

15

COURSE DESIGN MISTAKES

THAT RUIN ENGAGEMENT AND METRICS



INTRODUCTION

Hello there!

It's informative to examine good courses. And sometimes it's even more useful to analyze the not-so-good ones. After all, doesn't knowledge stay with us longer if we learn it from mistakes?

That's why we compiled the 15 most common visual design mistakes that instructional designers and eLearning developers encounter in their courses. Explore real-life examples of each issue and equip yourself with our tips on how to avoid and rectify them, enhancing the visual appeal and effectiveness of your courses.

Our list progresses in order of the increasing frequency that these mistakes occur. So, we'll begin with less common pitfalls and work our way up to the mistake that's made most often by course designers.



Let's get started!





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MISTAKE #15

DISTRACTING EFFECTS

We all like to add photos and images to make our slides more visually appealing and expressive. But if you add certain effects, this is going to be visually distracting for your audience.

For example, take a look at this course cover with a pixelated effect. The course designer probably wanted to make the photo less noticeable than the text, but it did just the opposite.



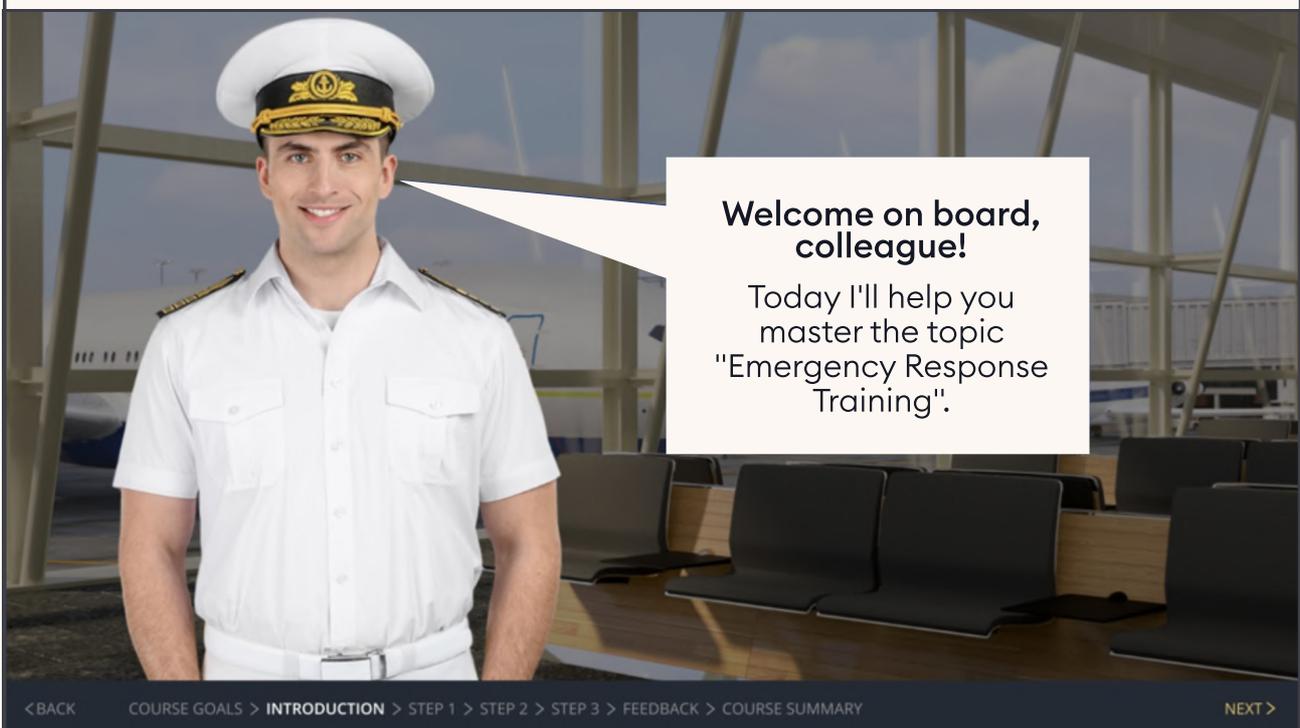
✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Don't use effects that make images look weird and artsy. They may have their place, but in very rare cases. So, for the most part, consider avoiding them.

