Visual literacy

When we learn online, everything from pictures and diagrams to videos and graphics plays a big role in how well we understand the material. Being able to choose and use these visual elements wisely is what we call visual literacy. This skill is crucial not just for making your course look good, but for making it more effective for every student.

Visual literacy helps us communicate better in a world where we're constantly seeing and sharing images and videos. In this post, we're going to look at why visual literacy matters so much when you're picking out visuals for your online courses. We'll discuss how the right images can help students grasp complex information, remember it longer, and feel more connected to what they're learning.

- Understanding visual literacy
- Types of images
- Sourcing and selecting visual assets
- Visual literacy practices for learning designers

Understanding visual literacy

So, what exactly is visual literacy? It's the ability to see, understand, and make sense of visual information. In simpler terms, it's about reading images and graphics the way we read words. When we're visually literate, we can interpret the messages that visuals are trying to convey, and we can also create visuals that effectively communicate our own ideas.

Why does this matter for online learning? Well, when you're learning through a screen, a lot of the information comes to you through visuals. If these images or videos are confusing or misleading, learning becomes much harder. On the other hand, good visuals can clarify difficult concepts and make learning more interesting and accessible.

Visual literacy isn't just a skill for artists or designers; it's a must-have for anyone who teaches or designs online courses. By developing your visual literacy, you'll be better equipped to choose visuals that add real value to your lessons. You'll know what makes an image effective and how to match the right visual with the right part of your course.

The impact of visual assets in online learning

Visual assets are more than just decoration in online courses – they're essential tools that help students learn better. Let's look at the different types of visual assets and see how they can make a difference in the learning process.

- **Images**: A well-chosen image can explain complex ideas quickly. For example, an image of a cell structure in a biology course can give students a clear, visual representation of what might take paragraphs to describe in text.
- **Graphics**: Graphics like charts and graphs can summarize data or trends in a way that’s easy to understand and remember. They're great for visualizing statistics in business courses or showing historical trends in social studies.
- **Videos**: Videos can deliver a lot of information in a short time and in a dynamic way. They are especially useful for demonstrating processes, like a scientific experiment or a cooking technique, allowing students to see the action step by step.
- **Diagrams**: Diagrams are excellent for breaking down and explaining the parts of something, like the components of a machine in an engineering course or the stages of cell division in biology.

These visual assets do more than just convey information; they help make learning more engaging and interactive. By seeing concepts in action or illustrated vividly, students are more likely to

understand and retain the information. This is especially true for visual learners who grasp information better through images or videos than through reading text alone.

Using diverse visuals can cater to different learning styles and needs, making your course more inclusive. Everyone from auditory learners to kinesthetic learners can benefit when visuals are paired with texts and activities that engage other senses.

Diversity and inclusion

Promoting diversity and inclusion in visual assets is crucial for fostering an inclusive learning environment. By ensuring that visuals represent a wide spectrum of cultures, backgrounds, and experiences, we can cultivate a sense of belonging for all students. This not only validates identities but also expands worldviews, exposing learners to diverse perspectives and narratives in a respectful manner. Embracing diversity in visuals not only ensures representation but also encourages empathy and understanding among learners, contributing to a more inclusive educational experience.

Types of images

Visual assets are integral to enhancing both comprehension and engagement in online courses. Different types of images—literal, figurative, metaphorical, and instructional—serve unique purposes in this context, each contributing to the learning experience in distinct ways.

Literal Images

Literal images depict exactly what they represent, providing an exact representation of reality. Examples include:

Photographs of Historical Events: In a history course, photographs provide a direct visual reference to past events, helping students to better understand and remember the historical context.



> Ngāti Toa's protest of the fast-track consenting legislation on the steps of Parliament. Photo / Adam Pearse[source: NZ Herald]

- **Detailed Anatomical Drawings**: In a biology class, precise drawings of anatomical structures aid in the accurate understanding of the human body and its functions.



Literal images help clarify facts and provide concrete examples of the concepts being taught. They are invaluable for the accurate representation of material, ensuring that students have a clear and direct visual reference for the content they are learning.

Figurative Images

Figurative images offer an artistic representation that captures the essence of a subject with some level of abstraction. They may not depict reality exactly but aim to convey the feel or spirit of the subject matter. Examples include:

- **Impressionistic Paintings**: In an art course, impressionistic paintings might be used to illustrate different artistic techniques or movements, conveying the overall atmosphere and emotion of the scene rather than precise details.



- **Abstract Diagrams**: In subjects like mathematics or physics, abstract diagrams can represent complex concepts in a simplified, visual form.



- **Stylised Illustrated Scenarios**: A stylised illustrated image of a scenario, like a cartoon depicting a busy marketplace, can be used to convey the essence and dynamics of the scene, often employed in storytelling or scenario-based learning.