



Rapid E-learning:  
Beauty tips



## Rapid E-learning: Beauty Tips

### Death to clipart: Why rapid e-learning should be beautiful

Rapid e-learning tools can, with a bit of clever tweaking, deliver programmes with much of the functionality of a custom built e-learning module. The area in which a rapidly developed piece of e-learning can differ from its more expensive alternative is in the look and feel and the quality of the images. It doesn't have to, though.

Some people are purists, verging on puritanical about this, saying that visual design is secondary from learning design. Some say visuals get in the way of the learning experience. In our opinion that's only the case when the visual design is bad. Sadly, that's most of the time.

In our view, effective e-learning should have a lot more in common with effective advertising and communications than with dusty old educational models. There's nothing that sinks the heart faster than a list of learning objectives on the opening screen. In our designs, we strive to get the heart pounding from the outset, through sharp art direction, crisp language, big bold ideas and statements. In other words, it must not be boring, which is still the most common adjective used to describe most e-learning. Graphics and effective art direction are key to this.

Looks matter. high quality branding in line with the materials you have provided, strong visuals and informative animations all reinforce the learning experience

This short guide is not about making you a graphic artist, but to help you source and specify images that will lift your rapid e-learning and play such a key role.

Sick of clip art and the same old images? Read on for a refreshing look at graphics.



## Rapid angle: What quality images add to rapid e-learning

- Create a professional feel to the content – learners take it more seriously
- Make the content easier on the eye and so make it easier for learners to absorb the learning content
- Deliver a greater sense of realism to case studies or scenarios
- Illustrate key learning points and act as a valuable visual cue for recall.

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If you included all the usual graphical elements that an e-learning production company normally throw into a bespoke e-learning programme, you would be hard pressed to know which was produced using rapid e-learning tools and which was not. We challenge people all the time on this.

The problem for the rapid e-learning developer is that bespoke graphics take time and perhaps more importantly can add considerably to your production bills. If you are lucky, like us, you will have some great graphic artists in your team, but their time may be limited. If you do not have a dedicated in-house graphical resource for your e-learning, you face a very common situation. You need to use someone externally.

Either way, you will need to define exactly what graphics or illustrations you need and you need to choose the visual assets that provide the most 'bangs for your bucks'. These will tend to be:

- **Visual assets that learners will see a lot** e.g. menus, backgrounds, navigation etc.
- **Images that are central to the learning points** e.g. an illustration of a process flow or a graphic (perhaps animated) of a mechanical operation
- **Photos or illustrations of people** that exactly reflect the situations they meet in their workplace.

These represent two distinct graphical tasks:

- The menus, backgrounds and navigation represent a general **Art Direction** for the whole programme. This is a major task but once it is done you could re-use everything to create a suite of similarly looking programmes. It could be a corporate standard for all your rapid e-learning. You can find a set of template resources at [www.rapidelearningstore.com](http://www.rapidelearningstore.com).
- The images and illustrations represent **graphical assets** that need to be defined individually prior to production.

To get these produced, you need first to create a brief for the graphics designer. This is what we will look at next.

## Defining and commissioning art direction

You should try and use a graphics designer who has done this before. Even an experienced web designer may find this unfamiliar territory. These are the steps you should follow with your designer:



### Rapid angle: Art direction for rapid e-learning

1. **Plan what functionality you want in your programme** – what navigation will you use, what sections will there be and what will be on each menu

2. **Document this** – it's often good to do this as a wireframe with boxes showing each option on the screen. This can be done easily using Word drawing tools

3. **Capture some images** of websites you like the look of or other e-learning programmes you would like yours to look like

**Tip:** If you have never done this before, when you are looking at the model screen just choose Prnt Scrn on your keyboard. You can then paste this image directly into your briefing document or paste into a graphics package and save as a smaller JPEG image so it does not add too much to the size of your briefing document

4. **Ask for three different versions of art direction** of a menu, a standard presentation screen and a question screen – it is unlikely that the designer will get it right first time. Alternatively, if you have time, work collaboratively with a designer to develop the art direction

5. **Ask for a firm quote for the work.** Don't pay for their time, pay for the job as there could be many iterations before you are happy with the end result

6. When you see the first examples, **be clear about what you like and don't like** about each example. Graphic designers are used to this iterative process and will have built it in to any quote they gave you

7. When you get to the moment that you are close enough to what you want, the graphics designer, if they want to protect themselves, will ask you to sign it off. If you do this and one of your colleagues or stakeholders wants changes later on, you will have to pay extra for those changes. So, **get your key stakeholders to review the art direction** and approve it before you sign it off.

