

# Visual Design Standards Checklist

Pablo Picasso once said, “Learn the rules like a pro so you can break them like an artist.” Instructional designers are often called upon to create art. In fact, you may find yourself creating masterpieces in the form of presentations, training courses, and learning materials.

You may not be ready to challenge the design world the way Picasso turned the art world on its head, but while you’re unleashing your inner artist, you can use the tips on this checklist to ensure you’re following good design principles.

## Text

The right font choice is the foundation for a great design. Explore different styles to find the best fit for the message you want to convey. Some additional tips for using text are:

- Choose typography that is clear and easy to read
- Stay in the same font family
- Don’t use more than three different font styles in one document
- Break up wordy chunks of text with images or white space
- Sparingly use all caps and bold text and only to guide the reader’s attention to important items or calls to action
- Illustrate process flows with graphics instead of long descriptions
- Highlight numbers and calculations with graphs and charts instead of heavy text

### Accessibility Tips:

- Include concise and legible transcripts for audio narration
- Provide clear and easily readable closed captioning or subtitles for videos
- Enable options for users to zoom or resize text

## Color

Color is a critical yet often misused design element. In fact, there is a separate set of rules dedicated to color theory. To effectively use color, keep these tips in mind:

- Use a color wheel to study the impact of certain color combinations in design
- Use warm and cool colors to evoke emotion, set the mood, and communicate a specific message
- Don’t use light font on light backgrounds or dark font on dark backgrounds (these combinations are too difficult for the learner to read)
- Use caution with clashing or complementary color combinations (such as purple and yellow; green and red; blue and orange). These vibrating colors may work for print and 3D, but in digital design, they can cause distortion and vision or accessibility issues for users
- If you can’t decide how much of each color to use, employ the 60-30-10 rule (60 percent main color, 30 percent complementary color, 10 percent accent color)

### Accessibility Tips:

- Ensure proper contrast between text and backgrounds (for example, use dark text on a light background or light text on a dark background)
- Limit the use of red text, which can be difficult for colorblind learners to see

## Images

One of the easiest ways to elevate your design is to use images. However, choosing the right images can be complicated. Following these tips can take your work from average to amazing:

- Use consistent image types (don't mix photography and illustrations)
- Use consistent borders around images (this includes color, stroke, line weight, and style)
- Use consistent icon styles (for example, if all icons have a round background, don't use a triangle background)
- Ensure icon meanings are familiar and easily understood
- Avoid pixilated and low-resolution images
- Use consistent color themes for a cohesive look
- Use relevant images or icons that reflect the subject matter of the design
- Use proper cropping techniques (don't crop heads off portraits; use consistent aspect ratios and crop shapes; crop to focus the viewer's attention)
- Use diverse images that reflect the world around us
- Limit animated images and text (too much animation is distracting and exhausting)

### Accessibility Tips:

- Use alt tags (descriptive text) for images, videos, and animations that can be read by screen readers for visually impaired learners
- Include playback options to pause and resume videos

## Web Design

There's a science dedicated to the fine art of web design. Just remember that the key to success is a simple, clean layout that focuses on the user experience. Some additional tips are:

- Follow style guidelines for typography, color, and images as listed in the previous checklists
- Study composition formations to decide where you want to guide visitors (Z and F patterns, visual hierarchy, flow, scrolling, and so forth)
- Organize site content in a logical sequence so that call to action buttons and navigation menus are easy to find
- Use consistent button styles and colors (for example, don't mix square red buttons with blue oval buttons)
- Ensure videos are embedded properly with high-quality image and audio
- Consider how the site will look across multiple devices
- Design links to display in a different color and to open in a separate tab or window so the user's view is not cluttered

### Accessibility Tips:

- Include an option to zoom or resize text to adjust visual settings
- Enable features for learners to navigate using a keyboard or mouse
- Ensure there is an option to select closed-captioning or subtitles for videos
- Allow learners to choose portrait or landscape orientation of content
- For additional web content accessibility guidelines (WCAG), visit [ColorZilla](#) or [WAVE](#)