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How important is text in eLearning?

Reading from a screen creates some difficulties. Yet, in an online course, textual content is essential to improve understanding and increase students' knowledge. How to make this type of content more attractive?

When we talk about eLearning we immediately think of those online courses where video and images are the main core. Thought does not immediately go to the text. It is known that internet sites, despite being largely based on textual content, focus a lot on visual content that risks, to a lesser extent, boring readers and thus avoiding them going to another website.

For this reason, in many cases, those who design an online course try to summarize the words written in videos, animations, infographics and images in general. On the web, not only is the reader's attention less, but reading becomes more complicated than when reading on paper. Scrolling the page, losing the sign or feeling annoying visual fatigue symptoms are common problems that prevent us from remembering the textual information on a screen.

According to the study on reading web pages via eye tracker (a tool that tracks eye movements), in fact, we tend to concentrate initially on the first lines of an online text and then read the rest quickly, trying to summarize the content, as if we were doing some sort of scan. This means, therefore, that we are doing a rather superficial and, consequently, less thorough reading.

Nevertheless, it is essential that the text is an integral part of online courses not only because of the need to develop the content itself, but also to help students store complex information and analyze it critically. How to best include (indispensable) textual content in an online course? Here are some tips:

1. Pay attention to the text

Although it is obvious, it is easy to find texts that are poorly written or misused. If the videos are excellent for fixing some fundamental concepts, the text explains more theoretical concepts. We must also pay attention to the "aesthetic" side of writing, choosing simple and legible fonts with an adequate size.

2. Accessibility of language

Depending on the level of the course and the students' previous knowledge, we will have to use a certain type of language. In general, however, it is preferable to use simple and direct sentences to allow a good understanding of the text, also and especially in the case in which our online course also includes non-native speakers.

3. Understanding test

To be sure that the students have read and above all understood the text, it is preferable to add, for example at the end of each unit, a small quiz to help summarize and fix the main ideas of the content.

4. Ability to print

Studies show it: reading on a paper support allows a better understanding of a text than a present on a screen. The experience of reading (turning the page, writing notes, etc.), in fact, allows a better understanding of the contents to be reached, especially for the generations preceding the "digital natives". For this reason, giving students the opportunity to print the texts of the online course will improve their learning.

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