MISTAKE #14

WILD SPEECH BUBBLES

Some eLearning developers extend the tail of the speech bubble right to the character, probably thinking learners will not guess who a phrase belongs to. Here's an example:



At best, it looks comical. And if you have several characters, the slide will look messy and overloaded, which can ruin learner engagement.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

To avoid the temptation of creating such a long tail, just place the speech bubble closer to the character and point it in their direction. Rest assured that learners will understand who says what!



MISTAKE #13

OVERUSE OF ART OBJECTS IN POWERPOINT

PowerPoint is full of various 3D figures and text volume effects. It might be tempting to use them to embellish or highlight text on a slide, but they are actually somewhat distracting and, frankly, a bit on the cheesy side.

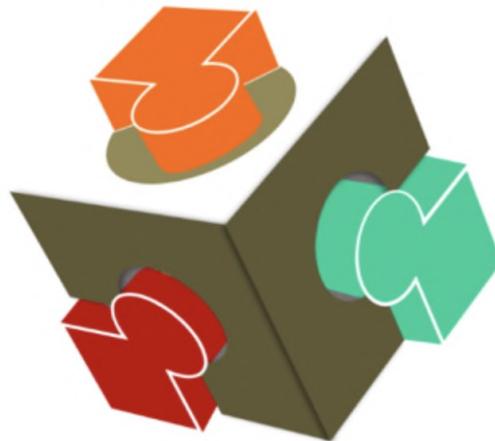
Three aspects of the culture of speech

Normative

learning and codifying language norms

Communicative

study and functional differentiation of expressive language tools



Ethical

describing speech etiquette, effective communication tools

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

The overuse of such objects creates visual chaos on the slide. So, keep it simple and use them only when it's really necessary.

MISTAKE #12

VIOLATION OF THE PROXIMITY PRINCIPLE

According to the proximity principle, it's important to place elements with connected meanings close together because the physical location of items on a slide can either create or destroy a logical relationship between them. If you violate the proximity principle, you risk confusing your learners and reducing their comprehension.

Take a look at the example below.

COURSE GOALS

1

2

3

4



Learn how to set the correct goals for a call

Know how to formulate a goal for a month or a day

Know the standards and rules for working with clients

Be able to build a workday model to increase work efficiency

Here, the proximity principle is clearly being ignored. The numbers are on the left, and the text elements referring to them are on the right. And these elements are not only distant from each other but also placed at different levels. In the middle, we can see a character who separates our content blocks from their numbering. As a result, it's hard to grasp which elements relate to each other.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Follow the proximity principle. As for the slide above, to fix it, you should move the character to the right side of the screen, where there is a gray rectangle, and place the text on the left, closer to the number icons. This will make the information much easier to understand visually.

