

**Want to Make Strong  
Design Choices?**

**Learn to Fix Bad Ones!**

**Bianca Woods**

Hi everyone. Welcome to Want to Make Strong Design Choices? Learn to Fix Bad Ones. Today we're going to have some fun revamping some designs that just don't work as a way to talk through how we use different design techniques in real life.

Just a side note, I always create resource websites for my presentations, so I'll be giving you the site address at the end of this talk with links to my deck and some additional resources for you to check out.

**The basics of design  
aren't terribly complex**

**So why are they so tricky  
to use in real life?**

The basics of visual design are relatively easy to understand - I've even done talks about them at this conference and others. But even if you understand those basics it can still be tricky to get used to how to apply them in real life. So why is that?



**Because there's not just  
one "right" design**

Because in many real design cases there's not a single right answer: there's tons of very different but equally valid design directions you can go in. And that ambiguity, while awesome for designers, can make it hard for newbies to make design choices they're confident about.



That's why I think working out loud and talking through design choices can be so useful. It gives people insights on what it's like to make good design choices and decide between different good options – understand not just the theory by how it's applied.



**And today is all  
about talking through  
how you can fix  
bad designs**

And to do that today, we'll be fixing designs that just don't work well as is.

While I don't want this to become a design trash talking session, I do think this practice of reworking weaker designs can be positive and useful because it helps you get better at knowing how to fix things when you have a gut feeling something isn't working but aren't sure how to go about making it better.

**We're going to look inside  
L&D AND outside too...**

**...At ANY sort of design that's  
trying to convey information**

And today I wanted to look at ANY design examples that are trying to convey information – not JUST ones from our field. In part, that's because I'm that design nerd who takes pictures of wonky designs so I had a lot of non-L&D examples on hand. But also because there's no reason you can't look for design inspiration and practice everywhere.

## Reminder 1



**There are  
many paths to  
a great design**

I do have a few reminders before we kick this off. First, like I mentioned earlier, there's rarely just one right answer to most design challenges. These are my takes, you could come up with completely different ones and still have a great design.

## Reminder 2



**Critique  
kindly and  
pragmatically**

Second, I think critique is useful, but we need to critique pragmatically – Bad design is sometimes the best design possible given challenging circumstances. When critiquing others, find out more about the context they were working in. When critiquing yourself, acknowledge the challenges and restrictions you had to do your work in.



First up we're going to look at some designs that made some questionable decisions when it came to fonts.



So here's my first example: and yes, this is a real parking lot sign in Orlando, Florida. In the chat, let us all know how does this make you feel about the officialness of this parking.

# Font choices impact how people perceive a design

So obviously font choices are going to impact how people perceive a design. And you want the vibe that people get from your font choices to match the topic of your design and even the brand it may be connected to.

**A business uses this font in their logo.  
What do you think they're selling?**

Baskerville

So let's practice a bit with figuring out that match between font and brand. In the chat, let me know what kind of a business you think would use these four fonts:

- Baskerville
- The Hand
- Magneto



So here's a case where I feel like the match between the business and the font is a bit questionable. And yes, also a real sign.

Now, in the spirit of empathy let's think about the challenges this design has to solve for:

- It's up high on a wall, so it needs to be able to be understood from far away.
- It's along a busy street. People need to get the information they need in just a glance.
- Both these challenges together means too much detail will get lost.



**Image Credits:**

Toronto skyline graphic: [vecteezy.com/free-vector/industrial](https://www.vecteezy.com/free-vector/industrial)  
Fireworks graphics: [vecteezy.com/free-vector/fireworks](https://www.vecteezy.com/free-vector/fireworks)

So here's a rough reproduction of the sign for us to play with. To my eyes the first problem we need to solve is that font. It's Chiller and that "B-movie slasher film" vibe of it doesn't feel all that celebratory. Also, it's not the easiest to read from far away either.

But that's not the only font choice problem. It's also got a few other fonts used on the sign a bit chaotically too.

Toronto skyline vector graphic: <https://www.vecteezy.com/free-vector/industrial> Industrial Vectors by Vecteezy

Fireworks vector graphics: <https://www.vecteezy.com/free-vector/fireworks> Fireworks Vectors by Vecteezy



So here's the sign with one single new font. In this case I went with Komika, which we saw earlier. It's got a vibrant and high energy feeling, making it a great fit for a fireworks business. Also, it's quite easy to read from far away.

Now we need to work on the text colour, because there's a lot of different colours being used here, but not often enough that it feels like a good pattern. I think they were trying to capture the feeling of different firework colours, but you don't really need that with the actual firework graphics there.



To simplify the design I just used three colours for the text. Red for that heading of “fireworks”. It’s a decent attention grabber, so I’m just going to keep it as is. The black text under it works as is too. But I shifted the event names to all blue so the colour isn’t so distracting. And while I was at it I also made them all the same size too.

So that helps, but the layout is still a mess.



For this final version I wanted to rearrange the layout to buy myself more space for the text to get bigger. So rather than use up the whole bottom of the sign with that long Toronto city silhouette and all the corners with the fire works, I clustered them off to one side together. I also trimmed off the sides of the cityscape, because you didn't need all of it to communicate the feeling of a city. That both bought me more room to make the text bigger and also make the cityscape bigger too.

I also dropped off that seal image that had been on the right bottom of the sign. It wasn't readable in the original sign, so I figured it could probably go.

And with that, I had substantially more space for the text. I increased the size of the blue and black text and then lined it up as tidily as possible under the Fireworks heading with a very rough grid.

The end result feels balanced and tidy, which still being very readable and preserving some of the feel of the original sign.

## **Avoiding these design problems**

**Consider how the font matches the project**

**Don't be haphazard with your text size and placement**

So here are your key takeaways for avoiding a design like the original sign in the first place:

First, when picking your fonts think about how their design fits both the project and the organization it's for.

Then, text placement and size shouldn't be haphazard. Using just a few sizes and a grid layout can make everything tidier.



Next up we're going to talk about colour. And one of the joys of presenting at a Canadian conference is I can spell "colour" right"!



So here's a sign from one of my local ServiceOntario locations. I think it's from the last time I had to get my driver's licence renewed and it's one of those signs that tells you what kiosk to go to when you're at the front of the line. The design is simple from a layout perspective, but the shadow on the text and colour choice make it really hard on the eyes.

A rectangular sign with a teal background and white text. The text is centered and reads: "If you're not careful, effects and colour can make a design abrasive".

**If you're not careful,  
effects and colour can  
make a design abrasive**

This sign is a serious cautionary tale about how if you're not careful, effects and colour can make a design abrasive.

**Things that can make a design  
hard on the eyes**

**Complex effects**

This sign demonstrates two things that make a design hard on the eyes. First is complex effects.

**Which is  
easier to  
read  
accurately?**

**Option 1**

**Option 2**

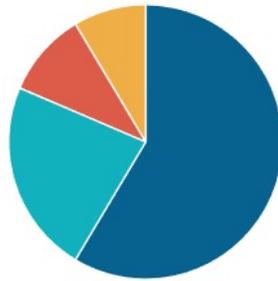
*Option 3*

**Option 4**

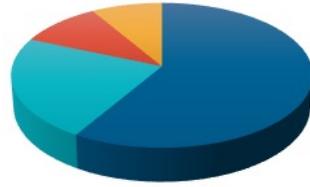
In the chat, let me know which one of these options is the easiest for you to read accurately and quickly.

Every option but for has some sort of shadow or distortion, all of which in this instance interfere to varying degrees with the readability.

**Which is  
easier to  
read  
accurately?**



Option A



Option B

How about these two pie graphs. Which do you think would be easier to closely estimate the percentage each pie piece represents, A or B?

Option B has that 3D effect, which looks kind of cool but the distortion foreshortening it creates makes it harder to get a quick sense of the pie slice sizes.



So the first thing we're going to want to do is take the shadow off that text on the left.



That's easier to read, but let's go one step further. The italics on "Please wait for the next agent" don't add anything and the slight angle isn't helping readability. Let's take that off as well.

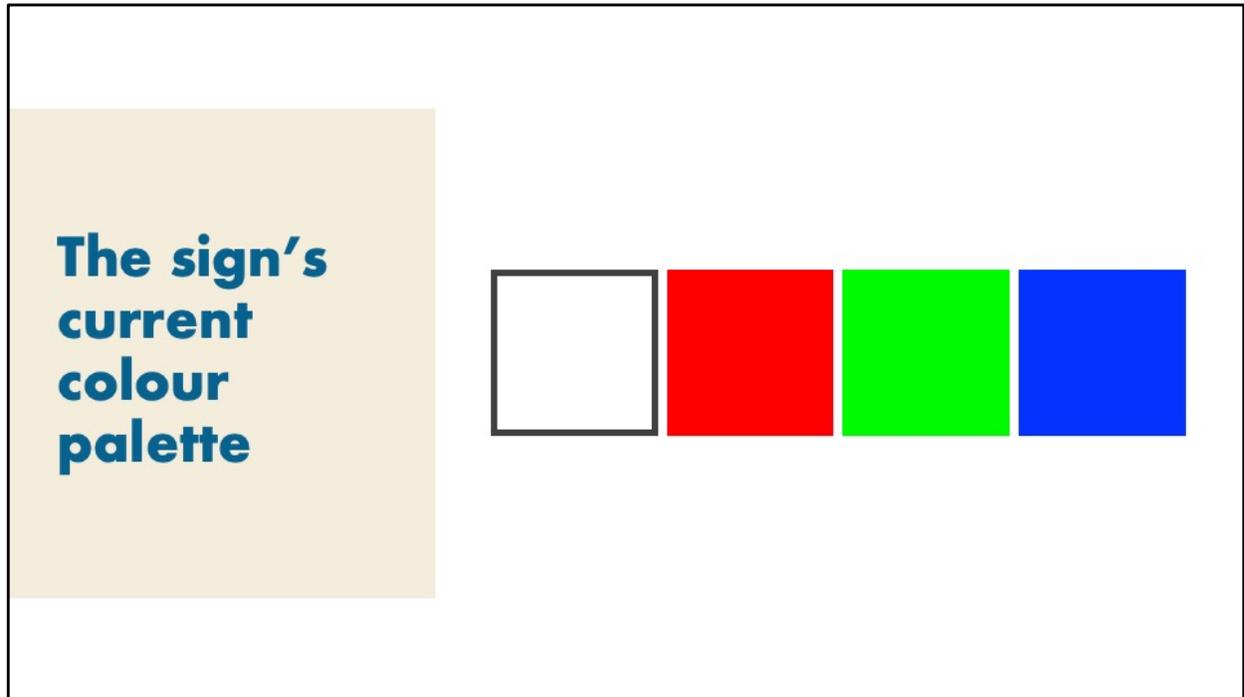


Still not a great design, but it's at least more readable now.

