Writing to Engage, Not Bore

Why your instructional writing style is boring your learners—and how to fix it.

ELB LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS CAN'T HELP THAT WE WANT TO INFORM. TO BE HELPFUL. TO BE INSTRUCTIVE! IT'S OUR WHOLE PURPOSE.

However, we have to remember that our eLearning courses are **NOT** instructional plans.

Because if we write our courses like we write our plans...

BORING.

That academic, instructional style of writing, slide after slide, is incredibly disengaging for learners. Instead, we need to separate our instructional efforts from our narrative writing. We need to create an engaging experience for the learners.

It's time to stop using "instructional design speak" in our courses! And this eBook is going to show you how.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN SPEAK

A writing style unique to instructional designers in which they detail their instructional plans to the learner instead of using an engaging and conversational writing style that would draw the learner into the experience.

Are you a perpetrator of ID speak?

INTRODUCTION

HERE'S HOW THE EXAMPLES WILL WORK.

For each example, we'll give you a little bit of background info about the course topic and where the learner is in the course.

Below the context you'll see how the example might read if you wrote it in a standard, boring, academic writing style, AKA instructional design speak.

In the right hand column, we'll give several examples of better, more engaging ways to write your content.

EXAMPLE – INTRODUCTIONS / WELCOME PAGES

CONTEXT

The learner is about to start a food service course about basic health and safety in the workplace. This is the first thing they'll read—how can you introduce the learner to the content in an engaging way?

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN SPEAK

"Welcome to this course about basic health and safety in the workplace. Today you will learn the most common procedures you are required to perform in the workplace in order to keep the environment sanitary. Click the forward arrow to begin."

IMPROVED VERSIONS

- *"We've all heard horror stories of worms in salad bars, BandAids in burgers, and worse. Here at Restaurant X, we know we can prevent it with a little common sense and your help. Welcome to your Basic Health and Safety course, where you'll learn that the cleanliness of our environment is a team sport—one we can win."*

- *"Is your workplace safe to eat in? Let's review some environmental sanitary processes."*

- *"Think about the food YOU eat. What are the conditions you'd like it to be prepared in? What can we do to create that environment?"*

- *"If we want to stay in business, we can't make our customers or ourselves sick. There are some basic things we can do. Ready to find out how?"*

EXAMPLE – TRANSITIONAL NARRATIVE

CONTEXT

The previous section introduced the concept of PPE and showed some examples of what typical types of PPE are in the workplace—hard hats, gloves, safety vests, etc. Next, the course will focus specifically on the proper way to wear PPE. How can you write a good transition?

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN SPEAK

"You will now learn about the proper way to effectively wear PPE in the workplace. Select each article of clothing to learn more."

IMPROVED VERSIONS

- *"Now you know the clothes that keep you safe, but do you know how to wear them? There's a right way and a wrong way to wear each piece of personal protective equipment. Explore each item to see if you're surprised by what you find."*

- *"It's time to get ready for work! What PPE should you wear?"*

- *"Learn what clothes are appropriate for the workplace by clicking on each article of clothing."*

- *"Create some interactive activity that is like a paper doll the learner 'dresses up.'"*

- *"Let's go through our safety wardrobe!"*

EXAMPLE – CONTENT WRITING

CONTEXT

The learner is being exposed to content that helps them understand the communication best practice of paraphrasing. The content below is what the stakeholder/SME provided. How would you rewrite it to be engaging?

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN SPEAK

"Restating what you've heard another person say is an important part of the communication process known as paraphrasing. It is important that you repeat back what you've heard using your own words so that the other person knows you've heard them and so that you know you understand the message."

IMPROVED VERSIONS

- *"Have you ever felt you were crystal clear, only to find out later the other person had a completely different understanding of what you said or wanted? Avoid that by using the best practice of paraphrasing—or restating—in your own words, what you heard the other person say. There are two bonuses to this practice. The first is that the other person feels heard. The second is that you can get confirmation you're on the same page."*

- *"Clear communication is in the ear of the listener—what is being said is not necessarily what the other person hears. Paraphrasing is an important tool to confirm understanding. Can you pick the best paraphrasing below to ensure that you're understanding the issue?"*

- *"Paraphrasing is summarizing what you've heard. Using your own words, you demonstrate that you are able to listen to understand, not just respond."*