

COPH ETA Visual Design Guidelines for Online Courses

The purpose of this document is to address the 3.3 Visual Design section of the COPH Minimum Standards. These guidelines attempt to cover topics such as: color, theme, graphics, resolution, navigation, links, fonts and course banner.

[3.3.a] Consistent and professional use of color, theme, graphics, and resolution that reduce distraction to students

Color and Theme

- provide sufficient contrast between background and text color - use light/neutral background colors with dark/black colors for text and bullets is preferred
- avoid patterned backgrounds
- reserve the use of blue with underlining for hyperlinked text only
- limit your text colors – ‘hot’ colors like bright pink and orange are, in general, less professional. Dark colors are preferred
- limit the number of colors on course website – about 2 to 3 colors (not including black and white). You can choose one color to coordinate a color scheme of 2 to 3 colors or tones.
- use a consistent theme throughout course (ex. consistent template design for PowerPoint lecture presentations)

Graphics

- use professional graphics
- use .jpg image format (compressed file format for high quality images - photographs).
- use .gif image format (for graphics files, buttons, and clip art not photographic quality).
- start with a high resolution graphic before altering its size to avoid jeopardizing image quality
- use animation sparingly - use for emphasis or for demonstrations

Resolution

- pages should be formatted for standard screen resolution: 800 (width) by 600 (height). This will minimize scrolling

[3.3.b] Navigation is intuitive and consistent throughout the course

Navigation

- limit number of buttons/links on course menu to 7 (remove unused navigation links on Blackboard course menu)
- avoid buttons which are distracting or have poor contrast between text on button name and button design
- limit navigation to 3 'clicks' (no more than 3 clicks to get to any information)
- limit the need to scroll or provide targeted bookmarks within the page

Links

- label links to reflect associated content (use entire URL for hyperlinks to external websites)
- links to external websites or content opens in a new window

[3.3.c] Font style, contrast and size formatted to enhance readability

Font Size and Style

- minimum 11 pt for body text
- use Sans Serif font (ex. Verdana, Arial, Helvetica)
- limit to 2 fonts
- use bold, highlight, or color for emphasis
- use of underline for links only

Alignment and Proximity

- left alignment for body text
- use of headers
- use of paragraphs
- use whitespace between paragraphs

[3.3.d] Course shell displays unique professional banner

Banner

- banner should include course title and number (department optional)
- banner meets other visual design guidelines for dimensions, colors and graphic:
 - measures no bigger than width-720px height-200px
 - reflects colors and graphics for course material and target audience
 - consistent with navigation of course menu