**Things that can make a design  
hard on the eyes**

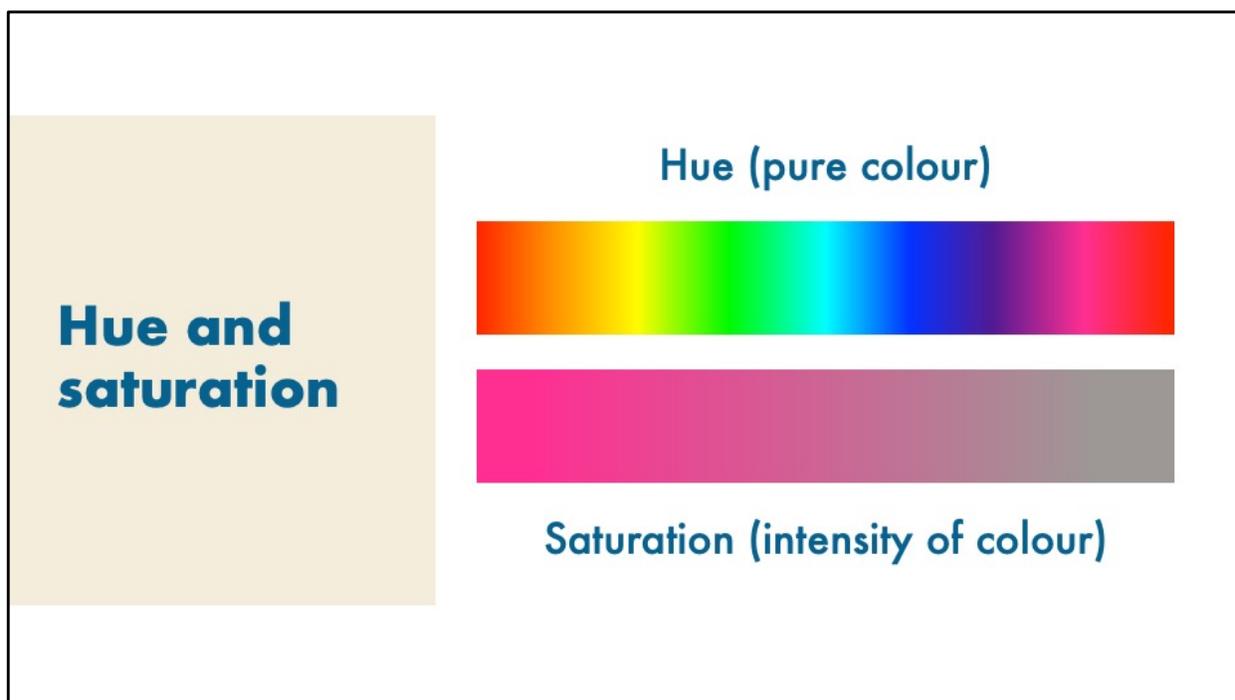
# **Bad colour choices**

Then there's the other aspect of this that's making the design hard on the eyes: the colour choices.



Here's the sign's current colour palette. It's rough to stare at... but why?

Because the three bright colours are high saturation.



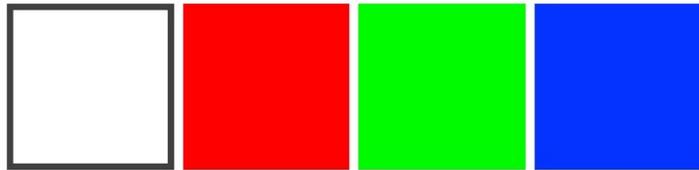
To understand this a little better we're going to need a very fast bit of color theory. The top bar is a bunch of Hues – your underlying base colour.

And the bottom bar is a bunch of saturation levels of a hue. Saturation refers to the intensity of a colour, The more saturated, the more bright or pure they look. And when they're desaturated they look more dulled out, washed out, or grey.

And saturation is great, but a little goes a long way.

<https://modus.medium.com/how-to-not-suck-at-color-b3980ee8084a>

**The sign's  
current  
colour  
palette**



Going back to the original palette, that's a lot of saturated colour all next to each other and all taking up a lot of space. No wonder it's hard on the eyes. So we need to fix that with a less irritating colour palette. But where can we get some colours?

## ServiceOntario

Driver's licences, plate stickers, health cards, birth certificates and other services provided by the Ontario government.

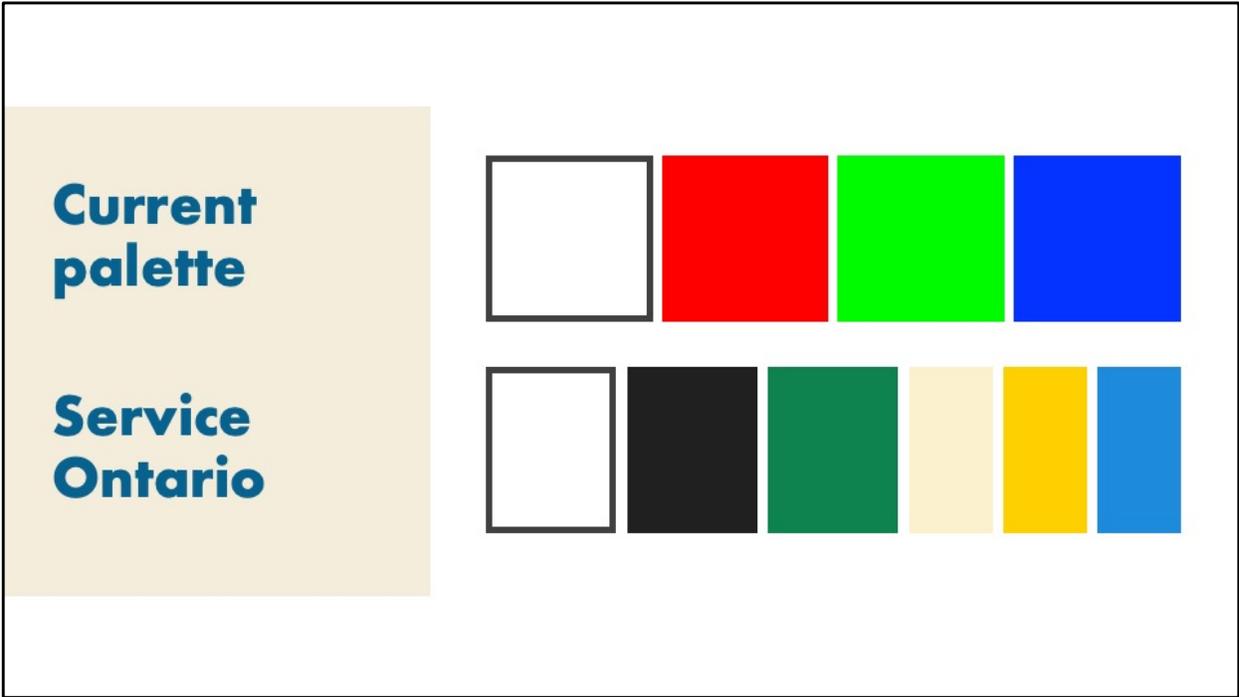
### Service changes due to COVID-19 (coronavirus)

We urge you not to visit ServiceOntario unless absolutely necessary.

Some ServiceOntario locations are closed and others are operating with reduced hours. [Find out which locations are open.](#)

[Learn about the ServiceOntario COVID-19 \(coronavirus\) response.](#)

Lucky for us, ServiceOntario actually has a set of official colours they use. Internally they'd have them in a brand style guide. Externally, though, we can just get a good sense of them from their website.



So if you compare what we have here, the ServiceOntario palette has some excellent main colours and some fun accent ones too. They're not all highly saturated and because they're the organization's colours, they're going to look a LOT more on-brand.



So let's take that old sign and just simply apply some brand colours.

**Please  
wait  
for next  
agent**

**ServiceOntario**

With that it's substantially less jarring to look at AND it's actually on brand. And while this took several minutes to talk through the process, taking off the text shadow and italics and then changing the colours would have taken maybe a minute or two start to finish. Which just goes to show fixing a challenging design doesn't have to take a ton of time.

# ServiceOntario

**Please  
wait  
for next  
agent**

And while we've solved the main problems here, there's always room to continue iterating if you want. For instance, this ServiceOntario location was in a Canadian Tire. It could be handy to have the ServiceOntario logo on the top of the sign instead of the bottom so people who are searching for that section of the building have more signs for it they can see from far away.

And the "Please wait for next agent" part wasn't in the same font as the company logo. It's easy to make this look more harmonious by adding that in.

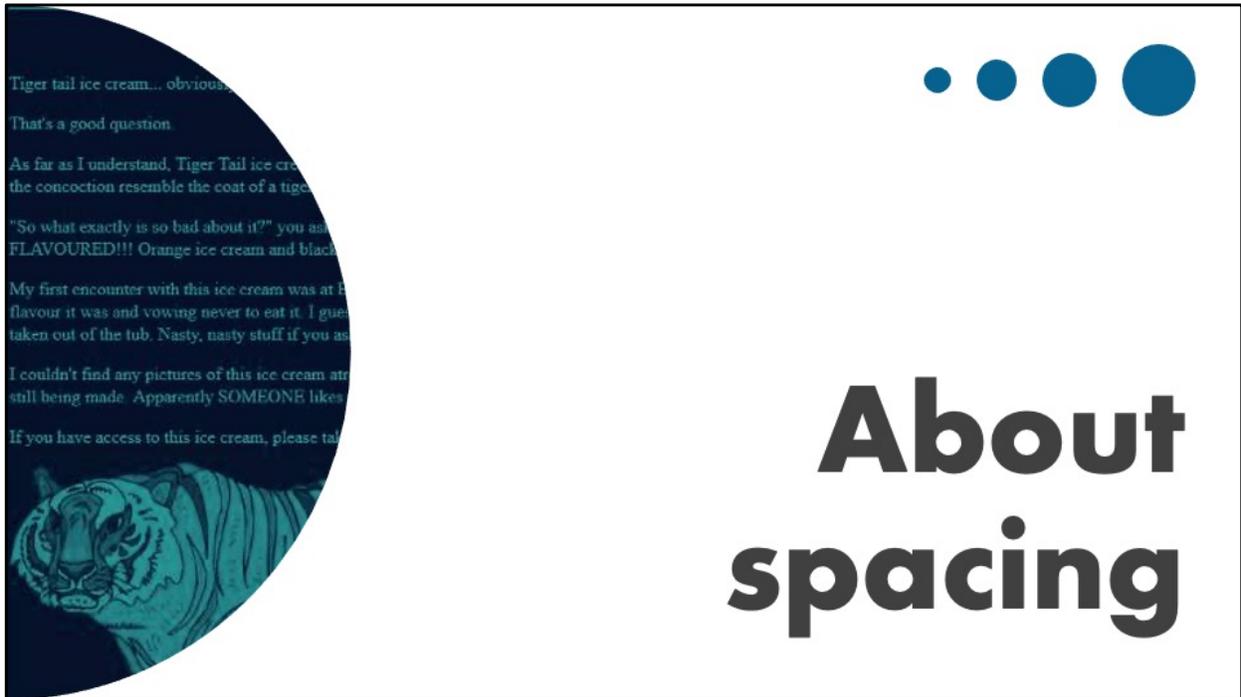
## Avoiding these design problems

Be careful about using distorting effects on important info

A little saturation goes a long way

If there are brand colours, use them!

**Key takeaways to avoid this in the first place:** Keep an eye on if any of the effects you're using on the text distort the clarity. Colour saturation isn't bad, but a little bit of saturation goes a long way. Keep your colour palette simple and on-brand, and if you don't have the company branding document handy websites and marketing materials can be helpful for inspiration.



