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How to use visuals to enhance learning

Visuals have the power to enrich communication and stimulate emotional response. So let's discover how to leverage visual elements to facilitate learning

When used appropriately, images can be a powerful tool within an online course. And this is not only because of their aesthetic value, but also because they have the ability to greatly influence and enhance learning processes.

In this article, we will therefore focus on the teaching power of images and try to understand how to use them strategically within an online course.

Why use graphic elements in training courses

Images convey messages faster
Our brain is able to process a limited amount of information in a certain amount of time, and the data that is processed the fastest are also the ones that attract people's attention the most.
With this in mind, images are much more effective content than blocks of text because they are **processed by the brain 60,000 times faster than textual conten**t.

Images reduce cognitive overload
Providing a lot of information in an eLearning course could overwhelm learners. With this in mind, visuals, when used well, can help reduce cognitive overload. Here, then, are some tips for strategic use of visual elements:

- when possible, use illustrations and diagrams instead of text snippets in your eLearning course;
- when using a complex animation, support it with an audio narration;
- carefully choose the type of image that best suits the information you want to convey (a bar graph is particularly useful for comparing different categories; a flowchart, on the other hand, helps to show a process in several steps; etc.).

Images help you to store information longer
Visuals are the easiest and most effective way to ensure that information is stored as long-term memory. In fact, visual elements help students make sense of the content and direct their attention, increasing the chances that they will remember what they have learned.
Thus, one of the easiest ways to ensure that students store information in their long-term memory is to **pair concepts with meaningful images**.

Images activate emotions
Images cause a faster and stronger reaction than words. They help users interact with the content, and these emotional reactions affect the retention of information.

How to choose the graphic elements of a course

Identify the purpose of your graphics
Each graphic element you include in your eLearning course should have a purpose: illustrative, mnemonic, relational, decorative, etc.
Identifying this purpose for each graphic element you use will help you in the selection process. But remember: the real purpose behind selecting graphics should be to help your learners with their learning experience. This is why you need to focus on the educational value of your visual elements, whether they are flowcharts, infographics, detailed images illustrating a process, and so on, and minimize strictly decorative elements.

Take your time
A relevant and memorable image is a powerful teaching tool that stimulates student engagement, reduces cognitive load, and meets learning objectives more efficiently. The images you use in a course are just as important as the text you write, the interactions you design, and the assessments you include. So take the time to choose images that are consistent and effective. Figure out what message the image is meant to convey and evaluate its relevance to both the content and the course as a whole.

Don't mix and match different types of graphics
Make sure that all visual elements of the course are consistent with each other. Consistent graphics improve the overall appearance of your course and make it more appealing to the user's eyes.
When including multiple graphic elements in eLearning courses, be sure to:

- do not overload your course with visual elements;
- optimize images so that they can load quickly even in poor connection situations;
- apply visual hierarchy to guide your learners through the course;
- be careful with color choices while maintaining graphic consistency.

Pay attention to navigation graphics
To help your audience easily navigate through the course, you will most likely need to use graphic elements such as arrows and buttons. Make sure they are clearly labeled and consistently placed so that students are able to use them easily.
Favor simple, clean graphics for your navigation elements, as unusual and complicated images confuse students most of the time.

Use images that connect with your audience
You can keep students hooked on your course if you can convince them that you'll be talking about them, their workplace issues, and the kinds of people they meet and interact with. For this reason, we recommend that you become familiar with your target audience so that you choose visual elements that are consistent with your target audience.

Carefully evaluate quality and consistency of visuals
The positive aspects of visual elements are only valuable when they are used appropriately. The quality and relevance of images matter a lot. Low-resolution or pixellated images are not only aesthetically unpleasant, but they are decidedly ineffective from an educational standpoint and risk losing the student's interest.
In addition, if irrelevant, images can cause distractions from the actual topic and, at worst, discourage your audience.

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