

Transcript – Mr. Bart Everson:

Advice on the importance of usability and accessibility (part 2)

Returning to our four major principles of usability, there are additional considerations which fall under the heading of visual clarity, readability, and consistency, which will also improve accessibility. So let's take each in turn.

The idea of visual clarity includes using legible fonts, color contrast, white space, headings, and indents to organize text visually. You'll also want to eliminate distracting elements like animations and graphics that are purely decorative. Don't get too subtle or fancy with color - remember different devices will render graphics differently, to say nothing of the variation in our eyeballs. Keep it simple.

It's probably a good idea to get a second set of eyes to look over your content, preferably someone who hasn't seen it before and isn't overly familiar with the topic. You may wish to work your way through the Usability and Visual Design Questions for Online Courses (pdf, 65k) which is available as a PDF download.

For further inspiration, check out VisualMess.com for a great overview of the principles of clean design. In this module, we're also including a slide deck with visual clarity exercises which you can download and edit.

Readability includes writing in active voice and at an approachable reading level. To check readability you can paste in a sample of your text into a readability checker, such as readable.com. You can also check readability within Microsoft Word. Again, you'll want to use legible fonts and adhere to the principles of visual clarity. Finally, if you are sharing PDFs, make sure they contain actual text and not just pictures of text. If this is a problem you may need to investigate OCR or optical character recognition.

Finally we come to consistency. The learning management system itself dictates a certain level of consistency, but it's up to you to supply the rest. Your layout, navigation, images, and terminology should all be consistent.

You'll notice throughout the modules of this course, the content is displayed consistently from page to page, and the images and graphics are similar in appearance, size, and shape. Our intent is to make these pages approachable and easy to navigate. Contrast these pages to many commercial news websites -- take your pick -- where the pages are cluttered with a mix of story links, pictures, videos, notices, and advertisements which makes it more difficult to navigate. Let your students spend less time hunting for information, less energy trying to distinguish the important stuff from the decoration. Let them have more time and energy to learn what you want them to learn.

That brings us to findability. See, I told you I'd come back to it. Your spellchecker may not recognize this word, but it was coined in the early 2000s. There's so much information at our fingertips and flowing across our screens, but it's no good if we can't find it. Help your students find what they need by being consistent, using logical categories for organization, labeling everything clearly, and adhering to those good old principles of visual clarity. Notice how, in this course, we put everything in modules. Modules allow you to aggregate your content, your activities, and your assignments in one easy-to-find place -- and you can put things in the order that you want your students to work through them. Starting each

module with an overview also improves usability. If you are moving a course online, organizing with modules also allows you to see where there may be too much material for the students to work through in the time provided. You may also spot gaps in content that need to be filled.

All right. That's it! Have fun making your course usable and accessible!