

Media Selection Guide for Instructional Designers

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Introduction

It is not what you say but how you say it that matters most.

As instructional designers and educators, the methods and media that we use to deliver instruction can be extremely impactful in our ability to achieve learning objectives.

The first section of this guide will relate our media choices to the following questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. The second section explores these questions as they relate to the most common media formats

Who are our learners?

The form of media, as well as the specific learning content, should relate to the preferences of the learners to every extent possible.

The following aspects should be considered:

- Age
- Existing knowledge
- Interest in the subject matter
- Access to media
- Time available for instruction

What are our learning objectives?

The depth and breadth of our learning objectives significantly influence the media formats that will be most effective.

For example:

- The flipped classroom model, where recorded video instruction is viewed before class, has been seen to better prepare students for relevant questions and successful application in class.
- An enthusiastic tone on an audio recording may better engage students in the details of a historical event than reading a textbook.

When will the instruction be delivered?

- If there is a short deadline to build the instruction, media formats that take time to build may be infeasible.
- Every instruction begins with text.
- Images can be added to the text.
- If time allows, a script can be recorded as an audio file.
- If there is more lead time, a presentation can be recorded.
- If there is time and funding, videos can be built, perhaps with interactivity included.

Where will the learning take place?

- Instructor-led classrooms allow for a greater range of instruction media, such as manipulatives, games, group activities, and spontaneous in-person interaction.
- Asynchronous instruction must be self-contained and delivered in advance. It can take the form of any media format, although digital formats will be strongly preferred.

Why are we building this instruction?

The choice of media for instruction should take into consideration how important the material is for the learners.

- Is this their first exposure to a new concept? If so, the media should facilitate a careful explanation with details that can be studied independently.
- If the instruction is remedial, using a combination of different types of media may help reinforce the material through repetition without inducing boredom.

How can we be sure to use the best media?

1. Consider everything you know about your learners.
2. Think about the best way to deliver the learning objectives.
3. Only consider media options that can be developed by the deadline.
4. Customize the media to the predetermined method of delivery.
5. Use the forms of media that will best help you meet the overall objective of the learning.

Media Options



When should TEXT be used?

Who	Any learner who can read can learn independently from text
What	Learning objectives that do not rely on sound or visuals
When	Text is the quickest and easiest form of media to produce
Where	Text can be used in the classroom or delivered digitally
Why	Text is effective but may limit engagement if used alone
How	Nearly every instruction will contain text in some form. However, graphics and interactive elements boost engagement and retention.

When should IMAGERY be used?

Who	Any learner who can see can learn from photos or illustrations
What	Learning objectives that require observation or interpretation
When	Although imagery can be very effective and engaging, locating and obtaining permission to use it can be time-consuming
Where	Imagery can be used in the classroom or delivered digitally
Why	Imagery adds significant interest to text instruction, but used alone, it may not be effective for meeting learning objectives
How	Effective use of imagery boosts engagement and understanding.

When should AUDIO be used?

Who	Any learner who can hear can benefit from audio elements
What	Learning objectives that do not rely on visuals
When	Although it takes more time than text, creating audio elements is not as time-consuming as some other elements
Where	Audio can be used in the classroom or delivered digitally
Why	Audio can be very effective, if and only if, the voiceover is engaging
How	Audio can be used alone or with other elements – it is especially effective for remediation and memorization

When should VIDEO be used?

Who	Any learner can learn from video. but the length should be age-appropriate
What	Any learning objectives can be addressed through video
When	Although it is very popular, video production is very time-consuming and requires specialized skills
Where	Video can be used in the classroom or delivered digitally
Why	Video is typically very engaging
How	If the budget and timeframe allow, video is highly preferred as an instructional medium

When should MANIPULATIVES be used?

Who	Every learner can use manipulatives, although they are usually used in young learners
What	Typically used for math or physics
When	Requires advanced planning and availability
Where	Manipulatives need to be used in-person. They can be used for e-learning if shipped to learners in advance
Why	Very effective for demonstrating spatial concepts
How	Because they need to be physically present, incorporating the use of manipulatives may need to be approved in advance

Summary



There are many considerations to be made when choosing the media for instructional design. The most important among them is the learner. We must understand what they know, their capacity for learning this material, and the method that is most likely to achieve the desired outcome.



Ideally, we would be able to make these choices with the ideal outcome in mind; however, budget, time, and personnel limitations can sometimes make those choices for us.



The best instructional design is the one that uses what we know to deliver content in the most effective way possible.