



Checks and Tips for Presenting and Structuring eLearning Content

A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.
— Antoine de Saint Exupéry

A DESIGN MAXIM

An overriding principle worth adhering to is that 'less is more'. There is no need to write a text when other excellent texts exist (point to resources, don't recreate them); if an image can say what you would otherwise need an essay to say, then use the image; one or two colours might help guide the eye, where five may just be muddling.

NAVIGATION AND ORGANISATION

If you are designing a course website, think carefully about how you are going to structure the site so that it reflects the way you want your students to learn.

How will you organize your material?

- By topic or theme?
- By week?
- By units of work?

Does the material need to be covered in a particular sequence?

If this is very important you should number topics. If not, it is usually a good idea to show a topic title rather than just "Week 1, 2 etc" or "Module 1, 2 etc". This provides more information at a glance and makes information easier to identify and get to quickly.

How do you decide what becomes top level navigation?

Think about what material students will need to access easily from anywhere in the website. You can organize this in any way you choose but quite often it works well when left hand navigation includes the topics, learning tasks and resources and the top navigation includes links to supports such as library pages, contact details, glossaries and perhaps assessments and timetables.

Are there natural chunks of information?

Small chunks of information are more easily absorbed than large, dense pages of text. Use white space, boxing and headings to add to your structure. Keep pages to a comfortable length.

Are there recurring elements such as certain resources and tasks?

Icons are useful to build consistency – they indicate particular types of material so they can be easily located. (CourseBuilder has three sets of icons. If possible, take all your icons from the same set. It helps with consistency of look and feel.)





How do I know I have it right?

Simple, try a small sample of work with some of your target audience and get their feedback – either online or in person. It is so important to do this as your perception of things as a teacher can be very different from what your students actually need.

A FEW POINTERS ABOUT MEDIA

Think about why you are using media and whether it adds to what you are trying to achieve –check again that you are supporting the learning objectives. It's important that media is appropriate to the surrounding content and is actually teaching or clarifying what you want your students to learn.

Images and photographs

Think about how much 'real estate' you want to devote to an illustration. Even if you need a large photograph, you would not want your pictures to be more than a maximum of 1200 pixels wide and 800 high and when it is just for illustration, you probably only want it to be about 300 pixels wide.

Compression

Remember that you often need to compress files for the web. This affects quality so although a photograph, video or audio file may seem fine in its current form, everything may turn to a blur when you try to compress it! Talk to staff at the LTU or CAD for advice on file types.

Tools

You can use a free online image manipulation tool called Pixlr to resize and compress photos. Access it at: <http://pixlr.com>

Paint.Net is an alternative free programme for PC that enables you to carry out simple digital manipulation and resize and compress your photos. (Note that you compress photos when saving.) You can download it here <http://www.paint.net/> In Photoshop, you can "save for the web" and compress files.

Audio and video

It is not always easy (or desirable) to convey information by text. Hearing or seeing a human voice can help students overcome the sense of isolation when they are grappling with a difficult concept or procedure.

Creating audio podcasts or Articulate presentations can be time-saving for both yourself and your students when information is potentially 'dense'.

Use the potential of the media! – make presentations useful and interesting by including visual power points with Articulate presentations, photographs, anecdotes, and 'real life' stories. This is what plain text just cannot do.

Copyright

Keep your materials squeaky clean with regard to copyright – online materials are quite different from a face to face classroom.

Check the University's copyright documentation:

<http://www.cad.auckland.ac.nz/index.php?p=copyright>

