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Tips to improve the navigation of an online course

Navigating an online course has an impact on the educational success of users and the credibility of the platform. Find out how to make it clear and intuitive.

When we talk about navigating online courses we are referring to those elements of the course that allow students to move around (links, buttons, menus, etc.).

In this perspective, offering **clear and intuitive navigation** within an **online course** is fundamental to the success of the course. The less time students take to understand how the course works and how to move around in it, the more time they will spend learning the content, which is good for both the credibility of the platform and the educational success of the students.

Confusing and difficult navigation is in fact one of the main **causes of dropping out of online courses**.

From this point of view, the key to excellent navigation of online courses is **ease of use**: first of all, remember that the first time a student accesses the course they will need to immediately understand where the material is and how to access it. This first impression will influence the next experience.

So make everything clear from the beginning and do not assume that the user knows how to start the course. For this reason, even if it seems trivial to you, make sure that the first button to click on has text like "Start Course" and make sure you **guide the user through each step** by providing detailed instructions for each activity, no matter how simple.

How? For example, provide a **welcome area** at where you explain to students how to start the course and where to find everything they need. If the course structure is simple and straightforward, a few text paragraphs will suffice; if the structure is more complex, include a video tour of the course showing **how the content is organised**.

Help students **click on links**, for example with formulas like "click here to answer the quiz" and make sure they can return to the homepage from anywhere in the course.

Another element that will help students navigate through the course is the menu. Choosing the **type of menu** to use is extremely important. You can choose from various options (tabbed navigation, horizontal menu, vertical menu, etc.) or integrate more than one to improve the user experience.

Make sure that the titles are clear, short and self-describing. This way students will be able to predict what the lesson will be about and have reference points to follow.

Also allow students to see their progress. Completing a course requires motivation, so it is helpful that they always see how far they have gotten in the course. Use a **progress bar** with a percentage so that students can easily see how far they have progressed and are encouraged to progress. Finally, obscure areas of the course that students have already completed, for example, by choosing a grey font colour or in sharp contrast to the rest of the modules still to be completed.

You can also use the text to indicate progress in areas of the course where students need to click on a series of consecutive slides or videos. For example, by inserting text like this under each content: "video 1 of 7", and so on.

From a **graphical** point of view, applies a **minimalist approach** and resists the temptation to decorate the user interface. For example, do not use more than three colors and avoid chaos. Make sure that the learning environment is organized and clean, this will improve learning effectiveness and reduce cognitive overload on the student.

Avoid using a large volume of text or graphic elements: rather, prefer white space. How? Use it around images, at the edges of the page, between text boxes and wherever it is useful to ensure that the student does not feel overwhelmed by the content.

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