Tiger tail ice cream... obviously

That's a good question

As far as I understand, Tiger Tail ice cream  
the concoction resemble the coat of a tiger

"So what exactly is so bad about it?" you ask  
FLAVOURED!!! Orange ice cream and black

My first encounter with this ice cream was at B  
flavour it was and vowing never to eat it. I gue  
taken out of the tub. Nasty, nasty stuff if you ask

I couldn't find any pictures of this ice cream at  
still being made. Apparently SOMEONE likes

If you have access to this ice cream, please tal

# About spacing

Now let's shift gears towards making space for the things we want to share in our designs.

## Tiger Tail Torture

Tiger tail ice cream... obviously it's bad, but what exactly is it?

That's a good question

As far as I understand, Tiger Tail ice cream is made up of an orange ice cream or sherbet base with ribbons of black goo that make the concoction resemble the coat of a tiger.

"So what exactly is so bad about it?" you ask. Well, here's the nasty part... that black goo... it's BLACK LICORICE FLAVOURED!!! Orange ice cream and black licorice?! What the hell were people thinking?

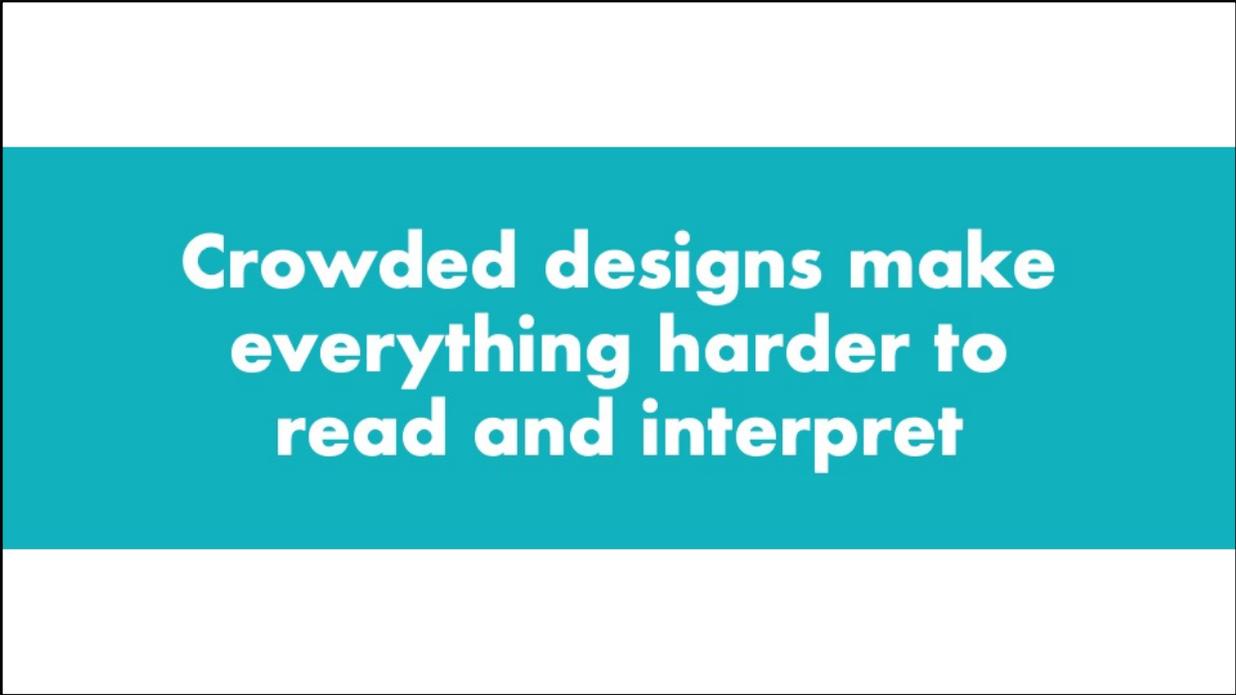
My first encounter with this ice cream was at Baskin Robbins in Toronto, Canada. I remember reading the card that described what flavour it was and vowing never to eat it. I guess other people did the same thing since I never remember seeing even a scoop taken out of the tub. Nasty, nasty stuff if you ask me.

I couldn't find any pictures of this ice cream atrocity on the web, but according to some ice cream distributor's websites the junk's still being made. Apparently SOMEONE likes it.

If you have access to this ice cream, please take a picture of it and send it to the email address below.

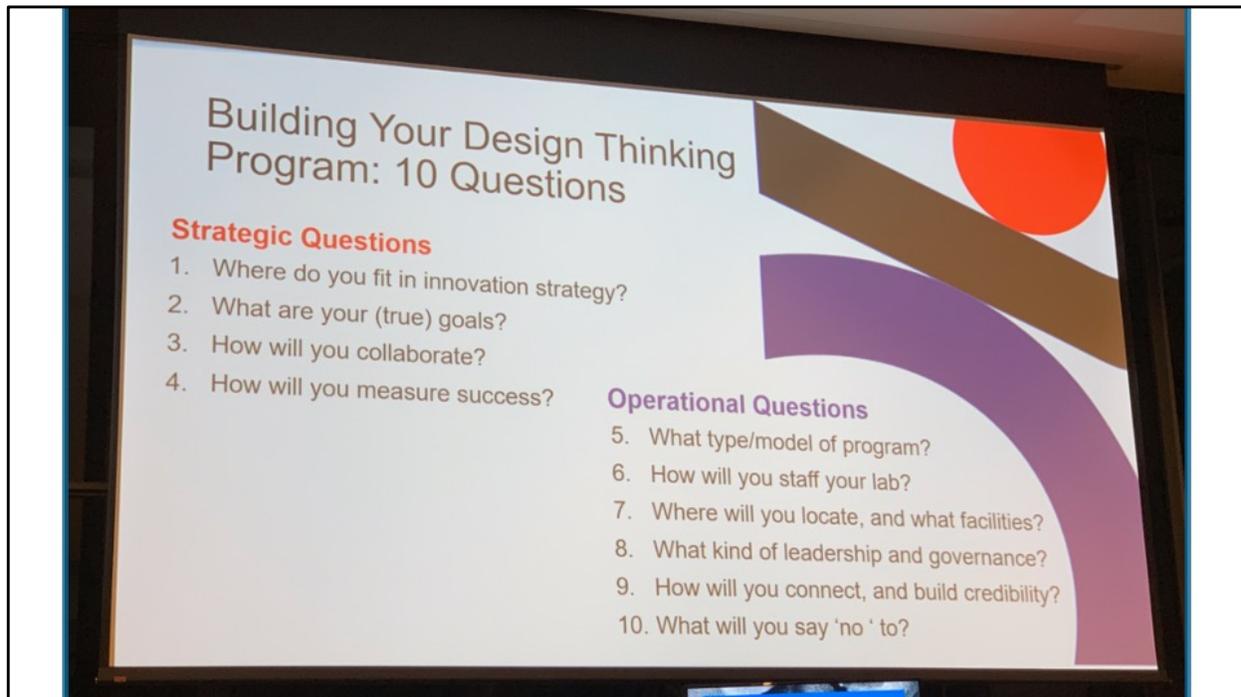


Okay... who here had their own Geocities, Angelfire, or Tripod website in the 90s? Because I sure did! And while I'm glad I was able to capture my lifelong dislike of Tiger Tail ice cream, the design here is a lot less timeless. That lack of space between the text and the edge of the frame? That clip art all squished up against the text at the bottom? All a very 90s website aesthetic.



**Crowded designs make  
everything harder to  
read and interpret**

These crowded designs don't just look a bit odd. The clutter also makes the content a lot harder to ingest too.

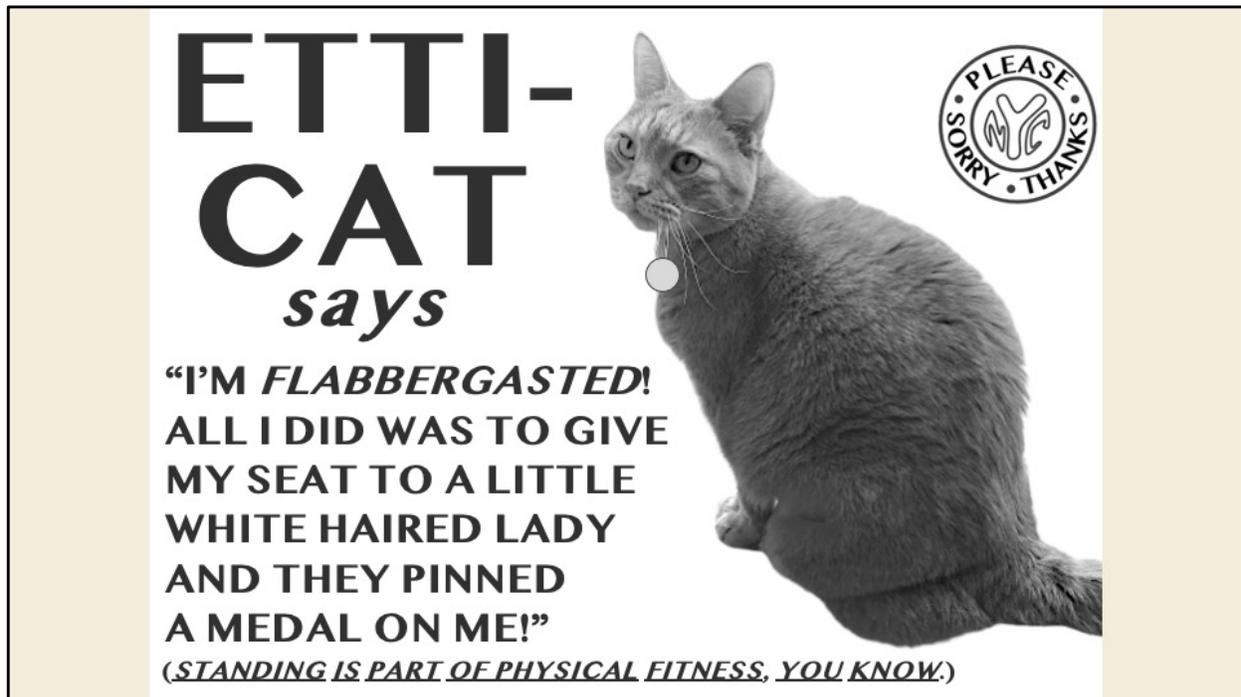


And that 90s website layout is still a thing today. This was a slide I captured at a book launch presentation. While it's definitely better looking than my old website, there's still so much going on on-screen and not remotely enough space in between items.

It's a common design issue, where someone wants to give people as much information on the screen or page that they cut out valuable whitespace – that empty space between design elements – in an effort to fit everything in. But that white space gives the brain a bit of a visual break, and without it designs often look overwhelming and have difficulty communicating their message clearly.



We're going to look at ways to rethink these crowded designs. And for that I have this NYC subway public service announcement from the 60s that I took a picture of at the New York Transit Museum. It's got that squished looking layout like the other layouts we just looked at, but it's also got some awkward text layout issues too that we'll want to fix.



So here's an editable version of that sign, this time starring my cat Spike.

What are the limitations we need to work within here?

