

Visual Design Checklist

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Design Essentials Checklist

Design for Clarity

Key: Does each element of my design have a purpose and contribute to my learning objective(s)?

Capitalize on color

- Have I allowed adequate white space so the learner can pinpoint what's important?
- Does my color palette match the mood I wish to impart?
- Is color guiding the eye or disrupting the flow?

Structure content

- Have I grouped content to visually communicate hierarchy, patterns, and relationships?
- Are my corresponding words and images displayed together?
- How have I employed type weight or scale to differentiate information, highlight what's important, and/or segment chunks?
- Are my visuals contributing to the pacing of the learning? (Does it flow or not?)

Create visual cues

- Does my design establish visual prominence so the eye can attend to what is essential?
- Do I need to consider additional directional cues for efficient understanding?

Design for Memory

Key: Does my visual design assist the learner navigating concepts from working memory to long term memory?

Activate prior knowledge

- Would it be useful to add a pre-assessment component before digging into the meat of my content?
- Are there thought questions I could use to activate what my learners know and prime them for taking on new material?
- Have I provided adequate context, ensuring learners have the fundamentals under their belt, before taking the learning deeper?

Manage load

- Is there anything extraneous in my visual design I need to get rid of?
- Are all components relevant to my learning objective and my target audience?
- Is the content chunked and sequenced visually into manageable (consumable/"processable") portions?

Build bridges

- When relevant, have I demonstrated relationships between what my learner already knows and the content I have/will present?
- Is there an opportunity here to provide rich feedback to the learner as they are acquiring new knowledge/skills/competence?
- What retrieval hooks am I offering the learner for quick recall?

Design for Meaning

Key: Have I designed a meaningful learning experience?

Engage emotion

- Will my learners grasp what's at stake personally for them?
- Would this presentation benefit from a story example or case study?
- Is it possible/relevant for this content to offer the learner an opportunity to share their insights and connections with the material being presented?

Spark association

- Would metaphor or imagery be a good vehicle for sparking association with what the learner already knows and drive the learning deeper?
- Does the level of complexity of this material require an overview or overlay to assist the learner in processing efficiently?

Application

- What opportunities or tools can I provide to the learner to guide reflection on the material and encourage the learner to relate the new concepts to what they already know/do?
- How can I encourage learners to put this material into (deliberate) practice?
- Have I provided sufficient examples from multiple contexts (such as case studies) so learners can apply what they've learned in their real-world setting?
- **Bonus:** Would it be beneficial to provide the learners with an authentic assessment tool to help them gauge their progress and how they can continue to improve their new skills?

Screen Design Considerations

Your screen should not draw attention to itself (& away from the learning objective). Just a few tips:

Legibility

- Use screen readable fonts; sans serif fonts are the most screen readable while serif fonts are often preferred for print.
- Use font effects sparingly if at all. Italics paragraphs are tough to read on a screen. Shadow, outline, reversing and embossed effects are difficult on the eye. **AVOID ALL CAPS ALTOGETHER.**
- Underlining denotes a hyperlink. Don't underline text for emphasis.
- Ragged right is most readable. Justify columns left (preferred) or right.
- Keep columns narrow and scanable. Eyes don't like to read across the width of a screen. In fact, eyes typically don't fully read screens (see scanability).
- Watch your font size. Appropriate size will be dependent upon your screen size, but realize tiny print is ignored because it requires too much effort.
- Ensure no less than 1-2 points leading; lines of text need space to breathe on the screen.

Scanability

- Eyes rarely read screens - they scan them. Why? Reading screens is tiring, requires more effort (e-readers are attempting to address this) than print resources and the hypertext world introduces new expectations for networked content vs. pages of content.
- Highlight **keywords** with bold or hypertext links.
- Offer meaningful subheadings.
- Break up paragraphs with bulleted lists.
- Maintain one idea per paragraph and reduce your word count.
- Apply the good old inverted pyramid - start with the conclusion and expect skimming for main ideas and what your learner deems relevant to them.

Image quality

- No pixelated images allowed! Images don't have to be high rez like print pubs, but they need to be crisp and clear.
- Warped images draw the wrong attention and impart a comic effect. Maintain image proportions.

Screen conditions

- Design for the device environment; conventions that work on the laptop do not work on the tablet and are light years from the smartphone. Learners exhibit vastly different behaviors and expectations depending upon device.
- **Test your design** on the device screen size and environment which you plan to deliver content.

