

Typography and learning design

Typography is a crucial element in learning design, significantly affecting how learners perceive and process information. Effective typography enhances readability, comprehension, and engagement with educational content. This guide delves into the principles of typography within the context of learning design, offering practical tips for creating visually appealing and pedagogically sound materials.

In many Learning Management Systems (LMSs), designers face limitations regarding font choices, formatting options, and overall design flexibility. Despite these constraints, understanding and applying fundamental typographic principles can greatly improve the learning experience. This guide aims to help learning designers make the most of the available tools, ensuring their content is both professional and educationally effective.

By incorporating typographic best practices, even within the limitations of LMSs, educators can create accessible and engaging materials that support diverse learner needs. Whether working on online platforms, printed resources, or multimedia presentations, mastering typography is essential for delivering high-quality education.

Headings

Headings play a crucial role in structuring content, making it more readable, accessible, and professional. This guide provides comprehensive instructions on the use of headings, including their importance, hierarchical order, and formatting conventions.

Why use headings?

Headings break the content into sections, slow reading, and help the reader track how ideas are connected. They refresh the eyes and improve readability, especially in online courses where readers scan for information.

Key benefits:

- **Organisational clarity:** Helps in structuring content clearly.
- **Readability:** Enhances the ease of reading and comprehension.
- **Navigation:** Assists readers in finding specific information quickly.
- **Logical flow:** Ensures the content builds gradually and logically.

Tips:

- Use plenty of headings for online courses.

- ~~Before drafting, give sections meaningful titles, break them into subsections, and identify all different pages.~~
- ~~Check the logical flow by reading headings only at the end of the draft process.~~

Heading levels in iQualify?

iQualify supports two heading levels plus the page title style <h1>.

- **Heading 2** <h2>
- **Heading 3** <h3>

The **iformat** plugin provides access to a 3rd heading level <h4>.

~~If additional levels are needed:~~

- ~~Use bold text for subheadings beyond Heading 3.~~

Importance of using headings in order

Maintaining a logical and hierarchical order of headings is essential for several reasons:

1. **Readability and structure:**
 - **Organisational clarity:** Provides a clear structure, making it easier for readers to follow.
 - **Logical flow:** Ensures a logical progression of ideas.
2. **Accessibility:**
 - **Screen readers:** Assistive technologies rely on the hierarchical structure of headings for navigation.
 - **Search engines:** Improve SEO by helping search engines understand the structure.
3. **Consistency and professionalism:**
 - **Uniform appearance:** Maintains a professional and uniform layout.
 - **User expectation:** Meets reader expectations for content structure.
4. **Editing and maintenance:**
 - **Ease of updates:** Simplifies editing and updating content.

Best practices for using headings

- **Use sequential order:** Start with Heading 1 for the main title, followed by Heading 2 for major sections, Heading 3 for subsections, and so on.
- **Avoid skipping levels:** Do not skip heading levels (e.g., jumping from page title to Heading 4). Ensure each level follows sequentially.

iQualify's heading 2 is enormous, and is visually stronger than the page title, which does make it unappealing to use.

- **Be consistent:** Maintain consistent application of heading styles and formatting throughout the document or course.
- **Use descriptive titles:** Ensure each heading clearly describes the content that follows.

Writing and formatting headings

Write headings that describe what follows. Use short and lively phrases.

Formatting rules:

- Capitalise the first word and proper nouns only. (sentence-case)
- Do not use full stops in headings.
- Do not introduce acronyms in headings.

Bullets and lists

Bullets and lists are powerful tools in learning design, helping to organise information, emphasise key points, and improve readability. This guide provides best practices for using bullets and lists effectively in educational content, ensuring that they enhance the learning experience without causing confusion or clutter.

Types of lists

- **Bulleted lists:** Used for unordered items where the sequence is not important.
- **Numbered lists:** Used for ordered items where the sequence is important, such as steps in a process.

Best practices for using bullets and lists

Clarity and simplicity

- **Be concise:** Keep bullet points and list items short and to the point. Avoid lengthy paragraphs within lists.
- **Use parallel structure:** Ensure each list item follows the same grammatical structure for consistency and readability.
- **Limit the number of items:** Ideally, limit lists to 5-7 items to avoid overwhelming learners.

Hierarchical structure

- **Nested lists:** Use nested lists sparingly to show subordination and hierarchy. Ensure nested items are clearly indented.
- **Consistency in hierarchy:** Maintain consistent formatting for different levels of lists (e.g., bullets for the first level, dashes for the second).

Context and relevance

- **Purposeful use:** Use lists only when they add value by organising information clearly. Avoid using lists for the sake of aesthetics.
- **Relevance:** Ensure that all items in a list are relevant to the topic and logically grouped together.

Examples

Bulleted list example

Benefits of using headings:

- Improve readability
- Enhance content organisation
- Aid in navigation
- Highlight key sections

Numbered list example

Steps to format a document:

1. Open the document in your word processor.
2. Select the appropriate template.
3. Apply the desired styles and formatting.
4. Review and proofread the content.
5. Save and export the final version.

Common pitfalls to avoid

- **Overuse:** Avoid overloading your content with too many lists, which can reduce their impact.
- **Inconsistent formatting:** Ensure consistent use of bullet styles and numbering throughout your document.
- **Lack of explanation:** Provide context or introduction to your lists to help learners understand their purpose and relevance.