- It's a vintage sign, so it needs to be black and white
- It's a subway sign, so it needs to be clear from several steps away and above people's eyeline
- Let's say we can't get rid of any text or change the messaging.

I need more space between things, so I need to think about how to use this space in slightly different ways.

# ETTI- CAT *says*

**“I’M *FLABBERGASTED!*  
ALL I DID WAS TO GIVE  
MY SEAT TO A LITTLE  
WHITE HAIRE*D* LADY  
AND THEY PINNED  
A MEDAL ON ME!”**

*(STANDING IS PART OF PHYSICAL FITNESS, YOU KNOW.)*



First up, the cat took a huge amount of space in the original design, but you don't need the whole cat to get the whole message. I've reworked this so the cat is bigger and bleeds off the side of the layout. You get much of the same feel but with it taking up less space. Then I also combined the tiny reward medal that had been on the cat to the emblem at the top of the screen. Covers two things at once.

**ETTI-  
CAT**  
*says*

**“I’M *FLABBERGASTED!*  
ALL I DID WAS TO GIVE  
MY SEAT TO A LITTLE  
WHITE HAIRE*D* LADY  
AND THEY PINNED  
A MEDAL ON ME!”**

*(STANDING IS PART OF PHYSICAL FITNESS, YOU KNOW)*



Now that I bought myself more space, I can move the text away from the edge and give it some room to breathe.

Now we need to deal with some of the spacing issues

- The pun of “Etti-cat” isn’t as clear when it’s spaced out over two lines”
- Everything is still crunched together
- Not abundantly clear it’s the cat “talking”

# ETTI-CAT

*says*

I'm flabbergasted!  
All I did was to give  
my seat to a little  
white haired lady  
and they pinned  
a medal on me!



*(STANDING IS PART OF PHYSICAL FITNESS, YOU KNOW)*

Here I reworked the text layout to get rid of squishing, odd spacing of the header. I also added a text box for the things the cat was saying to make it clearer at a glance that this was commentary from the cat.

**ETTI-CAT**  
*says*

“ I’m flabbergasted!  
All I did was to give  
my seat to a little  
white haired lady  
and they pinned  
a medal on me! ”



*(STANDING IS PART OF PHYSICAL FITNESS, YOU KNOW)*

But you could also go a bit less comic book-y and use some stylized quotation marks for the same effect. Both work well, but I personally like this approach a bit more given the look and feel of the rest of the design.

Now let’s deal with the little side note at the bottom. It reads like a little bit of snarky commentary, whether it’s from the cat or from someone else, but that’s not abundantly clear from the rather busy design of it. I want a cleaner way to show that than brackets, underlines, and italics all at the same time.

# ETTI-CAT

*says*

“ I’m flabbergasted!  
All I did was to give  
my seat to a little  
white haired lady  
and they pinned  
a medal on me! ”



**STANDING IS PART OF PHYSICAL FITNESS, YOU KNOW**

So here's one approach. I just put the text in a separate black bar, making it reasonably clear it's side commentary, and took off all the additional brackets and formatting that were making it look cluttery.

# ETTI-CAT

*says*

“ I’m flabbergasted!  
All I did was to give  
my seat to a little  
white haired lady  
and they pinned  
a medal on me! ”



“Standing is part of physical fitness, you know”

Although if you wanted to lean into this being something the cat was saying, you could do something a bit fun like this and add in another picture of the cat’s head so it looks like he’s saying that part too. It’s a bit silly, but it fits with the feel of ads from this time.

## Avoiding these design problems

It's okay to let a photo bleed off the screen or page

Leave empty space between things

Think about how words cut across lines

**So how do we avoid THESE problems?** Remember that it's okay to let a photo bleed off the screen/page – in fact, it's often MORE professional looking. Plus it can buy you more space for other things. Next, make sure you're leaving empty whitespace between design elements so they don't compete with each other for people's attention and look overwhelming. Finally, think about how words cut across lines and make sure you're not taking away clarity with a line break.



Now we're going to continue mocking my own work with a deep dive into the worst slide I ever designed.



Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious. Dali's work, which he rendered in a painstakingly realistic style, dealt with distinctly unrealistic subject matter. One of his most famous paintings, The Persistence of Memory, with its melted clocks and stark landscape, is an excellent example of his work.

So this is from one of the slide decks I made my first year teaching art, and I regularly show it as an example that anyone can learn to get better at this stuff. Because this is just a big pile of yikes.

In the chat, what are some of the challenges you see with this design?  
(Mention the complex background, the squished text, the lack of centering, and the overly complicated text.)

**Jokes about terrible  
slides sadly come  
from a place of truth**

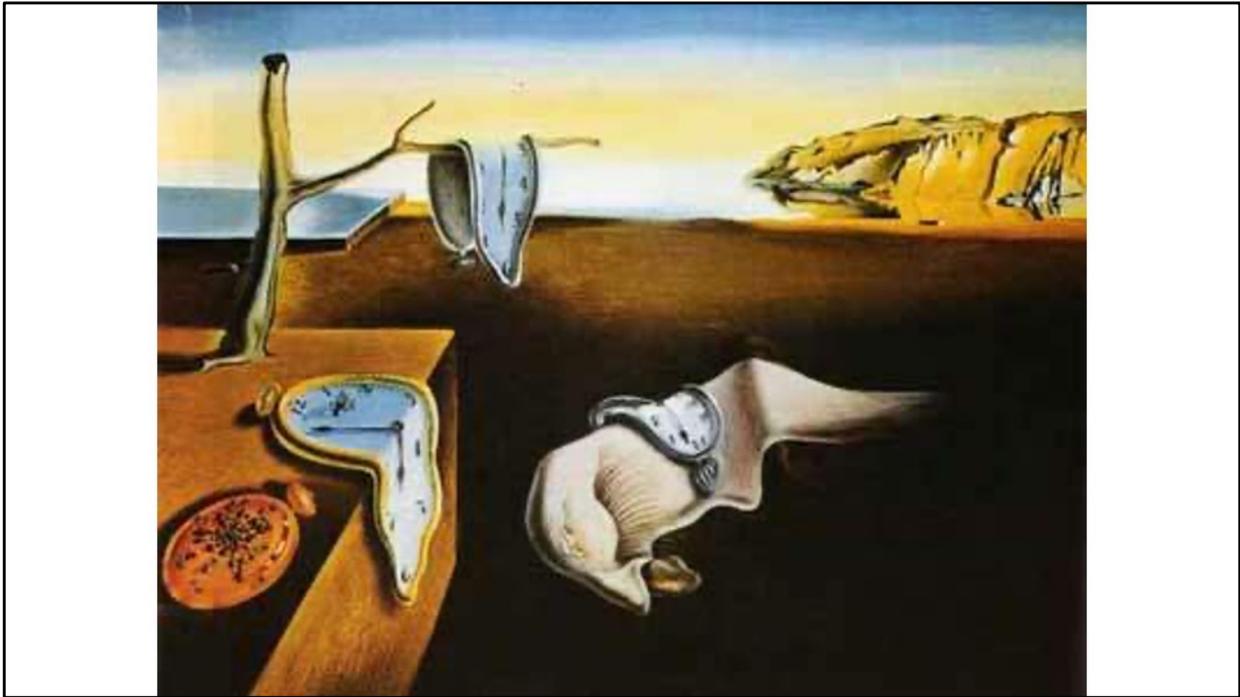
So yeah... this big takeaway here is there's a good reason people make fun of how bad PowerPoint slides can get. And it's not just slides. I've seen eLearning, handouts, signs, and other things in our field that maybe are THIS badly designed but have many of the same problems.

So let's do past me a favour and talk through some options for how I could have fixed this bad slide design.

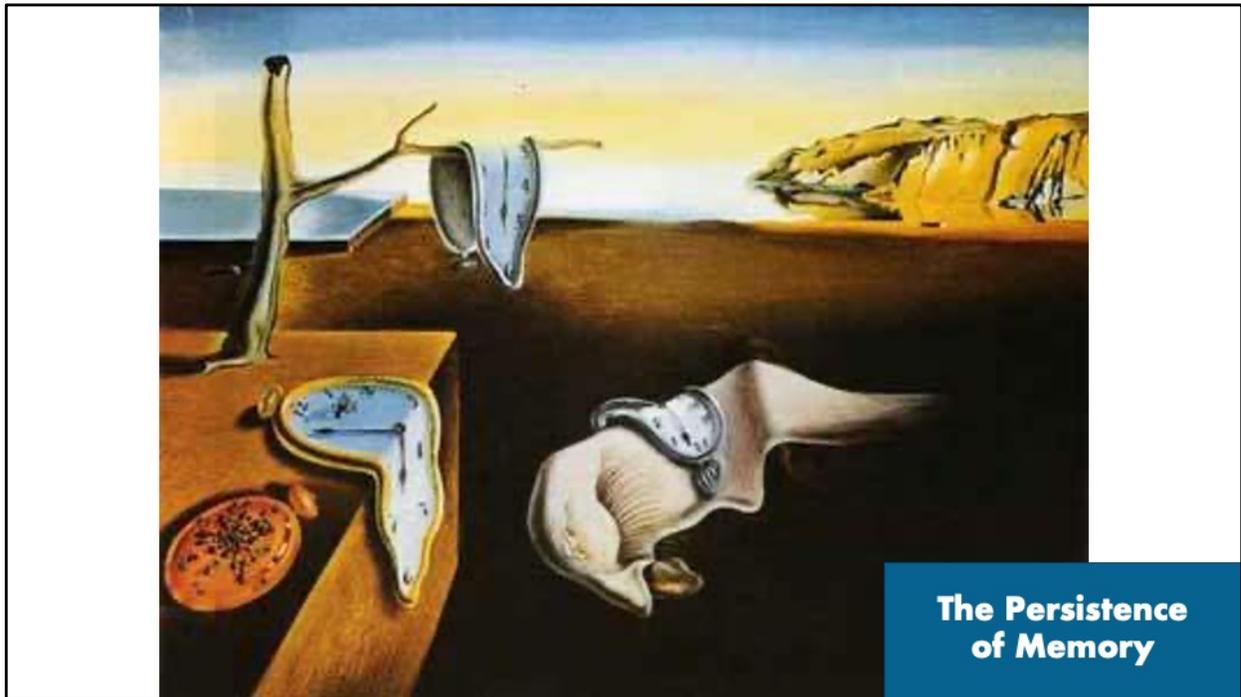


Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious. Dali's work, which he rendered in a painstakingly realistic style, dealt with distinctly unrealistic subject matter. One of his most famous paintings, *The Persistence of Memory*, with its melted clocks and stark landscape, is an excellent example of his work.