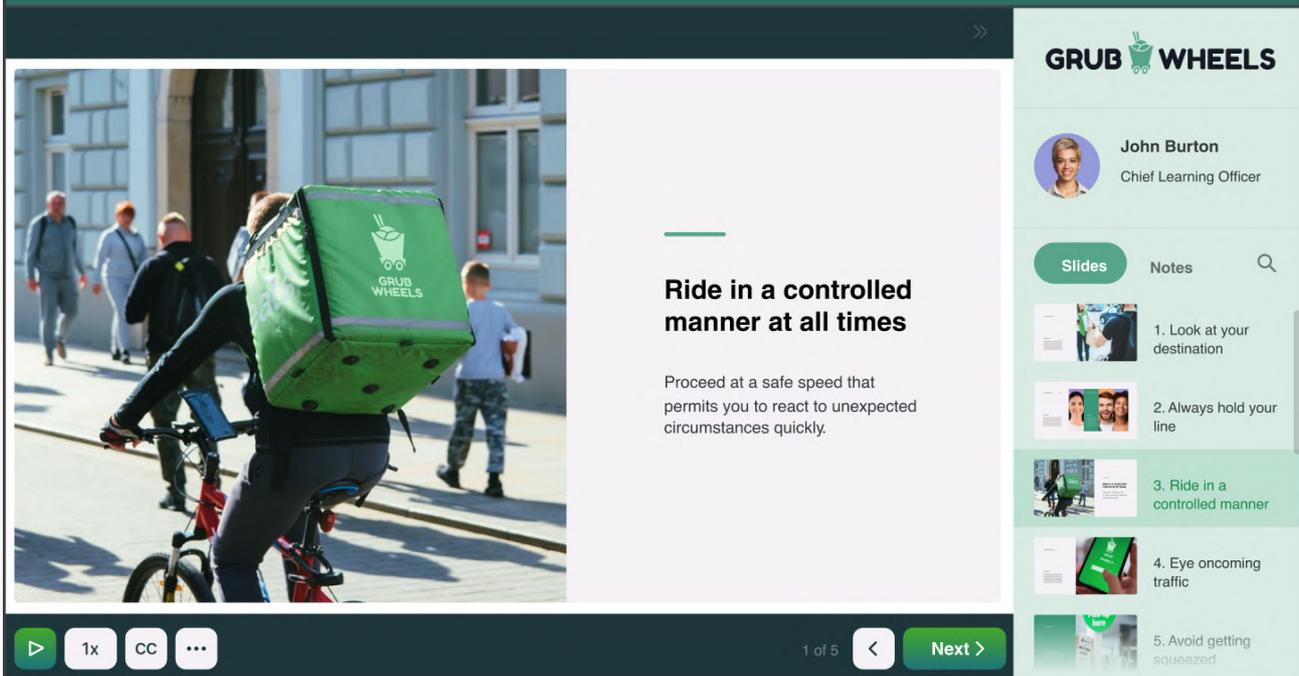
— ✕

<h1 style="color: #f47920; margin: 0;">MISTAKE #11</h1>	<h2 style="margin: 0;">THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE GRADIENT</h2>
<p>You can botch several things by using a gradient incorrectly. For example, it can cause your color scheme to clash and make the text hard to read.</p>	
<div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"> <div style="background-color: #f47920; border-radius: 50%; width: 30px; height: 30px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> i </div> <p>During February, the Alps are at their best. You no longer need to worry about poor snow cover. From February to March the skiing conditions are often excellent, but it can get crowded. Good weather conditions is a factor that contributes to the overall success of your ski holiday.</p> </div> <div style="background-color: #0070c0; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px; width: 80%;"> <p>Reasons to visit the Alps during spring:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Walking, hiking and trekking 2. Whitewater rafting and kayaking 3. Road cycling and mountain biking 4. Learn mountaineering and camping 5. Via Ferrata </div> </div>	
<p>Module 3. Alps</p>	

On the slide above, item two and three are almost illegible because of the background: there is not enough contrast, and one color blends into the other (white text on a light background).

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Be careful about where and how you use gradients. They sometimes work very well. For instance, you can use gradients in player buttons:



The screenshot shows a video player interface for a course titled "GRUB WHEELS". The main content area displays a slide with a white background and a green header. The slide title is "Ride in a controlled manner at all times". Below the title, the text reads: "Proceed at a safe speed that permits you to react to unexpected circumstances quickly." To the left of the text is a photograph of a person riding a bicycle with a large green delivery bag on their back. The bag has the "GRUB WHEELS" logo. To the right of the main content is a sidebar with the course title "GRUB WHEELS", the presenter's name "John Burton" (Chief Learning Officer), and a list of five slides. The third slide, "Ride in a controlled manner", is currently selected and highlighted in green. At the bottom of the player, there are controls for play, volume (1x), closed captions (CC), and a "Next" button.

GRUB WHEELS

John Burton
Chief Learning Officer

Slides Notes

1. Look at your destination
2. Always hold your line
3. Ride in a controlled manner
4. Eye oncoming traffic
5. Avoid getting squeezed

1 of 5 Next >

You can use a gradient, but you need to incorporate it into your course in a way that works.



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Green business criteria

A business is described as sustainable (or green) if it matches the following four criteria:

1. It incorporates principles of sustainability into each of its business decisions.
2. It supplies environmentally friendly products, which replaces the demand for non-green products.
3. It is greener than the traditional competition.
4. It has made an enduring commitment to environmental principles in its business operations.

✦

▶

ALL KINDS OF ELEARNING ACTIVITIES

Create any eLearning content, like full-fledged courses, interactions, assessments, videos, and scenarios.