Visual Design Sins

Baker's dozen of amateur layout errors based upon Golombisky & Hagen, White Space is Not Your Enemy

1. **Things that blink incessantly.** Keep animated repetition to a minimum or risk annoying your learner.
2. **Warped photos.** Maintain a photo's proportions. Distorting images draws the wrong type of attention.
3. **Naked photos.** Ensure photos aren't left with ambiguous borders. If you can't distinguish the edge of a photo from the background, mark its edges with a light line. Maintain a consistent approach among photos in the same presentation.
4. **Bulky borders and boxes.** Chunky borders are like fences with a "keep out!" sign. Default to understated borders to draw attention to your content - if a border is needed at all.
5. **Cheated margins.** If you're cheating your margins you're likely trying to squeeze too much in too little space. Allow your content to breathe with much needed white space. Eyes will thank you.
6. **Centering everything.** Left or right justified layouts offer a vertical line to guide the eye. Centered layouts are difficult to read and leave the eye searching for what's important visually.
7. **4 corners & clutter.** Think balance vs. filling space. Clutter is your enemy!
8. **Trapped negative space.** While white space is good to allow your design breathing room; trapped white space in the middle of your design is bad because it distracts the eye from your other visual elements and from your objective.
9. **Busy backgrounds.** Have mercy on your learners and avoid busy backgrounds - it's like stabbing them in the eyes. Don't allow your background to interfere with what you are trying to communicate visually.
10. **Tacky type emphasis.** Risky type behaviors include: reversing, all caps, underlining...exploring the word art feature in PowerPoint. Shadow can be difficult on the eye if you're designing for a screen. Engage cautiously and judiciously.
11. **Bad bullets.** Bullets are not inherently evil. Use bullets when you're actually listing something, make sure they are aligned vertically, and avoid cute or chunky bullets. Keep it simple.
12. **Windows and orphans.** Train your eyes to spot typographical awkwardness like stranded words or a hyphenated word at the top or bottom of a section of text.
13. **Justified rivers.** Since you probably don't work for a newspaper, there's no need to use justified blocks of text. Fully justified type is tough to pull off and usually results in unsightly rivers running through your text blocks that draw the eye away from your meaning and directly to your spacing issues.

Design Resources

Print

Baer, K. (2008) Information design workbook: Graphic approaches, solutions, and inspiration. Rockport.

Clark, RC & Lyons, C. (2011) Graphics for learning: Proven guidelines for planning, designing, and evaluating visuals in training materials, 2nd Ed. Pfeiffer.

Clark, RC & Mayer, RE. (2008) e-Learning and the science of instruction, 2nd Ed. Pfeiffer.

Cook, Gareth, ED. (2013) The best American infographics. Mariner Books.

Duarte, N. (2008) Slide:ology: The art and science of creating great presentations. O'Reilly Media.

Golombisky, K & Hagen, R. (2010) White space is not your enemy: A beginner's guide to communicating visually through graphic, web & multimedia design. Focal Press.

Lipton, R. (2007) The Practical guide to information design. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Malamed, C. (2009) Visual language for designers: Principles for creating graphics that people understand. Rockport.

Peters, Dorian (2013) Interface Design for Learning. New Riders.

Reynolds, G. (2012) Presentation zen: Simple ideas on presentation design and delivery, 2nd Ed. New Riders.

Samara, T. (2007) Design Elements. Rockport.

Tufte, ER (1990) Envisioning Information. Graphics Press.

Williams, R. (2010) The non-designers presentation book: Principles for effective presentation design. Peachpit Press.

Online

blog: <http://designerlearning.blogspot.com.au/p/heuristics-strategies.html>

blog: <http://elearningbrothers.com/the-color-of-elearning/>

blog: <http://www.visualmess.com/>

blog: <http://learningcircuits.blogspot.com/2012/02/visual-design-quick-tips.html>

blog: <http://www.articulate.com/rapid-elearning/5-common-visual-design-mistakes/>

blog: <http://www.articulate.com/rapid-elearning/warning-using-the-wrong-images-can-confuse-your-learners/>

blog: <http://designerelearning.blogspot.com.au/p/heuristics-strategies.html>

blog: <http://mobilewebbestpractices.com/visual-design/>

Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative webinar series: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7H7gs33JEM> (warning: audio is tightly edited to compress files for posting - *not* an elearning best practice ☺)

Color theory tutorial: <http://www.tigercolor.com/color-lab/color-theory/color-theory-intro.htm>

Free Resource: <http://info.shiftelearning.com/a-crash-course-in-elearning-why-visual-design-matters/>

Free Resource: <http://www.cdc.gov/learning/local/pdf/ElrngEsstls.pdf>

Create infographics: <http://infogr.am/>

Giant aircraft comparison example: <http://montse.org/storyline/comparison/>

Case based learning interaction example (call it a game if you must): http://www.smartbuilder.com/examples/Patient_Management/player.html

Fast Co, 21 best infographics of 2013: <http://www.fastcodesign.com/3023118/infographic-of-the-day/the-21-best-infographics-of-2013>