AI for images

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Generative AI can assist with the creation of images for learning materials, especially where a designer needs illustrative concepts, scenario visuals, placeholders, simple diagrams, or visual variation. It can be useful for speed and flexibility, but it also introduces questions about accuracy, appropriateness, copyright, bias, and educational value.

This page should be read alongside the visual literacy guidance in the Learning design guide, particularly pages on understanding visual literacy, types of images, sourcing and selecting visual assets, and visual literacy practices for learning designers. AI image generation can expand what is possible, but it does not remove the need to choose visuals deliberately and evaluate their learning value.

Where AI can help

AI image generation may be useful for creating:

- conceptual illustrations
- visual prompts for discussion
- scenario images
- cover images or section banners
- icon-style graphics
- simple visual metaphors
- placeholders during course development

These uses are most effective when the image does not need to function as precise technical evidence.

Good practice

When using AI for images:

1. **Be clear about the purpose**
   Decide whether the image is decorative, explanatory, motivational, or essential to understanding.
2. **Check for accuracy**
   AI images often contain visual errors, especially when depicting tools, processes, interfaces, anatomy, text, or technical detail.
3. **Review for representation and bias**
   Check whether the image reflects the intended context and avoids stereotypes or unintended exclusion.
4. **Use alt text and accessibility support**
   If the image is used in learning materials, support it with text alternatives and avoid relying on visuals alone to convey critical information.
5. **Match the visual style to the course**
   Ensure the generated image fits the tone and credibility of the course rather than looking arbitrary or out of place.

Risks and limitations

AI-generated images can:

- look plausible while depicting impossible or misleading details
- reinforce visual stereotypes
- include distorted objects, hands, tools, or interfaces
- distract from learning if they are overly decorative
- create legal or ethical uncertainty depending on the tool and usage context

These risks make AI images less suitable for contexts where precise visual fidelity matters, such as compliance training, technical instruction, or assessment evidence.

Example uses

Example 1: Scenario setting image

A designer creates an image showing a busy office environment to support a workplace communication scenario. The image helps establish context but is not relied on for any technical detail.

AI-generated example of an office team meeting used to establish context for a workplace commun

Example: an AI-generated scenario-setting image for a workplace communication activity. The value of the image is in helping establish tone and context, not in teaching exact procedural or technical detail.

Example 2: Early design placeholder

During course prototyping, a designer uses AI-generated images to test layout, page balance, and tone before deciding whether final visuals should be commissioned, sourced, or redesigned.

AI-generated example of a prototype online course design workbench used as a placeholder during

Example: an AI-generated prototype visual used during the early design phase to explore layout and presentation. In this use case, the image helps support design thinking rather than acting as final instructional evidence.

Practical guidance

Use AI images when they help to:

- establish tone or context
- provide lightweight illustration
- support ideation or prototyping
- create inexpensive visual variation

Be cautious when the image is expected to:

- teach exact visual detail
- show real procedures accurately
- represent compliance-critical situations
- substitute for carefully chosen educational diagrams

AI image tools are most useful when they are used intentionally and reviewed critically, not when they are treated as automatic replacements for visual design or educational judgement.

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