Question List
25:30

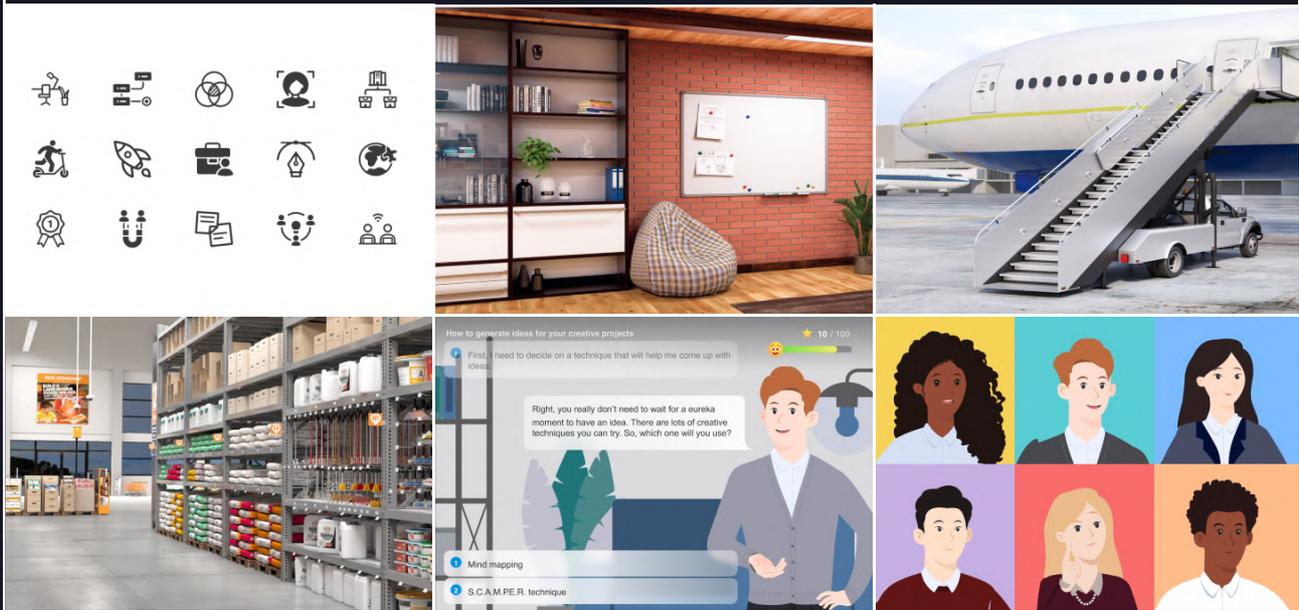
The official height of Everest is...

- 27,940 feet (8,516 m)
- 29,029 feet (8,848 m)
- 29,035 feet (8,850 m)

Your Score: 0 of 100
Question 1 of 10
SUBMIT

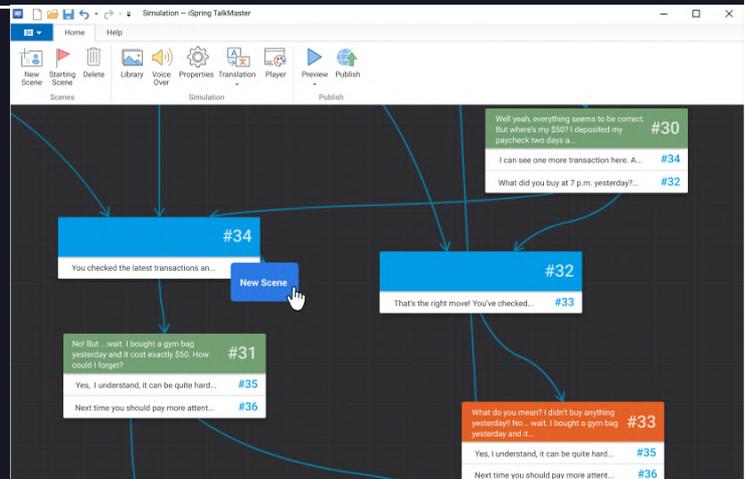
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MISTAKE #10

TOO MANY DIFFERENT SHAPES



ELON MUSK

A Canadian-American engineer, entrepreneur, inventor, investor. Elon Musk is the founder of PayPal, SpaceX, Tesla, as well a member of the Board of Directors of SolarCity, a company founded by his cousins.



At first glance, it seems like there's nothing wrong with the slide above. However, doesn't it feel somewhat chaotic to you? That's because there are too many different shapes: a round shape for buttons, a sharp-edged rectangular frame around the text, and an unusual rounded and sharp-edged shape for the photo. So, there are a total of four shapes on a single slide, which is way too many.

