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Instructional designer: the "brain" of the training of the future

The digitization of the education sector has made Instructional Design increasingly important. Who is Instructional design and what role does it play?

The instructional designer is an important role of the education sector and has come into the spotlight after the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way educational content is enjoyed. The ability to learn independently, easily and quickly through an Internet connection is something we do not want to give up because it is convenient. This is why those working in academia and corporate training are looking for people in the world of instructional design to create high-quality online education and training experiences for students and employees.

But what exactly is instructional design? And what does an instructional designer do?

In this article, we try to shed some light on this by explaining what he or she does, examining why there is an increase in demand for this job, what are the prerequisites for doing this job, and what are other roles within the instructional design world that support the instructional designer in his or her work.

Who is the instructional designer?

Despite its many advantages, eLearning has one major limitation: it has no human facilitator, so learners are on their own and dependent on the content offered in the course. For this reason, what differentiates a successful eLearning course is careful **instructiona**l design that guides a learner to the content. This is where the role of an Instructional Designer comes in. Instructional Designers are learning experts who understand how humans acquire knowledge and help make content easier to learn.

Instructional design is a broad field of knowledge that finds its practical application in identifying training needs, designing the corresponding learning path, creating the learning design, adapting content according to the design, helping developers create structured courses, and operationally managing the entire eLearning development lifecycle.

To understand exactly what an **instructional designer** is let's consider the definition of this role given by **Instructional Design Central**, a community of more than 25,000 people in this profession.

Here is how they describe this role:

"In short, instructional design is the process by which learning products and experiences are designed, developed, and delivered. These learning products include online courses, instructional manuals, video tutorials, learning simulations, etc. **Instructional designers are the 'architects' of the learning experience".**

Increasing demand for instructional designers

After decades in which it has played an essential role in helping people learn the knowledge and skills they need while often standing behind the scenes, the field of instructional design now finds itself at the forefront. Inside Higher Ed calls this role one of the most sought-after in academic education, but that is only one side of the coin. In fact, it is also one of the most sought-after jobs in a variety of industries, with strong career opportunities in corporations, government agencies, nonprofits, and organizations of all types and sizes.

When the COVID-19 pandemic forced academic institutions and companies to prioritize online learning, these organizations looked for ways to bring their training and education online. In doing so, they found a great need for professionals who could

design engaging and effective content. Once the pandemic passed, the trend of digitizing training in both academic and corporate settings did not stop, and as a result, this role has become one of the most sought-after in the training industry.

Current state of instructional design

Today all sectors, not just education, recognize that a strong focus on instructional design makes learning more accessible, efficient, and ultimately better aligned with desired outcomes. Looking at U.S. labor market data, the **Bureau of Labor Statistics** predicts that the need for training and development specialists will grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2031. So although the education sector seems like a natural choice for Instructional design professionals, jobs for this role can be found in almost any industry.

Prerequisites for being an Instructional Designer.

The requirements for these positions vary significantly depending on the needs of the business sectors or academic institutions in which the instructional designer works. Larger or more specialized organizations may have instructional designers collaborate with course designers, learning experience designers, educational consultants and other educational professionals. In other positions, instructional designers must manage numerous responsibilities during the design process.

For almost all positions, the following is required:

1. A bachelor's degree in education and some experience, or at least a very well-developed portfolio of work.
2. Many employers prefer a master's degree in instructional design or a related field.
3. Most positions require experience and familiarity with popular learning technologies, such as course creation software and learning management systems. Some may also require experience with a specific software application.

Industries most interested in instructional designers

To understand which industries are most interested in this role let's consider research done by eLearning Industry that researched the companies posting the most jobs for instructional designers. This research was based on an analysis of job aggregation sites including ZipRecruiter, Glassdoor, LinkedIn and SimplyHired:

- **Educational institutions**

Educational institutions, particularly universities, offer the greatest opportunities for instructional designers. A McKinsey report on online education shows an 11 percent increase in online enrollments for the largest online universities, while total enrollments for all universities are down 3 percent. In fact, established universities are faced with the challenge of developing content that will appeal to digital natives. As a result, there are excellent opportunities for instructional designers who want to work in the education sector.

- **Health services and hospitals**

One sector that has great demand for professionals such as instructional designers is the medical health sector. This is because medical education and digital technology systems in healthcare are increasingly interconnected. Instructional design concepts and models are essential for providing training and education programs that can help improve patient **safety**. As a result, providers in the health care sectors are turning to instructional designers to develop their education and training solutions.

- **Banking and finance.**

In the financial sector, there is a great demand for instructional designers to develop training courses that can support an institution's efforts in financial planning, banking, lending, and compliance with regulatory requirements. For instructional designers with experience in financial management or wealth advisory positions, the banking and finance industry has a wealth of open positions.

- **Software companies**

Few industries move as fast as software development, the same forces that have contributed to the rise of digital learning. Companies that provide software-as-a-service (SaaS) have a constant demand for instructional designers to create and update learning solutions for their employees or customers.

- **Consulting services**

If you are passionate about instructional design and want to explore various areas or want new challenges in different fields, you might choose to work in consulting. Consulting firms regularly look to grow and expand their corporate training programs and seek talented professionals eager to collaborate in serving some of the world's largest companies.

Other professions related to instructional designer

If you are interested in exploring a career in learning and training development but are not sure if the instructional designer role is right for you, don't worry because other options exist. Many of the industries mentioned above are also hiring for similar positions working with or alongside the instructional designer. Consider searching for the following jobs to see what positions you might be qualified for:

Learning experience designer (LXD)

While the responsibility of an instructional designer is the design of instructional strategies, the responsibilities and duties of a learning experience designer focus on making training and course experiences as learner-centered, accessible, and engaging as possible. Thus, this role focuses on the learner's user experience as he or she enjoys the course.

eLearning Developer

eLearning developers work at companies and academic institutions to create, test, and update learning content on various online platforms. Their role is focused on digital learning and they specialize in using authoring software and other learning technologies to design online courses.

Course Designer (Curriculum Designer)

A course designer focuses on creating a detailed training curriculum, including identifying topics, creating a timeline and number of hours needed for each course, and creating engaging course content (videos, quizzes, and activities). A course designer will work with a learning experience designer to determine a course's overall learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment methods, and then build the content. Course designers are in high demand in the education sector to develop content for both online and in-person learning environments.