# Tips for successful online training development

This resource is designed to assist in the development of online training, focusing on selected good design principles that can be applied to any online content development. It is important to note Liquor Control Victoria (LCV) does not prescribe how training providers design RSA training. This guide covers design elements we review when approving applications for online RSA delivery.

## Formatting (font, colour and spacing)

How content is presented can impact readability and the reader's ability to retain key information. Poorly formatted content is not only a potential issue for the average reader but also the estimated [13 million Australians](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/eye-health/eye-health/contents/new?s=) who possess a chronic eye condition. Formatting such as the choice of font, use of bullet points, colour and spacing have a significant impact on the readability of content.

Consider the following when developing training content:

* **Font size** – When users scan text, they rarely read all of it. Larger text tends to get read first. Use heading levels to differentiate between headings and subheadings. For more information on using see The World Wide Web Consortium Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C WAI) tutorial on [headings.](https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/page-structure/headings/)
* **Bullet points** – To make text easier to read we use lists, when order in a list is important use numbers, and when it is not, use bullets. Applying consistent formatting to the list is important. [Australian Government Style Manual](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/lists) provides examples on [how to use lists](https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/structuring-content/lists).
* **Colour** – Many free tools such as [WebAIM](https://webaim.org/resources/contrastchecker/) will check if the colour combinations you have used have sufficient contrast. Be sure to check those colours alongside the font size, as some combinations are acceptable when the font is large enough.

Also consider hyperlinks, especially the colour of the link once clicked, what was easy to read can be impossible to read once the link has been accessed.

A couple of orange square signs

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

* **Reposition less important elements** – If you find that high-contrast text is distracting, try varying the placement of the text on the screen. Often, changing the location or alignment of content, or adding more space around it, is enough to change its prominence on the page.
* **Text density** – Less is more, can the content be simplified, reduced by removing text that isn’t essential or hidden until the learner interacts with the content for example flip cards, accordions or hotspots. If your text is looking cluttered, try increasing the line or paragraph spacing, spacing should be consistent throughout the content.

Good formatting principles are not hard to apply. Once you have developed a template or standard, stick to it and be consistent.

The 3 examples below demonstrate the impacts of formatting on readability even though the content is the same.

**Example 1** – The colour is standard and easy to read, so there are no issues with contrast. However, the text is poorly formatted, with nothing to help the learner differentiate between the heading or body of the text.

**A red circle with a white x in it

Description automatically generated**A close-up of a text

Description automatically generated

**Example 2** – The use of colour is jarring and does nothing to draw attention to anything specific. More importantly the colour combination fails for most [Web Accessibility Content Guidelines](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/) (WCAG) checks. [LearnStudios](https://learnstudios.com.au/wcag-in-elearning/) have a comprehensive list of how to apply WCAG when developing online learning content.

**A red circle with a white x in it

Description automatically generated**A red sign with black text

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**Example 3** – The different text colour and increased font size make the heading stand out. The bullet points help identify the items as a list and the key categories bolded. Even if the learner did not read the content in full, the heading and bolded text alone gives them the 5 key factors that can affect blood alcohol concentration.

**A green check mark in a circle

Description automatically generated**A close-up of a text

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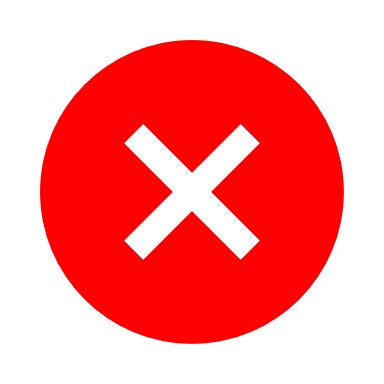
## Images

Photos, infographics, graphs and other graphics are a great way to:

* reinforce information.
* summarise key concepts.
* deliver visual representations of learning elements that would be difficult or impossible to explain via text.

