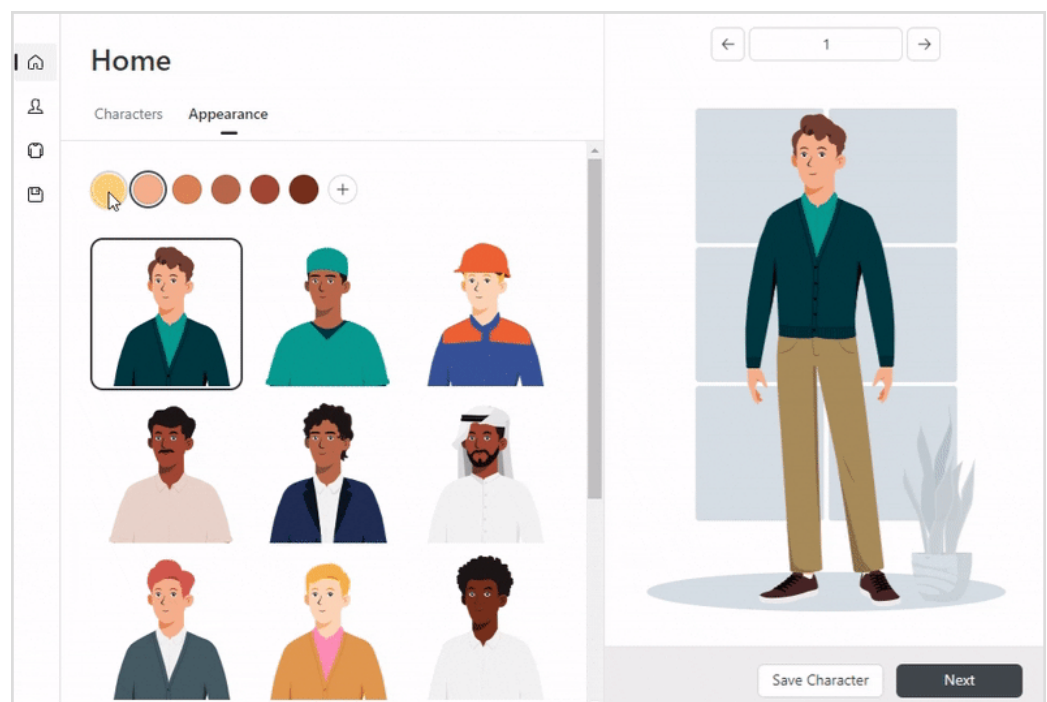
Step 6	**Polish your role-play** 4 hour

Preview your sim and check to see if everything's working. Perform the final refinement of the structures, graphics, and language.

Step 7	**Review and update** 5 hour

Publish your role-play to iSpring Space (the online storage that comes with iSpring Suite) and send a link to stakeholders. Ask them to provide specific feedback. Based on the feedback, update your role-play and deliver the final version.

And that's it! Your role-play is all ready to teach and engage learners!

NOW WHAT?

NOW THAT YOU KNOW THE THEORY, IT'S TIME TO GET PRACTICAL.

Role-plays might seem too complex to develop at first. But iSpring Suite's drag-and-drop interface makes it easy to create simulations with no coding or tech skills. Plus, the built-in Content Library provides a wide range of pre-designed characters and locations, so you can create an engaging training environment without involving professional designers.

But there's much more to it. iSpring Suite provides a multitude of capabilities beyond just designing role-plays. It is a comprehensive authoring toolkit that allows you to create a variety of learning contents:

- Slide-based courses
- Page-like courses with an AI tool
- Interactive quizzes
- Training videos
- Interactions

To see the toolkit in action and build your first simulation, download a 14-day free trial of iSpring Suite!

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