You should expect a competent graphics designer to take about 2 - 3 days to produce the art direction for your rapid e-learning programme.

- Master graphics files (these are normally in Photoshop format - .psds). It is important you get these as you can easily re-use some of the artwork for future projects. A competent graphics designer will have all the elements buttons, text etc in different layers, clearly labelled and easy for any one who has used a tool like Photoshop to make changes themselves.
- Background screens (without navigation buttons) in .jpg format. This is a compressed image to ensure quality look and feel but take up as little memory as possible.
- Menu screens (again in .jpg format). You can amend these if there are changes by going to the master psd files and changing the text there. If you do not have these skills or inhouse resources to do so, then you will need to go back to the original graphics designer.
- Individual navigation buttons (in .jpg format). Depending on what rapid e-learning tool you are using, you will need these as separate objects to add to the standard background screens.

Many rapid e-learning tools allow you to convert Powerpoint screens into e-learning content. If you are using one of these authoring tools, you will use these art direction deliverables to create a set of PPT slide templates which others can use when they are creating their own rapid e-learning content. Use the graphical background for every screen by placing it in the slide master.

In time, the investment in quality art direction will pay dividends.

## Defining and commissioning graphic assets

You will have a much larger pool of talent to tap into when commissioning individual graphical assets. Anyone who has produced graphical content for the web will have the minimum know-how to provide professional images for your rapid e-learning programme.

You may have a range of requirements and you should choose an appropriately experienced graphic designer to do each job. Obviously the more images you commission the lower the unit price.

Here are some guidelines on how long a designer might take to deliver you a single graphical asset:

Type of graphic	Time required
Photographic image (from a photo- library – see later for more on how to find royalty free images)	15 minutes to locate 10 minutes to edit and turn into .jpg file
Illustration - simple	2 hours
Illustration - complex	5 hours
Animated illustration (in Flash)	6 - 8 hours

If you are looking for low cost images (royalty free) there are a lot of options out there. Some are free while others are low cost.

Here are just a few of them:

[www.photos.com](http://www.photos.com)

[www.istockphoto.com](http://www.istockphoto.com)

[www.photosights.net](http://www.photosights.net)

[www.alamy.com](http://www.alamy.com)

[www.fotosearch.com](http://www.fotosearch.com)

[www.photolibrary.com](http://www.photolibrary.com)

[www.copyrightfreephotos.com](http://www.copyrightfreephotos.com)

[www.fotalia.co.uk](http://www.fotalia.co.uk)

Once you download some good ones make sure you create your own library to share with colleagues. It will need a clear folder structure but you will find that two or three hundred good images will provide most of your needs.



## Rapid angle: Deal with current and future needs through a photo shoot

Think about future needs when researching and commissioning images. For example, there will be many times where you will need office scene images. In this case, it might be worth arranging a photo shoot in your office location.

You can either do this yourself armed with a good digital camera or you may want to bring in a professional photographer (who could also provide the photographic models.)

You can hire models by the day to act out various scenes in meeting rooms, at desks and rest areas or use volunteers in the office. Make sure models bring changes of clothes so you can show them different in different scenes and combinations.

**Tip:** We don't recommend using internal staff if the subject matter of the training is sensitive (such as grievances.) You don't want to have real people confused with fictional characters in e-learning scenarios.

A professional photo-shoot could be used to produce a wide range of portraits for your virtual coaches in your programmes. A whole range of different expressions and gestures could be photographed to be used in many future programmes.

If you just want to use images from your office and are less fussy on how professional they look you can do it yourself. An internal team of complete novice interactive designers in a local council in London did this very successfully. They just went round with their basic digital camera and took pictures of colleagues for a programme on project management. The images were authentic and perfectly fit for purpose with no external costs incurred.



## Rapid angle: Graphics and illustrations for rapid e-learning

If you are using a 3<sup>rd</sup> party to resource your images, it pays to be systematic.

