Who is digital accessibility important for?

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Introduction

Hello, I'm Susi Miller from eLaHub and I'm going to be taking you through some of the key things you need to know about digital accessibility and specifically accessible eLearning. In this video I'm going to be answering the question: Who is digital accessibility important for?

This is a crucial question to answer, because without an understanding of the types of impairments you need to think about, I believe it is almost impossible to really understand how to design in an accessible way.

When I started trying to create accessible eLearning resources, for example, I tended to focus on the changes I needed to make in order to help learners with visual impairments.

This was because I had first-hand experience of working with a learner who had a visual impairment.

I had a vague understanding of the other types of impairments I needed to consider, but I didn't really know enough about them to understand why I was being told I needed to do certain things to make my eLearning accessible, and I found this really frustrating.

So I believe that by finding out more about the impairments we need to accommodate it can really help us to become better designers of accessible eLearning.

Another thing which has really helped me is understanding that as well as helping people with permanent impairments, making eLearning accessible also helps anyone with a temporary or situational impairment.

When we come to take a look at some examples in this video, I hope this helps you to understand, like it did for me, why inclusive design really is better design for all of our learners.

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Types of impairments

We'll begin by having a look at the four main categories of impairment. The first is, vision and the second is, hearing. The third category is motor and it's important to realise, from a digital accessibility point of view, when we are thinking about motor impairments, we are considering users who cannot use a mouse and so navigate using a keyboard. Our final category is cognitive.

Before I give you some examples of each of the different types of impairments, I'd like you to pause the video and see how many you can think of for each of them.

1. Permanent impairments

So here is my, definitely non exhaustive, list of examples. For vision we have

- Blindness
- Colour blindness
- Glaucoma
- Albinism

For hearing we have

- Deafness
- Hearing loss
- Acoustic trauma
- Auditory processing disorder

For mobility and once again a reminder that this refers to learners who can't use a mouse – we have:

- Loss or damage of limbs
- Arthritis
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Tremors
- Repetitive Strain Injury
- Parkinson's

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Finally, for cognitive you'll notice that I've called the category cognitive differences rather than impairments. This is because the category includes examples such as dyslexia and autism which would often be thought of as cognitive impairments, but also includes examples such as anxiety and bi-polar disorder which would be considered mental health issues.

You'll notice that at the bottom of the list I've also included second language learners. This is not in any way intended to undermine these learners, some of who may well be fluent in the second language, but is just a reminder of the fact that, in the global community in which we operate, some of our learners will definitely have accessibility requirements based on the fact that English is not their first language. The good news is that all the accommodations we make for users with cognitive impairments will also benefit these learners.

I hope that some of the examples that you thought of were included in this list and that you agree this was useful. Although we definitely need to focus on how we can cater for impairments, and not the impairments themselves, I have definitely found it beneficial to have some examples of the type of permanent impairments I need to think about when creating accessible eLearning.

In addition to permanent impairments, however, there are two other categories of impairment we need to be aware of. The first is Temporary impairments.

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2. Temporary impairments

Temporary impairments are considered to be any impairments which last for less than six months. They are circumstances or situations which could happen to any one of us at any time. The picture in this slide, which shows an injured hand wrapped in a bandage gives a good example of a temporary motor impairment. Now pause the video and see if you can think of any other examples of temporary impairments before we move on.

The other examples I have are:

- Visual impairment due to eye laser surgery
- Hearing impairment due a head cold.
- Cognitive impairment due to flu.

But there are many, many others.

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3. Situational impairments

The second category we need to be aware of is situational impairments. These are also known as environmental impairments, and just like temporary impairments can affect any one of us at any time. Again, the picture in this slide shows an example of a learner experiencing a motor impairment. This time the impairment it is not due to an injury, but simply because the man is holding a sleeping toddler in one arm while using a laptop with his other. Now pause the video and try and think of some more examples of situational impairments before we move on.

The other examples I have are:

- For vision, - trying to use a tablet or laptop in bright sunshine

- For hearing - trying to listen to audio on a train without headphones

- And for cognitive – trying to concentrate on an eLearning module in a noisy open plan office.

So, the take away point about both temporary and situational impairments is that they could happen to anyone, at any time.

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Disability or accessibility requirement?

Before we finish, I'd like you to think about your own situation. What would you answer if you were asked the question 'Do you consider yourself to have a disability?'

I would certainly answer 'No'. But if we rephrase the question and think of accessibility requirements rather than a disability the answer would be very different. In my case, I need reading glasses if the font is small or the light is bad, I sometimes find it difficult to hear people talking if there is a lot of background noise, and I occasionally suffer from wrist pain so use the keyboard instead of my mouse to navigate through web pages. I was also told at school that I was dyslexic, and although I have never been formally assessed, I do find it easier to read online if I use coloured overlays and an underlining tool.

So, if you were asked if you have a disability what would you answer? And if the question were rephrased to accessibility requirement what would you answer? If you answered no to both, would that still be the same if you considered temporary and situational impairments? And could you still be sure you could say no in 10 years, or 20 years' time?

Conclusion

In this video, I've explained who digital accessibility is important for, by looking not only at permanent impairments but also situational and temporary impairments. I hope that this has demonstrated why, at eLaHub, we believe that designing accessible eLearning resources, really does benefit all of your learners. If you agree, or want to find out more, visit us at eLaHub.net.