There are some key considerations when using imagery:

* **Make it relevant** – If the image is being use as a filler, leave it out. Images should add value and be relevant to the content being delivered. Ensure that all images have Alt Text, this is a text which describes the image.
* **Ensure the image is of reasonable quality** – With advances in internet access, you don’t have to be as mindful of file size as you used to be. This does not mean you must use very high-resolution images, but you should ensure the images you are using are clear, legible and not oddly cropped.
* **Maintain balance** –There is of course no hard rule dictating the perfect ratio of text and image, however it is usually clear when the balance is off. Try and ensure there is a good mix of text and images in your online materials. As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Specific assets such as mandatory signage can be accessed through the [LCV website](https://vic.gov.au/print-my-liquor-signage).

A close-up of a sign

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## Learner engagement

In the absence of a trainer and other students the content is the only source of engagement for the learner. So, we need to be mindful of the fact that endless reading can really detract from the overall experience and the transfer of learning. Consider how you could use the following to enhance your online learning:

* **Interactivity** – Think about incorporating some interactivity throughout the content so the learner is simply not clicking ‘next’ until getting to the end. Most authoring software provide a range of inbuilt functionality that enable the learner to have meaningful engagement**,** for example a carousel can be a great way to present process steps opposed to using a numbered list.
* **Videos** – Are great for communicating a lot of information in a short amount of time. They can help learners grasp concepts more easily by providing demonstrations in a real-world context so for example skills, behaviours or customer interactions that the learner would otherwise have to interpret through words and/or images.
* **Scenarios** – Use scenarios to test a learner’s knowledge responding to a specific situation. It can be a good mechanism to confirm whether the learning has been understood in a practical circumstance. Feedback should be incorporated when using scenarios so the learner can understand why a particular response was correct or incorrect.
* **Quizzes** – A quizcan be designed using a range of different formats some of the most common include mix and match, multiple choice, fill in the blanks and drag and drop. They provide the learner with the opportunity to track their understanding of the content and test their knowledge retention prior to getting to the formal assessment. Consider using spot quizzes at the end of a topic, after a video or for critical pieces of learning.
* **Simulations** –Typicallyused to replicate real-world processes, systems or interactions to help provide an authentic learning experience.  For instance, it could be a scenario-based simulation where a learner is presented with different outcomes based on each response they provide.

Building engaging learning content isn’t limited to using one or all of the above. Options available to you will also be determined by the authoring tool and learning management system you are using. Despite the tool or platform always try and put yourself in the shoes of the learner and what they will experience and consider what will help obtain the best outcome.

## Quality control

One of the most important but overlooked steps is quality checking the content. You publish the work without reviewing it, only to hear from students and instructors that there are grammatical errors, hyperlinks that don’t work, and incorrect answers throughout the assessment.

Always review your work. Ideally you should have someone else look over the final product, as their fresh eyes will pick up things that you, the author, will miss.

Ask the following questions when reviewing your work:

* **Is the text correct?** Thoroughly proofread all text, captions, and instructions as typos and grammatical errors can undermine the credibility of your course.
* **Is the content accessible?**Consider your audience and those who may have accessibility requirement. Where necessary verify that it adheres to accessibility standards (such as [WCAG](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/)).
* **Does the content match the learning objectives?** Make sure the content is accurate, clear and relevant to the learning objectives.
* **Do the interactive elements work?** Check any quizzes, simulations and videos thoroughly to ensure they function as intended.
* **Does the course flow as intended?** Check the structure and sequencing of the content. Users should be able to intuitively move between sections, modules, and content pages. Verify that buttons, links, and menus are working properly.
* **Are the assessments correct?** Double check the accuracy of the questions, answers, and scoring mechanisms in your quizzes and tests. Ensure that the grading system aligns with the learning objectives.
* **Does the progress tracking work?** The LMS should track the user’s progress, verify that it accurately records completed sections, modules, and assessments. Users should be able to resume where they left off seamlessly.
* **Does the module work on a variety of devices and browsers?** Test the content on various browsers and operating systems to ensure it works for all learners. Check how the content looks on different screen sizes.