More than words and more than design – using an information design approach

Information design is about developing the text, visual elements and look of a document or website to make it as readable, engaging and effective as possible. It should start at the earliest stages of development, and integrate writing, editing, design and digital development tasks on different scales – from the big picture to the finest detail.

Scale and purpose	Writing and editorial tasks	Design and development tasks
Large scale – analysing and organising	• Analyse the content in relation to the aim of, and audience for, the information • Develop an outline, headings and storyline that convey the information in a logical and engaging way • Identify where visual displays could help to tell your story, and what information should be used to create these visuals • Define an appropriate writing style	• Understand the purpose of the information and how the audience will access it (e.g. print, online, mobile) • Consider information structure, length and overall formats (e.g. manual with technical diagrams, report with tables and graphs, 'glossy' photo-filled brochure, informational website, functional mobile app)
Medium scale – mapping and revising	• Refine and revise the text to ensure that writing is clear and concise, and that the 'characters' in the story are introduced and presented accurately and consistently to support the story • Ensure that text and visual displays are well matched – the text above and surrounding a table, graph or image should refer and relate to this image • Use elements of the story to guide development of tools for navigation and understanding, such as flowcharts, process steps, key points boxes and infographics	• Map elements of the content to guide visual concepts, images, colours and page styles that capture the essence of the content • Develop features to help readers navigate and understand the information (e.g. flowcharts, infographics, site structure, menus, colour coding, headers and footers) • Plan purposeful interactive features such as data visualisations, infographics and flowcharts to engage readers
Fine scale – styling and presenting	• Copyedit to ensure accurate and consistent word styles, language and grammar, abbreviations, cross-references, citations, scientific terminology and other editorial matters • Edit tables, figures and other images, and write alternative text for all of these to ensure that the information is accurate, clear and easy to understand	• Design the details of the print or digital page layout • Attend to details of presentation – including colour, fonts, and placement of text, tables, images and infographics – to maintain readers' attention and improve understanding • Provide additional functionality such as cross-linking and accessibility features to ensure that readers have flexible access to all the information