Imagine a 30-slide course in which each slide uses different shapes. The multitude of shapes will be distracting to your learners, and the course will look odd.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

It's important to understand that shapes convey a certain meaning. For instance, a circle is a symbol of positivity and is usually associated with less complicated subject matter. And for more serious topics, more dramatic or edgy shapes will work better. So, consider what the general mood and tone of your course need to be, and use shapes that convey the desired meaning.



MISTAKE #9

EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT

Sometimes instructional designers want to highlight several key ideas on a slide because they consider that everything on the slide is important. As a result, the slide gets overloaded with meanings, and learners get lost.

What is a *leader*?

A leader is someone who does more than just lead people. They have to be driven by the right motivation and **make a positive impact** on the people around them.

A leader is someone who can **see how things can be improved** and who **rallies people to move toward** that better vision.

Leaders can work toward making their vision a reality while putting people first. Just being able to motivate people isn't enough — leaders **need to be empathetic** and **connect with people** to be successful.



In conclusion, a leader **inspires, manages, and supports their teams** to work creatively and confidently toward the shared vision.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Adhere to the “one slide, one idea” rule. If you have several key ideas on a slide, spread them out over different slides. Or, if you have [iSpring Suite](#), use one of the built-in interactions that will structure your content, separate ideas, and make the learning experience more engaging.



MISTAKE #8

MISUSED ANIMATIONS

Animations can be a great way to engage learners, but they can also annoy them. If you use multiple animations on the same slide, or even if you use a single animation on each slide of your course, your learners are likely to tire of them very quickly.

Make sure to not use a fade-out animation on one slide, a pop-up type on another, and rotation on the next, for example. So, make sure to not use a fade-out animation on one slide, a pop-up type on another, and rotation on the next, for example. Many different animations can create a sense of disorganization for the learner. They may be interested at first, but will get extremely annoyed by the fifth slide.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

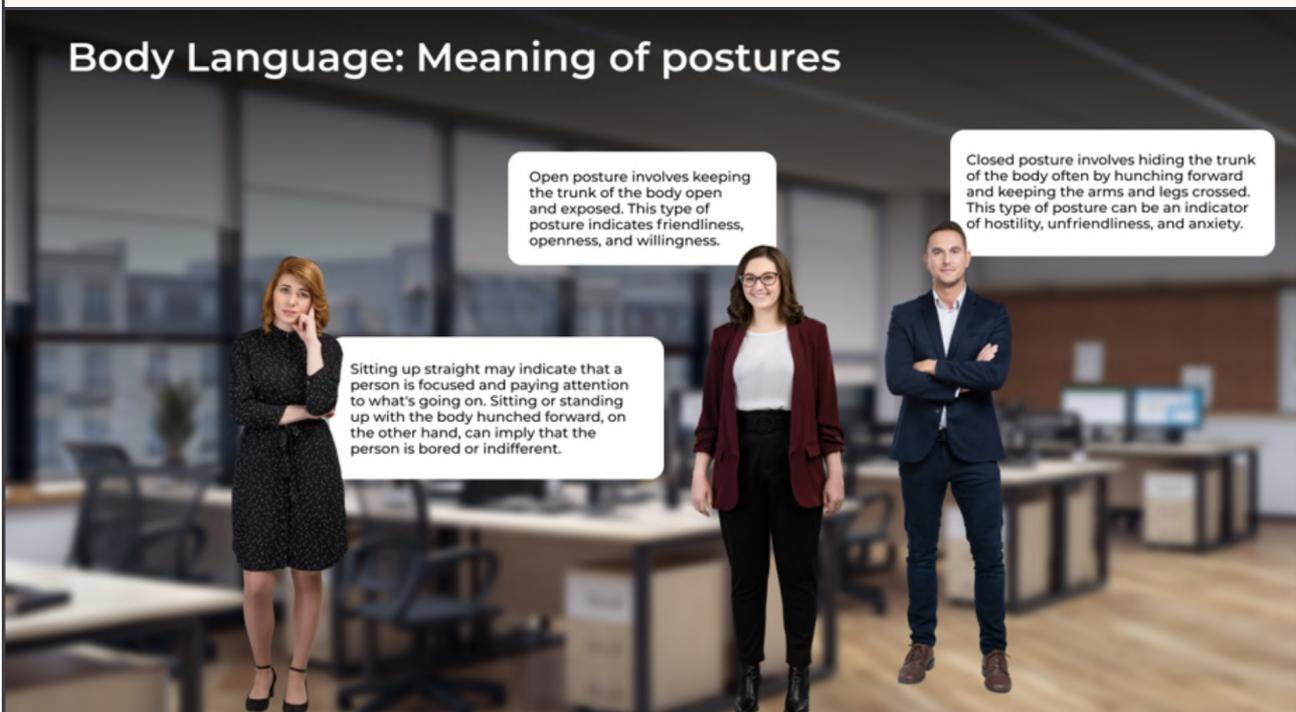
Use up to two or three animation effects in the entire course, and only when they add meaning or help you make the learning experience smoother and more engaging.

