


Periodic Table of

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Creating better learning experiences is an art and a science. By incorporating the right elements, and avoiding hazardous ones, you can create engaging and effective learning experiences. Click on each set of elements to learn more.

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Customer-Facing

The Customer-Facing group of instructional design elements provide guidance for successful interactions with customers, clients, or stakeholders.

Instructional designers have a uniquely intimate relationship with their customers, especially when it comes to designing and developing custom courses, where the customer often has very specific requirements for their learners. What goals and outcomes do your customers desire from the learning you will develop? How will success be measured? These Customer-Facing elements will help you set the right course and stay on track.

Cl

Collaboration: eLearning can't be designed in a vacuum. Collaboration with key customers, SMEs, stakeholders, and peers is critical to creating the best product.

Go

Goals: Ensure that the goals of the project are clearly defined and agreed upon by all parties in order to manage scope and success.

Cn

Consultation: Provide meaningful consultative options and explanations to your clients and help them achieve their business goals while representing the learner's interests at the same time.

Wh

Warm Handoffs: To ensure nothing is missed as the project progresses, conduct warm handoff meetings to walk key team members or stakeholders through progress and reviews.

Co

Communication: Transparent, frequent, documented communication throughout the project helps achieve the best end result with the fewest sticking points.

So

Incremental Sign-off: Don't work in secret and then emerge with a finished product that could be "off." Find ways to get incremental feedback along the way.

Ct

Commitment: Gain commitment from your stakeholders and SMEs about their level and frequency of scheduled involvement prior to project start to ensure smooth completion.

Pt

Prototype: For larger projects, consider prototyping to be part of the storyboard or course to allow stakeholders to get a taste and provide input early on.



Learner-Facing

What is eLearning without learners? The Learner-Facing elements of instructional design are all about user experience. How intuitive are the navigation and controls? How do learners submit their answers? Is there adequate practice and feedback? The world doesn't need another boring page-turner! These elements remind you to work with your SMEs to adopt a learner-centered approach to learning.

Ts

Testing: Allow the learner to prove their knowledge, if only to themselves, via relevant and well-written test and knowledge check components.

Cs

Consistency: Be consistent with course navigation, question feedback, interactions, etc. Less time should be spent figuring out HOW to learn and more time learning.

Fb

Feedback: Give the learner rich, meaningful, frequent feedback to help them learn. Go beyond correct and incorrect — immerse them in "the why."

At

Autonomy: Create as much autonomy for the learner as is appropriate in your course design, flow, and activities. Let them choose and direct their learning wherever possible.

Au

Audio: Audio should be professionally recorded with realistic-sounding talent who will give the right intonation, pause, etc. Script it this way.

Cg

Cognition: If the learner isn't thinking, the learner isn't learning. Design your course so that the learner has to THINK and APPLY to interact. Not just click.

Ve

Visual Explosiveness: Visual organization, design, expression, and layout are key parts of the learning process and must be prioritized in course design.

Po

Positivity: Create a positive experience for the learner through activities, feedback, and narrative that encourages and promotes confidence. Testing: Allow the learner to prove their knowledge via relevant and well-written tests and knowledge checks.

Ch

Choices: Use your SMEs to discover common performance mistakes and build them into the course via robust choices, distractors, and meaningful feedback.

Va

Variety: Don't let your course become routine, predictable, or repetitive in boring ways. Keep interest alive with diverse interactions and visuals.



Behind the Scenes

These Behind the Scenes elements outline the many decisions and actions that go into designing an engaging and effective learning experience. Are you aligned with organizational goals? Make sure the voice and approach are appropriate for your audience, culture, and learning objectives.

AI

Alignment: Align the business goal of your customer to the needs of the learner and reflect it in your content, activities, approach, and assessment strategy in order to win.

Af

Affective Design: Use all the tools at your disposal to help affect the learner's desire to do the right thing. Often there is a motivational or emotional component to address.

Ad

Audience: Content, approach, activities, and design should be centered around an audience whose preferences you took the time to discover.

BI

Blooms: Make sure you're designing to the appropriate goal level of Bloom's Taxonomy. Take care to avoid over or under-engineering your course.

Sj

SMEs: Utilize your SMEs wisely by preparing to embed their stories, reasoning, common mistakes, and best practices in your course design.

Wr

Writing: Use appropriate writing style, clarity, and transitions in your writing. Make wise decisions about on-screen text vs. narration.

Ac

Active: Create an experience that allows the learner to practice desired behavior. Structure your course in a way that influences behavior through action.

Th

Thematics: If you're going to use themes, stories, or let the user play a role, make sure that creativity is aligned to education and performance-oriented tasks.

Si

Simplify: Effective training makes concepts, information, and practice as simplified and digestible as possible. Don't just regurgitate content, design it.

Ob

Objectives: Get clear about your course objectives and how they link to the learner and your customer. Consult them frequently so you don't get off track.

Ef

Efficiency: Be efficient in your process and product. Your project needs to be within budget, timeline, scope, and length.



Operational Best Practices

These Operational elements are the backbone of an organized workflow, and considerations for every instructional designer to prepare to ensure a successful project. Tools and considerations including blueprints, style guides, globalization, and QA process all play an important role.

PI

Plan: Whether it's an outline, blueprint, or storyboard—you need a plan. Then you need to refine and perfect it before building.

Np

Input: Design strategies for input throughout course design, completion, and rollout in order to continue to improve.

Sg

Style Guide: Review the style guide ahead of time. Style guides dictate how a brand is represented in text and establish grammatical guidelines.

GI

Globalization: Increase diversity of media. Decrease any design, characters, language, or graphics that seem too central to one country. For translation ease, leave plenty of white space, avoid idioms, and keep your image text tool-native.

Qa

QA: Structure formal QA processes for your course that ensure it is functional (for intended and unintended function) and clean.



Course Crippleers

Course Crippleers are dangerous or toxic elements which must be handled with care, or your course may suffer serious consequences. Are your visuals up to par? Are your lessons bogged down by superfluous dead weight? Know what it takes to protect your course from these hazardous elements.

Sp

Superfluous: Let the learner focus on what matters and give them a chance to remember it without watering it down in a sea of unnecessary text and visuals.

Ck

Click Next: eLearning is NOT an online PowerPoint. No one wants to see slides with a stock photo and 10 bullet points, slide after slide. People want to participate. Let them.

Cr

Clutter: Eliminate clutter of any kind on the screen. Good design incorporates plenty of white space and ample margins to let your content breathe.

Bv

Bad Visuals: Today's audience is saturated with professional media. They know bad media when they see it, and it slashes your content's credibility from the get-go.

Le

Lengthy: Even feature-length, professionally produced films can be too long. Recognize your audience's limit and chunk your courses to appropriate sizes.





You're an instructional design
expert now.

It's time to take this knowledge
and apply it to your eLearning
development projects.

We can't wait to see what you create. Be sure to tag us on
social media if you use these elements in your next project.

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