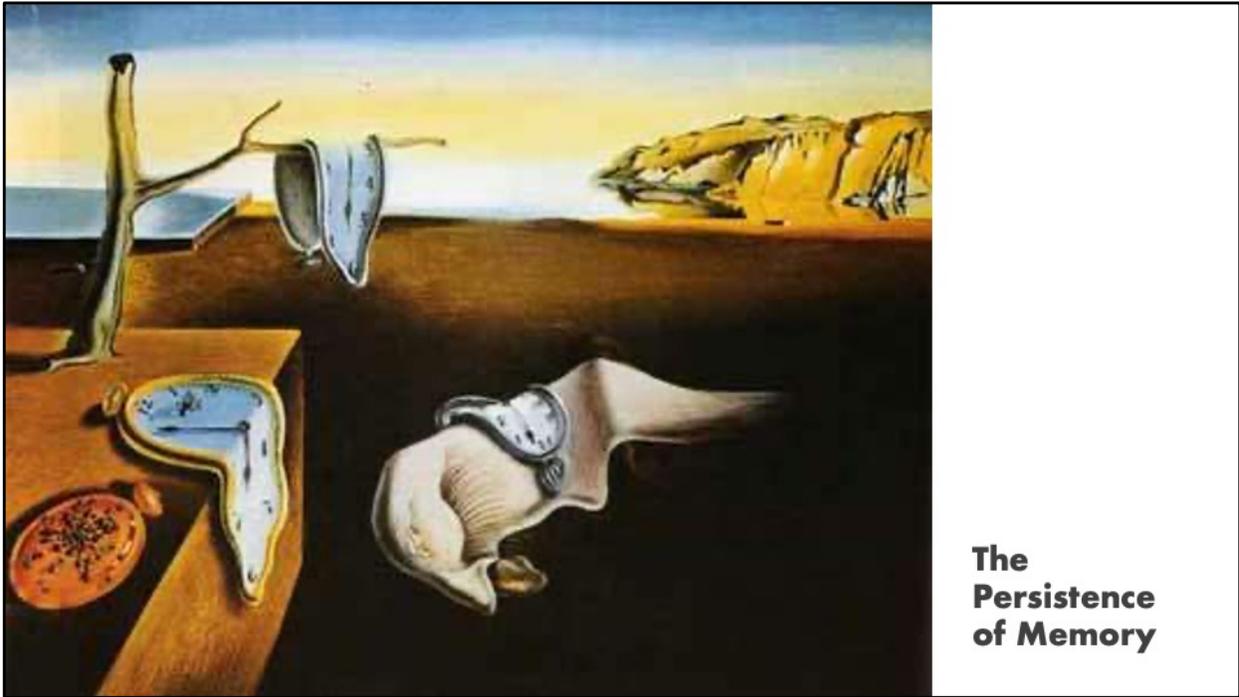
There's loads of different ways we could make this better and they all involve simplifying everything substantially.



If we're continuing to think about this as a slide, the easiest answer is just dropping everything but the image and going as full screen as you can with it. If the image is the focal point for supporting what you're saying, you don't need anything else on-screen for the design to work. In this case, because of the aspect ratio of the original painting it'll look a bit more polished in the original 4:3 size of my old slide deck. In today's more common 16:9 size slides it's a bit less polished looking since I now have those white bars on each side. But if it isn't important to have the full image on screen like it would be with teaching about a painting, then just make the image the size of the screen and crop it.



If you do need a little bit of information on-screen to support what you're saying, add a small card over top of it can work well too. You just want to make sure there's space to add it without covering up anything important in the image. You'll also notice I changed the font to a simpler, easier to read option. Much like with the fireworks sign, if you're conveying important information you want it to be as clear as possible for people.



And if you do have some room, move the image to one side and put the content you need to include in the empty space. It gives some balance to an asymmetrical layout and doesn't get in the way of the image at all. Out of all the slide options for this particular image, this is probably the one I personally like best, but all three options we just looked at work well.



Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious. Dalí's work, which he rendered in a painstakingly realistic style, dealt with distinctly unrealistic subject matter. One of his most famous paintings, *The Persistence of Memory*, with its melted clocks and stark landscape, is an excellent example of his work.

So that's some easy ways to fix this if you're dealing with a slide, but what if this was an eLearning screen or a book page? What if you actually needed to convey all the information currently on-screen in text?



**The  
Persistence  
of Memory**

For that, I'm going to go back to that last version of the slide idea, because it's got flexibility for more text.



## The Persistence of Memory

Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious. Dali's work, which he rendered in a painstakingly realistic style, dealt with distinctly unrealistic subject matter. One of his most famous paintings, The Persistence of Memory, with its melted clocks and stark landscape, is an excellent example of his work

The challenge here is that's a LOT of text.



## The Persistence of Memory

Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious. Dali's work, which he rendered in a painstakingly realistic style, dealt with distinctly unrealistic subject matter.

One of his most famous paintings, The Persistence of Memory, with its melted clocks and stark landscape, is an excellent example of his work.

One option is to make the text smaller. You just have to make sure that “smaller” doesn’t become too small to read comfortably in whatever format you’re displaying that information in.



## **The Persistence of Memory**

Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious. Dali's work, which he rendered in a painstakingly realistic style, dealt with distinctly unrealistic subject matter.

One of his most famous paintings, The Persistence of Memory, with its melted clocks and stark landscape, is an excellent example of his work.

Another option is to make the image smaller to buy yourself more space. This is another option, though, where you'll need to make sure you're not shrinking it so much you're losing important information in the image.



## The Persistence of Memory

Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious. Dali's work, which he rendered in a painstakingly realistic style, dealt with distinctly unrealistic subject matter. One of his most famous paintings, The Persistence of Memory, with its melted clocks and stark landscape, is an excellent example of his work

Or you could also approach this from an instructional design approach instead of only a visual design one. Does everything that's there need to be there? Or can you write this in a shorter way without losing important details?



## The Persistence of Memory

Surrealistic artists of this period were also interested in dreams and the subconscious.

**The Persistence of Memory** is an excellent example of Dalí's combination of a realistic style with distinctly unrealistic subject matter.

This shares the same core information, but with substantially less words. As a result, I didn't need to shrink the font size at all and it still has ample whitespace between design elements so the layout doesn't look overcrowded.

## Avoiding these design problems

A slide can be just an image

Get rid of text that isn't necessary

Instructional design can sometimes solve your visual design challenge

**Let's talk through your key takeaways on this particular design:** First off, it's really okay to keep it super simple and go fullscreen with an image with slides or anything else where there'll be narration. Next, get rid of text that isn't necessary, because that's going to buy you more space for what's important and keep your layout from being cluttered. Finally, in our line of work there's a lot of crossover between our instructional design work and our visual design work, and many times one can help solve a challenge with the other.



For our next challenging design we're going to take a look at the common design challenge of just having way too much text.



In this case we're going to take a look and a slide redesign project I worked on a few years ago. Obviously I've made the company anonymous and changed up the copy so it's not revealing any private information or data, but otherwise this is essentially the slide deck I received.

# INDUSTRY CROWDFUNDING

- One of the fastest growing segments
  - Crowdfunding in our industry is expected to reach **US\$2.6 billion in 2021 and grow by 150% plus in 2022**
- Tremendous traction for industry crowdfunding platforms
  - The top three platforms alone have **raised over US\$700M** for deals and nearly US\$100 million internally for the development of their platforms in 4 years
- Our company is the **first mover in Canada**
  - The Canadian market for our industry is large – Recent research projects \$35 billion worth of transactions for 2021 and 2022 across Canada
  - Canadians prefer investments in our industry but have limited access to them – fitting perfectly with our current investment model

So here's a selection of the slides I needed to rework.

In the chat, take a guess at what sort of issues do you see that you think I had to solve to make this better.

Talk about the challenge of text heavy slides/screens. Mention the lack of narrative. Mention the unnecessary detail in the slide template.

Design challenges to work within:

- Needs to feel on-brand
- Needs to build trust

**Text alone can sometimes  
fall flat. Especially if  
there's a lot of it**

The big visual design dilemma in the original design is that text alone can sometimes fall flat. Especially if there's a lot of it. And that's not just a problem in this deck. It's something I see a lot with designs that are meant to convey information, whether they're in learning and development or in some other area of communication. And that falling flat is a huge barrier to people engaging with what we've created, understanding our messaging, and remembering it later.

So let's break down how to fix some of the individual areas of this deck to talk through how you can fix any text dump content with visual design.

 **Company Name**

**Overview for:**

**Potential Client**

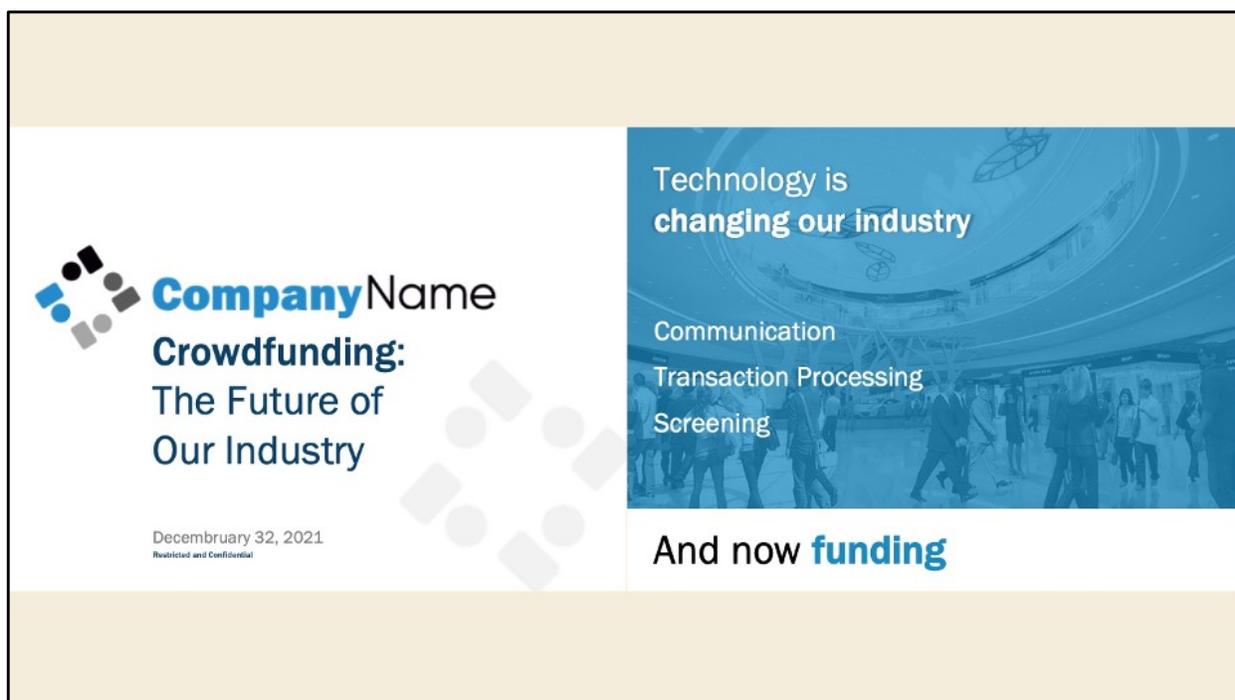
Decembruary 32, 2021

## INDUSTRY CROWDFUNDING

- One of the fastest growing segments
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 **Company Name**

The opening starts with a bunch of text – with isn't the best way to make an emotional impact on an audience.



And here's what the the first part of fixing this deck looked like. This is another case where it's a combination of visual design AND instructional design leads to a better solution. The cover is mostly the same parts, but I made them larger so they'd stand out more. On the instructional design side, I also added a compelling presentation name, which immediately grabs people's attention. And then rather than doing an info dump about crowdfunding on the first slide, I added image-centered slides that helped capture the hook of the presentation.