1. Include a general description of each image in your PowerPoint storyboard you want in the programme e.g. 2 people arguing in a meeting room, first stage in process xyz etc. Use the numbering of the screens in the script to name the graphic e.g. AGE\_10 might be the screen name and so the image should be AGE\_10\_01.jpg. If you have another image on that screen then it will be AGE\_10\_02.jpg and so on

2. Create a separate image list from the script. Do this as a spreadsheet to track progress. It is very easy to forget an image and find at the last minute you have to scabble to find one quickly. Suggested columns could be:

IMAGE ID	PRODUCER	FIRST VERSION	SIGNED OFF	NOTES
AGE_10_01	Ray Lewis (External)	Done 23/7/07	Geoff to review 27/7/07	

3. Group similar types of images earmarked for external production and produce a statement of work document which outlines the each set of images required with the descriptions from script and any other existing relevant documentation e.g. existing images, marketing literature etc.

4. Send statement of work brief to prospective graphic designers and ask for firm quotes. Again, don't pay for their time if you can help it, pay for the job as there could be many iterations before you are happy with the end result

5. Choose graphics designers on the basis of quality of existing work (ask to see examples), reputation (get references) and cost, of course

6. Set clear deadlines for each image. Freelance designers will be juggling lots of balls in the air if they are any good so if you are not clear about when you want something and how important meeting that date is, your work could go to the bottom of the pile if another client shouts louder

7. Produce a briefing document for each image (see below for a template) and do not leave anything vague for the

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designer to interpret. 9 times out of 10 they will make a wrong interpretation

8. When you see the first versions, again be clear about what you like and don't like about each. Graphic designers are used to this iterative process and will have built it in to any quote they gave you. Always check their spelling, they are often more conscious of look than accuracy of content

9. When you get to the moment that you are close enough to what you want, the graphics designer is likely to want you to sign it off. If you do this and one of your colleagues or stakeholders wants changes later on, like the art direction, you will have to pay extra for those changes. So, get your key stakeholders to review the first version of the images and approve it before you sign it off.

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## Example graphics brief template

From:	Contact Number	
	Email	
To:		
Project name & number:		
Author:		
Finished file format:		
Target file size (k):		
Days budgeted:		
Issue date:	Completion date:	

### Guidelines for completing the template

Some of the issues may need to be discussed with the graphic designer prior to giving this written briefing

Style of art direction: corporate guidelines, examples to follow, description of look and feel, delivery

File type: make this clear. GIF & JPG OK?

Palette: what image depth is required e.g. Is there a specific palette?

Graphic dimensions: what is the resolution size? Are there specific frames you want?

File names: give full file names, don't let them create their own – it will only lead to confusion later on

File locations: you must list the location to save finished files to if you are using an online storage option

Brief:

# Key actions



## Beauty tips for Rapid E-learning:

- Do not scrimp on the art direction (as long as you can re-use it) and share this among fellow designers in your organisation
- Create and catalogue a library of images (from royalty free libraries – buy a CD, get a subscription to an online library for a month and gather as many images as you can or simply buy individual images as you go along)
- Ensure you keep to a house style and look and feel if you can – so people can easily re-use images because they are the right size and style for their programme
- Set up a separate library of images from all of the completed programmes. Ensure it is available to everyone in your organisation and is well publicised. Encourage others to add to it
- Be very clear about what you want when briefing graphic designers – over specify if you have to. Leave them to add their creative flair but within the direction you provide for them.

## Take it further

What do you want to do?	Check out these Rapid Guides
Find out the best way of producing effective rapid e-learning modules	How to Write for Rapid E-learning
Learn more about meeting accessibility guidelines	How to Meet Accessibility Guidelines for Rapid E-learning
Use some pre-prepared screen designs and layouts in your rapid e-learning	Rapid e-learning PowerPoint templates
Use some pre-designed learning designs	Product Knowledge Template Soft Skills Template Induction Template Procedural Knowledge Template

All these and more are available at Kineo's Rapid E-learning Store:  
[www.rapidelearningstore.com](http://www.rapidelearningstore.com)

For more information on Kineo's rapid e-learning services:

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email [info@kineo.co.uk](mailto:info@kineo.co.uk), or call +44 (0) 1273 728 900.