MISTAKE #7

FLOATING FOLKS

Characters add a nice touch to courses, but only if they touch the ground according to the law of gravity. Otherwise, they are just floating in space, which is cringeworthy.

Body Language: Meaning of postures



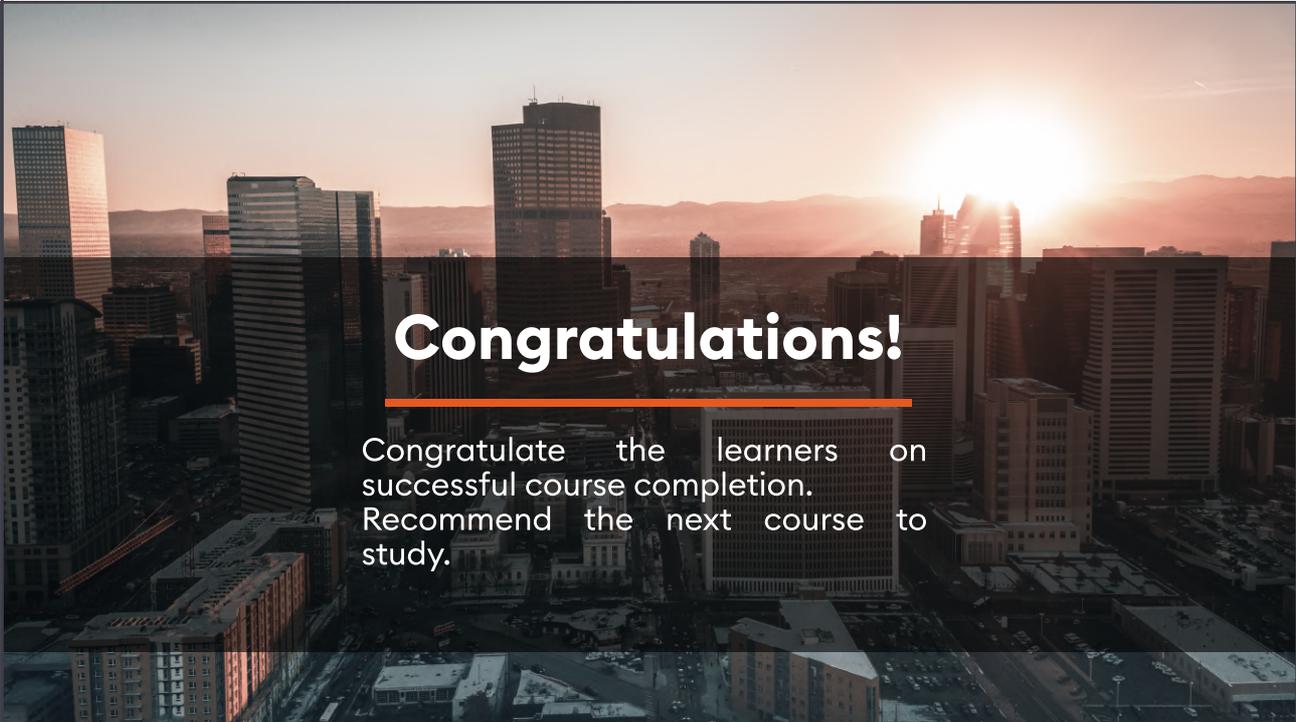
✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

There's only one exception when floating characters have a chance to look natural – if your course is about astronauts in space. In all other cases, don't show characters at full height. Place them closer, and cut them off at around waist level. This will help you avoid zero gravity on your slides and will make it easier for learners to see characters' emotions, which will create a better visual and emotional connection

MISTAKE #6

JUSTIFIED TEXT LAYOUT

Justified text is taboo in courses because it makes texts unreadable. It creates additional unnecessary spaces between words. Learners' brains interpret all such spaces as periods. That's why they pause after every word, and the learning process becomes exhausting.