## What is crowdfunding?

Donation &  
Rewards  
Based

Industry  
Based

## The crowdfunding market is growing

	Globally In 2021	Annual Growth Rate (2021 to 2022)
Global Crowdfunding Market	US\$34 billion	113%
Securities Crowdfunding	US\$28 billion	130%
Our Industry Crowdfunding	US\$2.6 billion	<b>150%</b>

Source: Pancy Official Industry Report, 2021

And I didn't stop with just one slide – I used several to set the stage for the story narrative and had each slide cover just one major story beat. And where possible I used images and also large versions of numbers to really highlight the key takeaways for the audience. Spacing out the information more lets it take up more visual space so it can make more of an impact. And at the same time that space allow each point to have storytelling space too, which is great for communicating information in a moving way.

**BUSINESS MODEL**

Online Investment Platform

Industry Experts as Platform Partners

Invest Alongside Partners

Partners Manage Industry Assets

**Company Name**

**Online** investment platform

**Industry experts** as platform partners

**Invest** alongside partners

**Partners** manage industry assets

Company Name

Here we've got an attempt at a more streamlined slide, but it's still pretty dull because it's just text without a lot of meaning on it's own.

(ANIMATE SLIDE)

And here's my revised slide. I like simple icons so much as a replacement for bullets as a well-chosen icon actually can add clarity at a glance. I was also really lucky in this case because the interconnectedness of how they explained their business model connected really well to their logo, so I was able to organize this graphic in a way that lightly mirrored it. So a little bonus branding reinforcement got to go in there as well and a big thanks to the original logo designer for coming up with something so spot on for the brand for me to play off of later.

The slide is titled "PARTNERS & DEALS" and is divided into two main sections. The "PARTNERS" section on the left features three placeholder boxes labeled "LOGO" in dark blue, medium blue, and green. Below these is a grey box with the text "Additional Partnerships Coming" and a small logo for "CompanyName". The "DEALS" section on the right lists four investment opportunities, each with a small image and text:

Deal Name	Year	Amount
Industry Product 1 Investment	2020	Up to \$200K
Industry Product 2 Investment	2019	\$233K
Industry Product 3 Investment	2021	\$721K
Industry Product 4 Investment	2020	\$620K

The slide also includes a small "9" in the bottom right corner.

In this case there was this one slide trying to do a bunch of work all at once. It made for a busy slide, but it also made for a busy narrative as there was a LOT of information they wanted to share attached to just this one slide.

## Reminder 3



**Slides are  
free!**

So late into this presentation we have our third reminder – slides are free – so are eLearning screens. In a lot of cases when you're working digitally if it doesn't all fit you can add a page, slide, of screen. People often are a lot less sensitive to slide counts than you'd think if it means the information is spread out in a way that's easier for them to ingest.

## PARTNERS & DEALS

PARTNERS

LOGO

LOGO

LOGO

Additional Partnerships Coming

CompanyName

DEALS

	Industry Product 1 Investment 2020 Up to \$200K
	Industry Product 2 Investment 2019 \$233K
	Industry Product 3 Investment 2021 \$721K
	Industry Product 4 Investment 2020 \$600K

## Our industry partners have experience

LOGO

32+

years

LOGO

25+

years

LOGO

17+

years

So what I did with the design first was put the business partner logos on their own slide. So that's cleaner and more focused, but it also left me some design space to add some information in. Because what was important for this narrative wasn't just the partners themselves, but specifically how experienced those partners were. So by buying more design space for the header that gave context and the years the partners had been in business, the visual design was able to reinforce the speaker's point even more.

**Company Name** projects

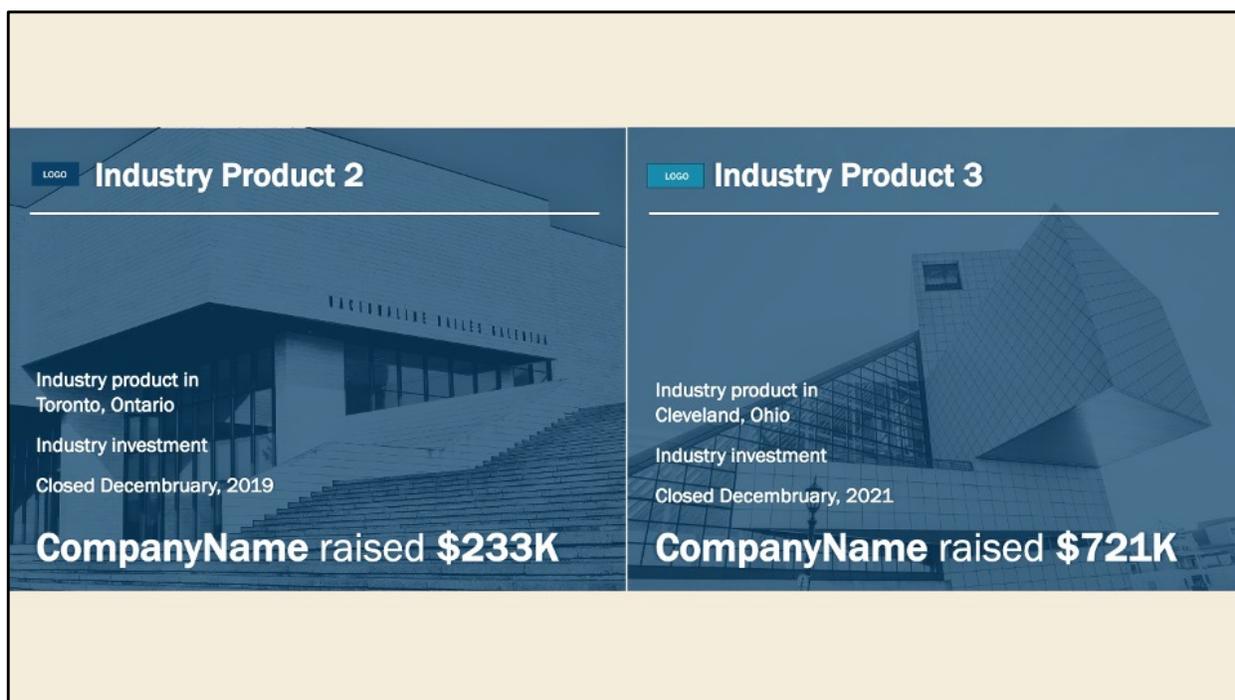
**Industry Product 1**

LOGO

Industry product in Sarasota, Florida  
Industry investment  
Closed Decembruary, 2020

**Company Name raised \$200K**

Then there were the four projects mentioned on that same slide. They were so cramped in the original design, but they were important parts of the speaker’s narrative. So I spread them out over multiple slides to better reflect how much importance they each had. So this is a case where the visual design is again reinforcing what’s most important to the narrative design. And that’s a huge way that visual design can help with learning and communication.



Now I did something a bit tricky with the background here – I used the project images themselves. Using an image as a background can be a design disaster if you’re not careful as it can make the design too busy and hard to read text on top of. But if you’re careful there are ways to make it work.

Now, these aren’t the original photos I used in the real deck – but in the real deck the only project photos I had access to looked wildly different from each other, and not in an easy way to fix. So I just converted them all to black and white and then tinted them with a brand appropriate colour. This made them all match AND it lowered the contrast of the images so they’d look less busy with text on top of them.

And when it came to the text, first I knew I needed the text to be bright so it would stand out, hence making it white. I also made it substantially larger than it had been on the original slide, which also helped a lot with readability.

It’s also not easy to see at first glance, but I also added a dark blue shadow to the text. Yes... the very thing that I pointed out earlier today as something that made the ServiceOntario sign worse. But in this case it serves to enhance the edges of the white text. So instead of distorting it it actually adds to the readability. Which is a good example of how in design something that’s a terrible choice one place can be a great choice in a different circumstance.

The image shows two adjacent presentation slides. The left slide is titled "WHAT DO INVESTORS GET?" and lists six benefits: Exclusive Deal Flow, Pari-Passu Investment with Expert Partners, Invest as Little as \$10,000, Regular Reporting, Regulated Investment Platform, and Sign Up for Free with No Obligations. The right slide is titled "WHAT DO PARTNERS GET?" and lists four benefits: Efficient Source of Capital, One Investor, Not Multiple Individuals, Passive Capital, No Change to Current Business Model, and Lower Cost of Capital. Both slides feature a logo for "Company Name" in the bottom left corner and a small number (4 and 5 respectively) in the bottom right corner. The slides are set against a light beige background with a white central area.

WHAT DO INVESTORS GET?	WHAT DO PARTNERS GET?
Exclusive Deal Flow	Efficient Source of Capital
Pari-Passu Investment with Expert Partners	One Investor, Not Multiple Individuals
Invest as Little as \$10,000	Passive Capital
Regular Reporting	No Change to Current Business Model
Regulated Investment Platform	Lower Cost of Capital
Sign Up for Free with No Obligations	

But good visual design isn't just about spreading things out. It's also about knowing when to bring them together. In this case there were two sides where the content was actually connected. But it was hard to compare the two when they were spaced across two slides.

What does **NexusCrowd** offer you?

Partners	Investors
Efficient Source of Capital	Exclusive Deal Flow
One Investor	Invest with Expert Partners
Passive Capital	Invest as Little as \$10,000
Lower Cost of Capital	Regular Reporting
	Regulated Investment Platform

By combining the 2 slides into 1, the visual design was actually able to better reinforce the connection and speak to two related audiences at the same time. Sometimes if you're comparing things or trying to talk about things as a whole putting them together in your design makes a more powerful statement.

## COMPANYNAME TEAM

<p><b>Jimberly Jims - Founder</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lorem ipsum deler sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin congue odio interdum nibh dapibus. at dignissim ipsum luctus.</li> <li>- Interdum et malesuada fames ac ante ipsum primis in faucibus.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Glenda Glenns - Co-Founder</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nulla rutrum finibus pulvinar. Donec dapibus quam et porttitor pellentesque. Donec elementum nisi in gravida.</li> <li>- Mauris volutpat eleifend dui, consectetur laoreet neque venenatis sed. Nam dignissim vestibulum turpis sed aliquet. Vivamus pretium nec tortor id consectetur.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Spikerton Spikes - Advisor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nam hendrerit mauris quam, vitae mollis velit facilisis eget. Phasellus in sem justo.</li> <li>- Praesent eu maximus est, nec facilisis quam. Maecenas vitae massa augue.</li> <li>- Maecenas nec pretium mi. Vestibulum laoreet mauris eget augue pulvinar faucibus.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Kana Kans - Advisor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Phasellus ex magna, placerat vitae nulla nec, fringilla sagittis ante.</li> <li>- Mauris auctor nunc eu augue tempus, nec elementum lectus dignissim. Pellentesque nisi mauris, porta eu gravida et, gravida at eros. Orci varius natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Owen Owens - Advisor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Curabitur ac mi erat. Quisque sit amet pretium arcu. Sed arcu orci, egestas ut ornare vitae, molestie semper.</li> <li>- Ut gravida leo sed mauris varius, in auctor nunc sodales. Curabitur metus orci, acurmean sed arcu et, vehicula mattis lorem.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Stevie Stevens - Advisor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nulla malesuada cursus velit malesuada vestibulum. Donec convallis in lorem at elementum. Mauris varius justo ex, vitae auctor diam uttricies nec.</li> <li>- Mauris sit amet semper orci. Curabitur vulputate pulvinar augue, non ornare neque efficitur at. Vestibulum sit amet tellus iorem.</li> </ul>

CompanyName

## The **CompanyName** team

**Jimberly Jims**  
Founder

**Glenda Glenns**  
Co-Founder,  
Chairman of the Board

**Spikerton Spikes**  
Advisor

**Kana Kans**  
Advisor

Finally, there was this slide about the company team. It’s a total info dump and doesn’t give you much connection to the team members at all. I wanted the people viewing this deck to have more of an emotional connection with the people they were potentially investing their money with than this slide gave them.

