

Learner Characteristics

Another step in the analysis process is to determine the various characteristics of your learners.

Learner Analysis

Understanding characteristics of our learners helps us make better design decisions. The more we know, the more likely we are to choose instructional strategies that will work for our learners.

If you are able to, the best way to get an understanding of your learners is by interviewing several potential learners. If you are not in a position to interview a few potential learners (either future or previous), then you will need to take your best guess at articulating who you think your learners will be. What you are doing by writing it down is articulating the assumptions you are making about your learners when you are making decision about the design.

Some of the characteristics that you might wish to document are:

- Age
- Gender
- Location
- Language proficiency
- Cultural background
- Education level
- Motivation
- Prior knowledge on the topic
- Technology skills

Creating Personas

Personas are a tool that is commonly used in a variety of different design fields. A persona is a fictitious description of a person. Personas help us empathize with the person. In addition, they help us better understand what assumptions we are making when we make design decisions. For instructional designers, we sometimes use personas as a way to describe who our learners might be. It is often not possible to get all the learner characteristics into one persona, such that you need several.

Creating a persona involves writing a description including the important characteristics of the learner. Sometimes we find an image to accompany the description. The goal is to provide just enough information to ensure that they key characteristics of the learner are covered. Later, when you make your design decisions you can draw upon your personas to help inform the decision.

Persona Example: Jackie



Jackie works full time as a trainer for a non-profit organization that has

about 500 volunteers. She is responsible for onboarding the volunteers.

After work she rushes home to ensure she has time to spend with her kids before they go to bed.

After the kids are asleep she has time dedicated to complete her graduate studies.

Motivation: Jackie needs the masters degree in order to keep her job.

Age: 35

Education: Undergraduate degree in Social Sciences, no formal instructional design training



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