Congratulations!

Congratulate the learners on successful course completion. Recommend the next course to study.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Avoid using justified text. Instead, align the text to the left.

MISTAKE #5

TYPOS

Everyone makes mistakes and typos, especially if you're working on a course alone without a team and are responsible for all the stages. At a certain point, you will have gone through the text so many times that you'll stop seeing your errors. But learners will.

Introduction. What will you learn after completing the course?

- 01** You will know how to establish *contact* using posture and gaze.
- 02** You will understand how establish contact using facial *expressions* and voice.
- 03** You will learn to establish contact using *dsitance* and gestures.



✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

It's best to have your course scripts checked by professional proofreaders. If that's not possible, give it to one of your colleagues and/or use spell check, grammar check, and tools like Grammarly, Hemingway Editor, and ChatGPT..

MISTAKE #4

PATCHWORK SLIDE

A patchwork slide is one that uses a jumble of different styles, colors, and ways of presenting information. Like the one shown below.



This is not the worst example, but you can see that the colors don't match well, the icons have different styles, and the text is in different formats. There's a generic stock character that takes all the attention when it shouldn't. Also, the word "algorithm" is underlined on the slide, and many people associate underlined text with a link to a website. It looks like something you should click on to access a page on the Internet.

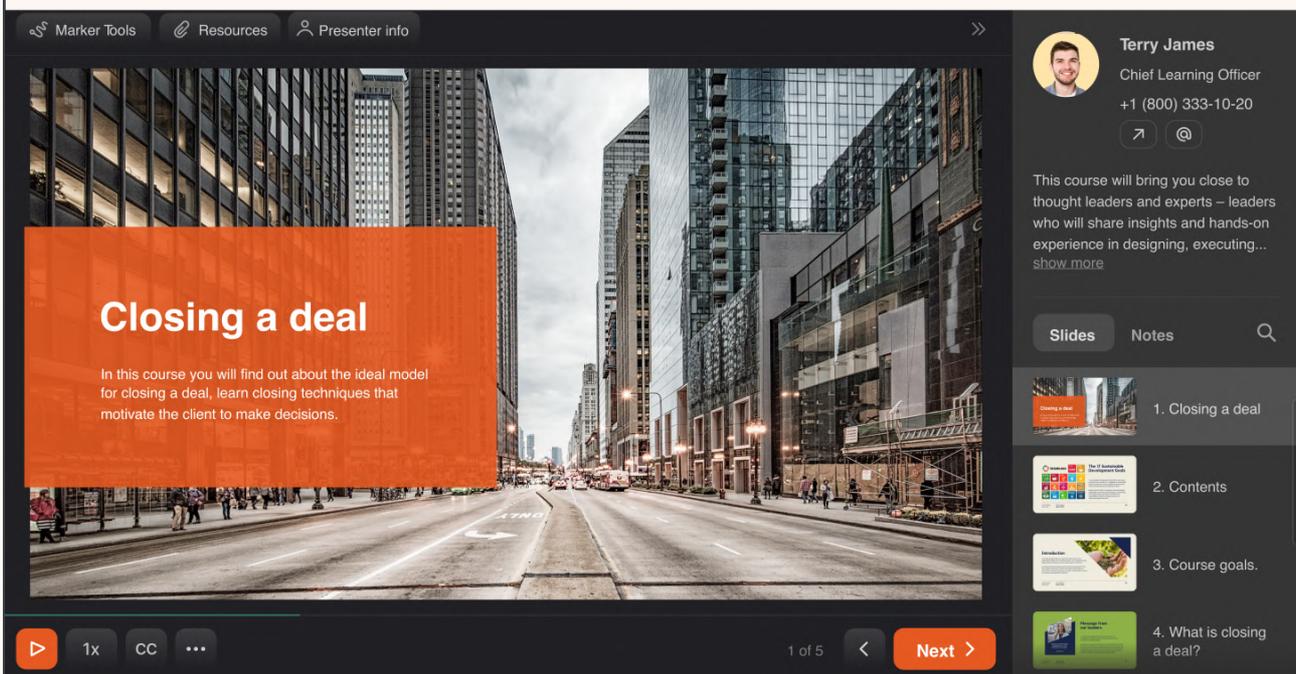
✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Select a single way to draw attention to the text throughout the course. For example, if you've already used italics, don't also use a bold font or underlining.

