



Design Quality Guide

A resource for continuous improvement of instructional and learning experience design.

Design is an art that requires careful balancing of a number of decisions, and determining if a design has achieved that balance can be tricky. This guide outlines criteria for overall quality of formal course design. To some degree, these criteria can also guide high quality learning experience design when the recommendation includes non-formal learning support strategies. The criteria are based on Learning 4 Learning Professional's design decisions framework and principles for effective adult learning.

Performance Environment

- Performance environment has been assessed and environmental supports and barriers have been identified. Environmental factors include: clarity of expectations, work flow and systems, performance resources and tools, supervisory practices, team dynamics and incentives and rewards.
- Appropriate performance supports have been recommended and will be implemented to align with training.

Anticipated Learners

- Anticipated audience has enough in common that all will gain from participating in the program.
- Assumptions about audience that are relevant to design decisions have been identified and validated.
- Design accounts for important assumptions about the audience.
- Recommendations are appropriate for audience size, anticipated turnover, and geographic dispersion.

Performance Context and Objectives

- Business and performance objectives have been documented and agreed.
- There is tight integration (clear line of sight) between and among the three levels of integrated objectives (business, performance, and learning).
- Design clearly identifies and reflects how knowledge and skill developed should be manifest in on-the-job performance.

Goals and Objectives

- Project has a clear driving goal, and there is direct alignment between it and the recommendations in the design.
- Design identifies clear learning objectives that are at the appropriate nature and depth for the audience, time frame, and desired outcomes.
- Achievement of objectives is able to be validated or measured in some way.
- Objectives are communicated to learners in motivational way.

Big Idea

- A clear big idea or significant learning experience intention overarches the approach and is noticeably reflected in design.

Content

- Content has been scoped to the appropriate essentials for the audience, objectives, and time allocated.
- Content is well-researched and well-supported (the approach works).
- Processes, models, and frameworks are presented in a memorable way.
- Content is in alignment with the theoretical and research frameworks from which it is drawn, and customizations don't compromise anticipated impact (or design contains counterbalancing elements to address potential issues created by customizations).
- All substantial content relates to the goals and objectives.
- Content presents an appropriate level of intellectual challenge for the audience.

Delivery Format

- Design leverages the strengths of the utilized delivery formats.
- Design reflects best practices for activities in the utilized delivery formats.
- Design blends multiple delivery formats appropriately and seamlessly.
- Delivery is accessible to all intended learners.

Learner Motivation

- Elements of the design tap into and intensify learners' motivation to learn and apply.
- Activities generate an emotional connection that encourages learning.
- Learners articulate their own goals related to the topic or skill that is the subject of the course.
- Learners will be able to articulate a clear alignment between the program's objectives and business goals or initiatives and/or between the program's objectives and their own personal learning goals.



Techniques

- Design maximizes active, learner-centered techniques and utilizes presentations and lectures appropriately and sparingly.
- Design incorporates high value techniques appropriate to the objectives and context: simulation/role play, case study analysis, authentic practice, reinforcement and retrieval practice, storytelling, and reflection/transformation of learning to action.
- Design leverages [high impact practices](#) if appropriate: learning communities, experiential learning, problem-based learning, collaborative assignments, global learning, research opportunities, internships, and capstone projects.
- Design incorporates [social learning](#).
- Design incorporates [connected learning](#) qualities where possible: peer-supported, interest-powered, academically oriented, production-centered, and openly networked.
- Array of techniques attends to [universal design](#) principles: providing for multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression.
- Design promotes social presence, teaching presence, and cognitive presence ([community of inquiry model](#)).
- Design enables [interaction with instructor, peers, and content](#).

Activities

- Learners are actively engaged in the learning process; the learning activities are challenging and engrossing.
- Activities are relevant to the learners, using examples and on-the-job performance scenarios that are contextualized in recognizable ways.
- Activities are well aligned with the objectives.
- Learners are given opportunity to articulate the relationship of learning to a performance context.
- Learners are given opportunity to draw on their own experiences and build on experiences to promote learning.
- Activities are targeted in areas where learners will have the most challenge.
- Activities are designed in ways consistent with quality criteria for the technique being utilized and consistent with the theoretical or research framework on which they are based (or contain counterbalancing elements to address potential issues created by customizations).
- Activities promote application of learning in a performance context.
- Learners are given the opportunity to process what they are learning through discussion and/or reflection.
- Facilitation helps learners to engage in all phases of inquiry: triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution.
- Activities present an appropriate level of intellectual or physical challenge.
- Design of activities attends to cognitive load limitations.
- Activities reflect a degree of creativity and innovation to ensure they are absorbing and challenging for learners.
- Humor, fun, and game-like components encourage play and are appropriate for the audience.

**Design is not just what it looks like and feels like.
Design is how it works.**
~ Steve Jobs



Structure and Timing

- Design reflects a well-organized flow.
- Activities are given the appropriate allocation of time to complete.
- The time allocated for each activity is appropriate relative to the importance of the activity for achieving objectives.
- Design flow contains motivating opening and closing activities.

Visual and Interface Design

- Customized graphics support learning.
- Materials have consistent color palate and interface (that is “branded” or consistent across multiple programs).
- Graphics illustrate more than decorate.
- Graphics have consistent look and feel and are appropriate for audience.
- Visual themes and metaphors are consistently carried out throughout materials.

Formative Evaluation

- Anticipated results are clearly articulated.
- There are enough relevant activities of the right type to allow learners to demonstrate they have achieved the objectives as stated.
- Design contains multiple points for assessment as to degree to which learners are grasping content or performing skills effectively.
- Design allows flexibility for instructor to provide additional instruction or remediation, or provides a path for students to obtain supplemental instruction.

Summative Evaluation of Results

- Design provides plan for discerning and documenting degree to which objectives are achieved.

Looking to turn this into a rating form? Try these ratings:

- Sustained round of applause!
- “Good job” emoji
- Yes, but could be improved...
- Not represented
- Not applicable for this project

Wow Factor

- Elements of the design are likely to delight learners and clients.
- Design illustrates exemplary, engaging learning.
- At least one element of the design can be described as novel, extraordinary, transformational, or creative.

Learning Environment

- Extended design offers clear pathways for deepening knowledge and skill.
- Enrichment materials and activities are available and easy to access.
- Go-to people (internal and external) are identified for ongoing support and emulation (includes experts, thought leaders, and public academics).
- Supervisors and managers are offered developmental practices to support ongoing learning.
- Self-assessment guidance is provided, and feedback is made available and supported.

Application and Performance Support Environment

- Learners are either...
 - given the opportunity to apply the material and get feedback during the program,
 - or given time to plan for application, and given guidelines for feedback (by self, manager, or peer) if appropriate.
- Application (work) environment supports continued learning and reinforcement.
- Resources (e.g. job aids, templates, checklists, environmental reminders) are available for all moments of need (learn, learn more, apply, troubleshoot, change).
- Coaches and managers are equipped to notice, praise, reinforce, and correct behaviors related to knowledge and skill developed.
- Learners have a plan for mutual support on the job.

Please contact me if you would like support in customizing a design quality review strategy for your own team. clombardozi@L4LP.com