(ANIMATE SLIDE)

So I instead ditched the text content about each person and used photos instead – and yes, I did also get to benefit from being told there were two people I could leave off the new slide, but this approach would have worked even with all six of the original people too.

There are better ways of sharing that background history on each team member, whether it’s in the speaker’s notes or in an additional handout. Also, this design needed to build trust, so having people’s real faces right there had the potential to make more of an immediate impact on the audience. It also organized the content visually better than a wall of text – you could tell there were 4 team members with the photos way faster than with text alone – and it was also way less overwhelming too.

## Avoiding these design problems

Kick things off with impact

Icons can help visually organize your information

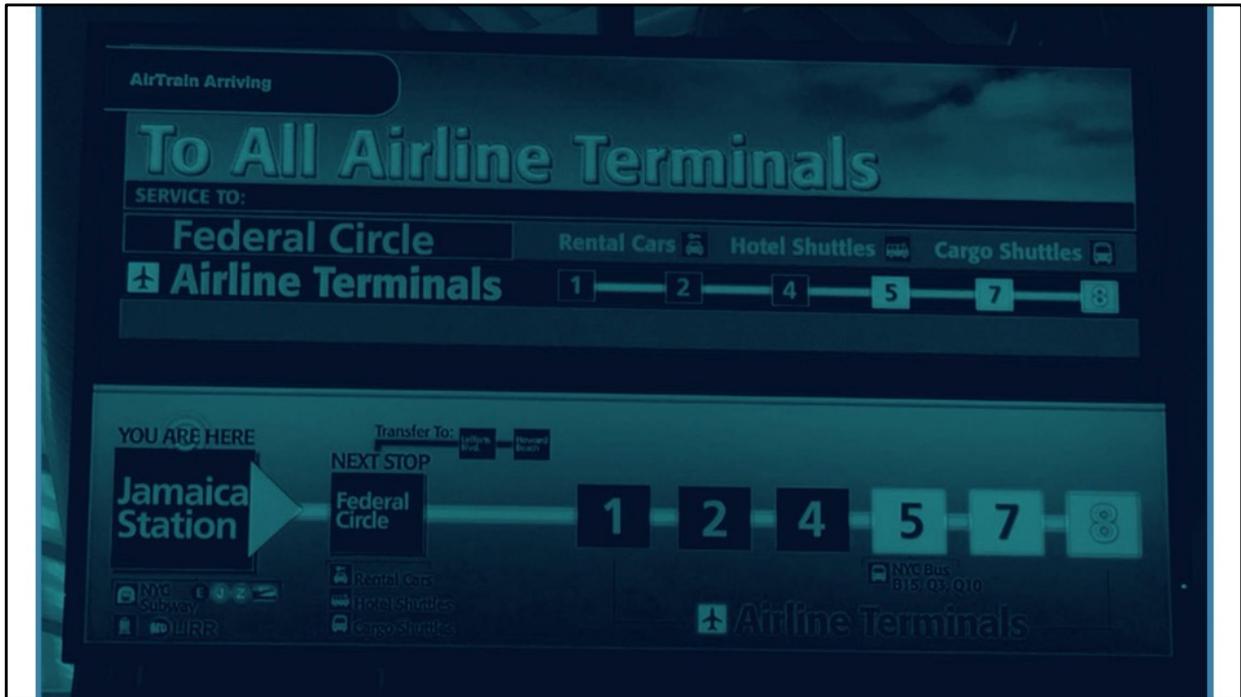
Separate or condense your design according to your narrative

Images can help with connection

**So let's talk about our key takeaways to avoid this in the first place:** First, never underestimate making a good first impression with your design. That beginning is the opportunity to hook people, both from a visual perspective and a narrative one. Next, if you're looking for an alternative to bullets, icons can help visually organize your information. Then, make sure you're separating or condensing your design according to the narrative you want to reinforce. Finally, images can add clarity and even emotional connection with your subject, so use them strategically, especially when your visual design needs to change people's minds or build trust.



Last but not least is a sign that for years was the bane of my existence.



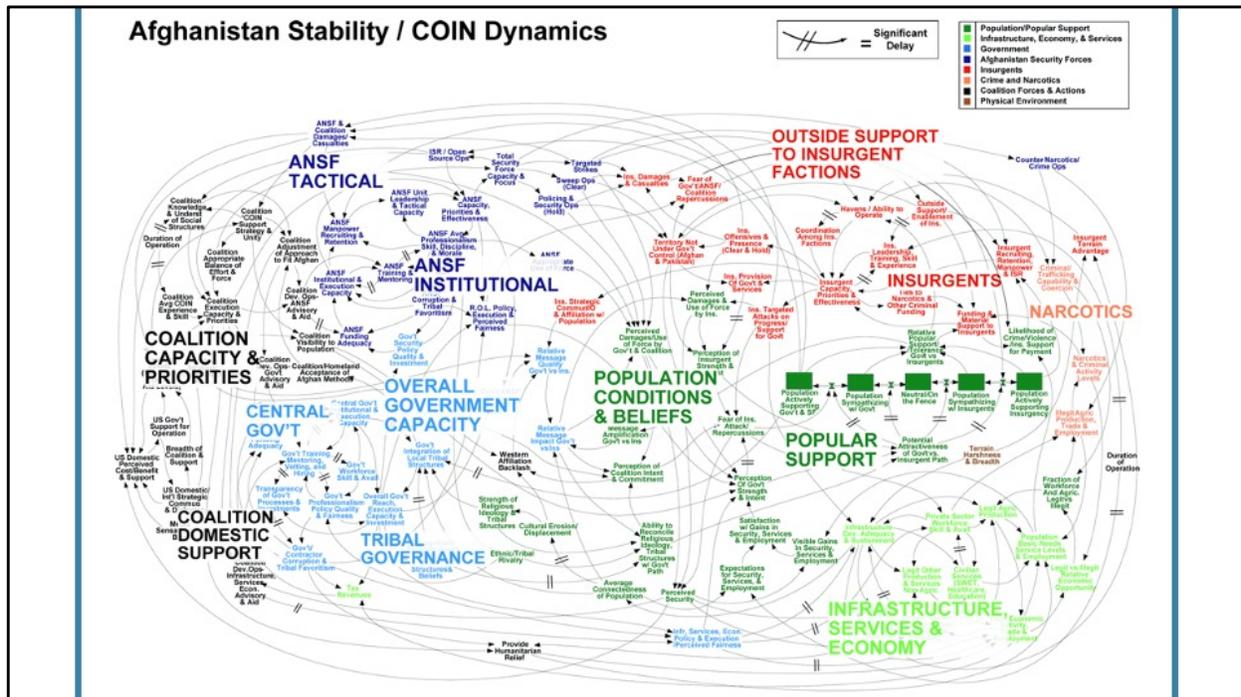
So the AirTran is a little people mover train system at JFK airport that travelers use to get to the different terminals, but also a bunch of other connection points to public transit, commuter trains, hotel shuttles, and and the car rentals. And this is a sign they had up on the displays at each AirTran stop. Essentially it's in the moment performance support.

There's just way too much going on here. You've got the busy background, repeated information, super bright colours, all sorts of different text sizes. It's a lot to take in and parse even when you're calm and you've got time. But how often is travel calm? In the chat, tell me some really common ways travel can go a bit sideways.

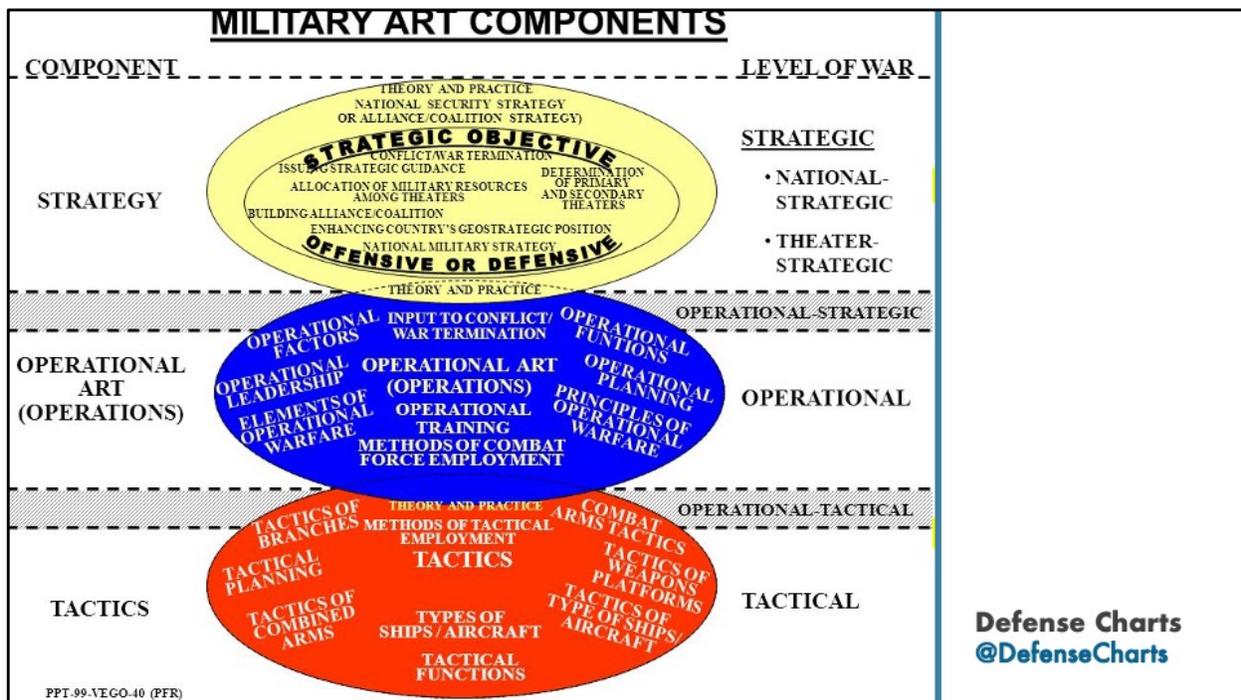
So imagine a logical stressful case where someone needs to use this sign. They've never flown through JFK before. They're late for where they need to be because of other delays in their travel. They're also hungry because they couldn't get anything decent to eat while they were traveling and they're tired too. The train JUST arrived and they've only got a minute to get the info they need from this sign before they hop on. Oh yeah... and there's more than one train so if they get on the wrong one it might not take them where they need to go.