MISTAKE #3

EXCESSIVE BUTTONS AND TABS

Standard player templates usually contain several default buttons and tabs. It might be fine to use all of them, even if there are many, but only if learners actually need all of them.



The screenshot shows a presentation player interface. At the top, there are three tabs: 'Marker Tools', 'Resources', and 'Presenter info'. The main content area displays a slide with an orange background and the title 'Closing a deal'. Below the title, there is a short paragraph of text. At the bottom of the slide, there are several control buttons: a play button, '1x', 'CC', and a three-dot menu. To the right of the slide, there is a sidebar with a profile picture of Terry James, his name, title 'Chief Learning Officer', and phone number '+1 (800) 333-10-20'. Below this, there is a search bar and two tabs: 'Slides' and 'Notes'. The 'Slides' tab is active, showing a list of four slides: '1. Closing a deal', '2. Contents', '3. Course goals.', and '4. What is closing a deal?'. At the bottom of the sidebar, there is a 'Next' button.

However, if there are no presenters or resources in the course, why confuse learners with these buttons in the top section of the player? If the course has no voice-over or background music, why keep the sound on/off button and the slide replay button?

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Check your course player layout and customize it if necessary to include only those buttons that are relevant to your course.

MISTAKE #2

POOR USE OF HIERARCHY

The idea of a hierarchy in design involves positioning the elements on a slide so that the learner views them in a specific order. First, they read the title, then the key idea, and then maybe some additional information. But if you use it poorly, the slide becomes a mess.

Introduction is the first step when interacting with a mentee.

Stage goals for "establishing contact":

- Develop a correct understanding of their personality
- Establish trust
- Create the image of an authoritative expert



Here, the title is competing with the subtitle. It's even hard to tell which of the elements is the title. A learner has to read and process the entire text to figure out what's what.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Show the importance of the elements on the slide by using a sort of visual ranking system. The most important elements should be larger and more visible. Font size and boldness should be applied in order of decreasing importance.

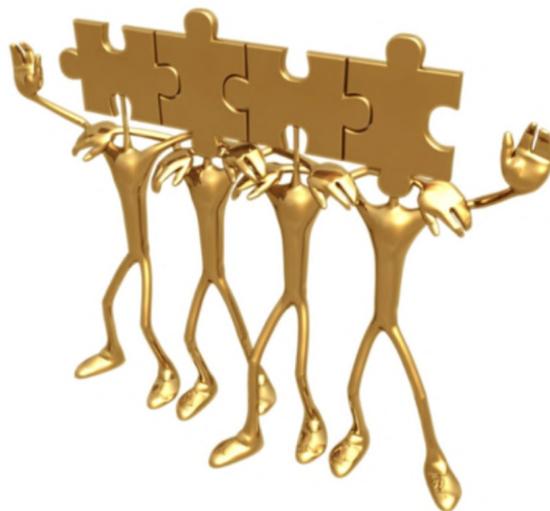
MISTAKE #1

THE USE OF SUBSTANDARD IMAGES

When selecting an image for a course, we need to understand the meaning it conveys – whether it complements the material or is a metaphor of some kind. Everything on the slide should be there for a reason and must work. Does it work on the slide below?

MAIN WORK RULES

- If the duration of the call is less than 10 seconds, such a call is not considered an activity.
- You need to cultivate at least 10 new contacts a day, which means calling and talking to a client.
- Work with trial cases follows the following algorithm:
 - 1) make a call
 - 2) write an email
 - 3) make a repeat call
 - 4) close the case



The image depicts a team (it is a team, right?) which is suggestive of coordinated teamwork or a common idea, while the text is telling us about sales rules. Okay, there's a slight connection between sales rules and a team, but it's too distant, and the image confuses learners rather than illustrates or supports the key idea. So, no, it doesn't work.

✦ HOW TO FIX IT ✦

Try not to add images just because they look great. Use those that make it easier for learners to grasp the topic. Simple, authentic images usually work much better and establish an emotional connection with learners.



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