So obviously part of the design challenge here is communicating directional information on a sign that's above eye level. But another part of that design challenge is knowing a decent portion of the people using your sign are going to be stressed out while doing it.

And unfortunately the complexity of this sign adds to confusion, especially in times of stress, rather than solves it.



But it's not just terrible signs at airports. Some of you might remember this infamous US government PPT slide that was supposed to explain the situation in Afghanistan.

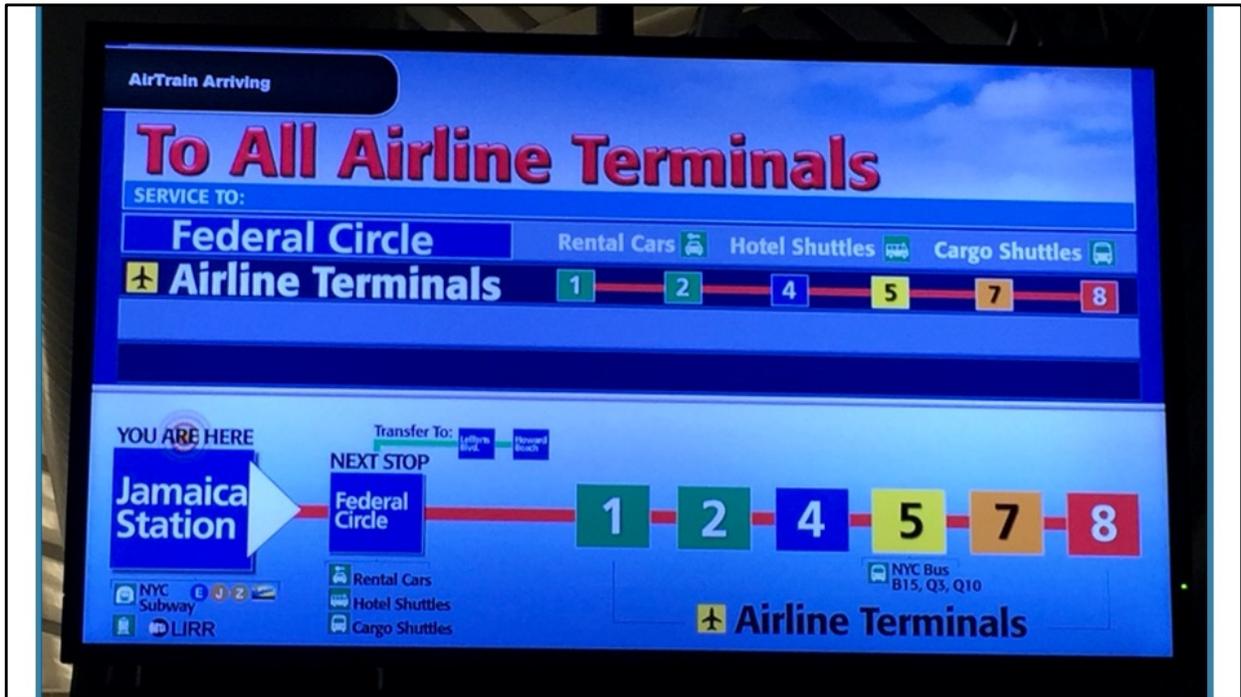


Military slides have such a bad rap that there's a whole Twitter account that curates particularly awful ones. And while these are especially awful, there are loads of other examples of designs in presentations, eLearning, performance support, and more that makes things way worse than way better.



**There's a finite amount  
of info someone can  
take in at once**

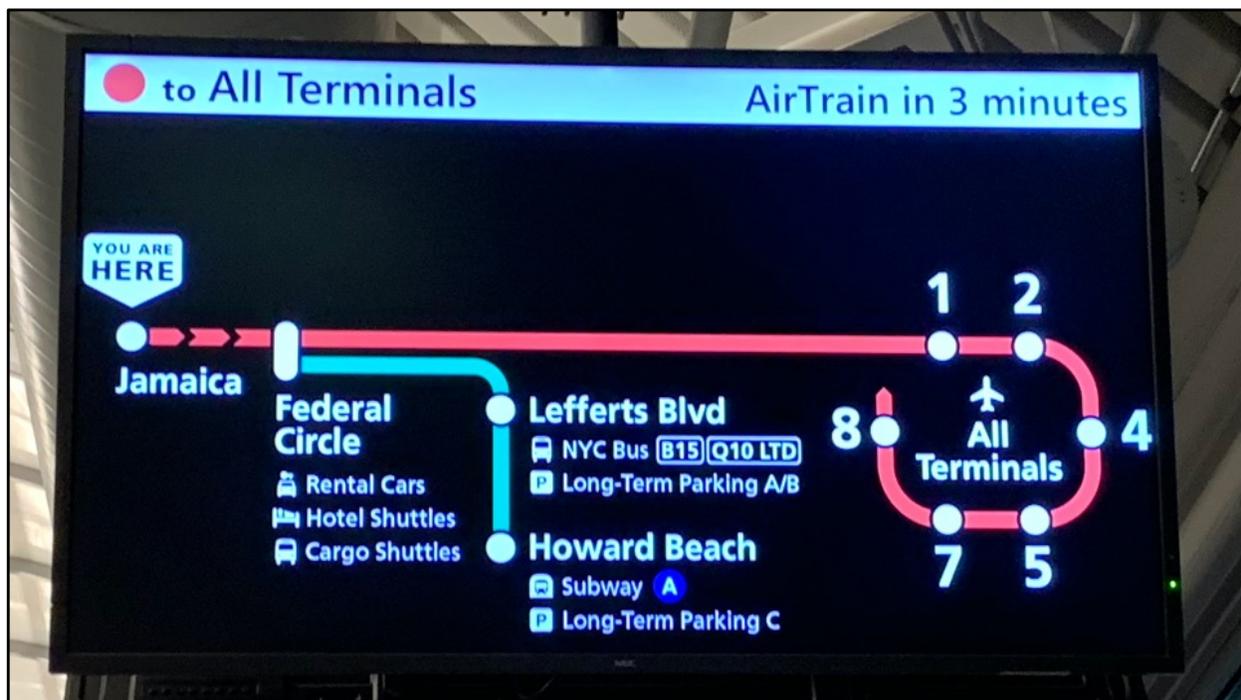
The challenge is in all cases there's really a finite amount of info someone can take in all at once. So you need to be really picky about how much you're trying to share at once.



So let's go back to the sign. Now, for years every time I traveled through JFK I saw this sign and while waiting for the train I'd ponder all the different ways I'd redesign it. I even spun up the beginnings of a PPT version of it so I could play with ideas and write a blog post about it. So imagine my surprise when I traveled to New York in September 2019 and saw this...



Yup. They beat me to the punch with an all new design!



And there's so much that's better about this.

- Removing the complex background makes it easier to read at all times of the day.
- Getting rid of the doubled map reduced the confusion of trying to figure out which one you needed to pay attention to.
- Not using too many sizes of text helps everything look tidier.
- The old version didn't show the loop at the airport terminals, which seems like a really important piece of information to have left off. This adds it in.
- It's also so much clearer about there being another line that goes to some different stops.

So hooray for JFK airport for doing the redesign work here for me!

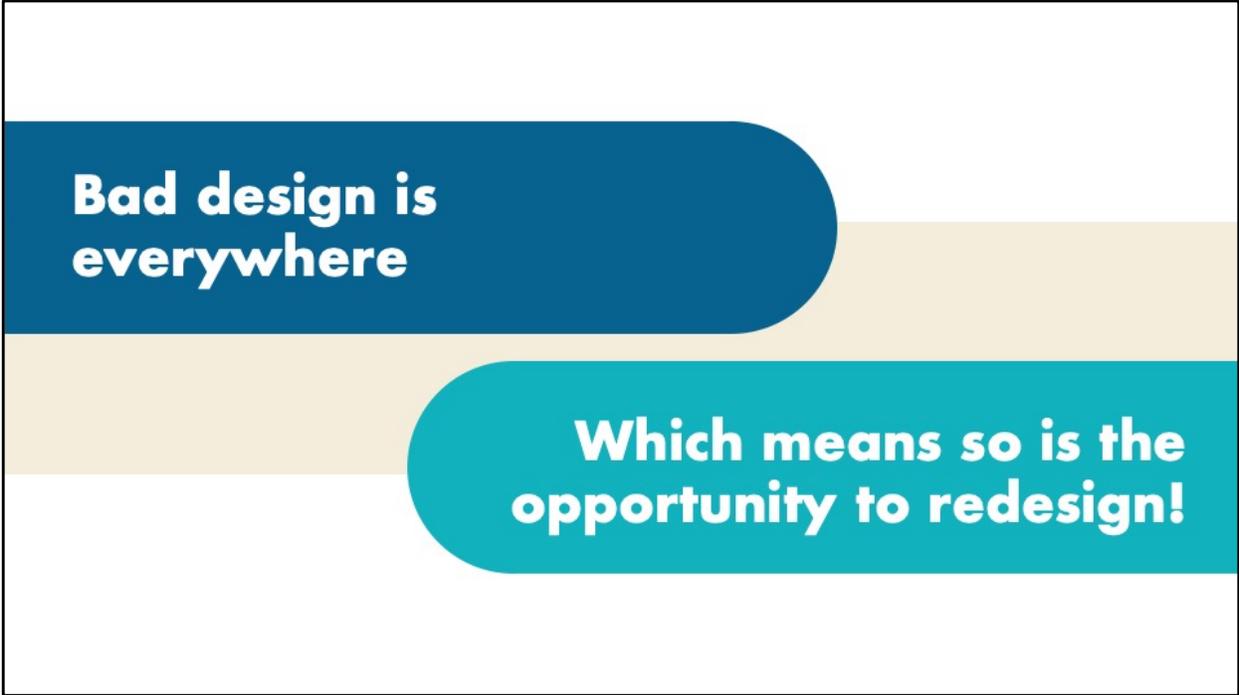
## Avoiding these design problems

Avoid unneeded repetition

Use the minimum detail you need to convey info

Consider the worst case scenario someone will use your design in

**So here are our final key takeaways to avoid this in the first place:** First off, avoid repetition where not needed. There are some circumstances where it can be helpful, but usually it's just clutter. Second, think about ways to use the minimum detail needed to convey your information effectively. Finally, people don't interact with your design in a bubble, so always think about the logical worst case your audience will need this in. It might really change your visual design choices.



**Bad design is everywhere**

**Which means so is the opportunity to redesign!**

So to wrap this up, bad design is everywhere. But that's not necessarily a bad thing, because it does mean the opportunity to practice redesigning is too, even if it's just in your imagination. If you see something that strikes you as a bit off, ponder ways you could fix it. Even if you can only get it a little bit better at first, that practice helps you build your design skills.

## Contact me



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**[biancawoods.weebly.com/strong-design-choices.html](http://biancawoods.weebly.com/strong-design-choices.html)**

Now, as promised, here's a link to the resources site I put together for this presentation. It's got links to all the resources I talked about today, plus a few more I thought you'd like. As an added bonus, it also has a copy of this slide deck along with my presenter notes.

You've also got my Twitter handle and personal email address here as well. I'm a total dork about all things design, so if you want to chat further about it, feel free to contact me at either of those places.

Now, before we finish up, do we have any questions?