

Report to the VHS Training Program Review Digital Competency Overview

Compiled by Dr. Brenna Clarke Gray
Coordinator, Educational Technologies
Thompson Rivers University

Executive Summary

The Vancouver Humane Society has produced a series of digital teaching and learning modules that are strong on content and tone. This report offers suggestions for improving the accessibility of the materials by attending to the inclusion of alt-text and video transcripts alongside the captions, and by checking all PDFs for accessibility. The most resource-heavy recommendation in this report is the recommendation to improve interactivity of some sections, especially the reflective questions, and to create more case study activities. This report suggests adopting H5P to accomplish these tasks, though other suggestions are offered.

Strengths of Existing Programming

This is a warm, welcoming, and approachable training series. I am not a content expert, but I felt confident in and persuaded by the materials, which are thorough and left me, as a novice to the subject, with a good sense of each module's focus and without major questions.

Material is presented clearly and concisely and is reinforced by timely quizzes and good use of visuals. The site structure and architecture is sensible and lends itself to the logical flow of course materials. The content is carefully scaffolded in a way that helps the learner develop connections between concepts and across modules. Overall, it is a pleasurable experience to work through the units and I see this project as being very close to finished.

Areas for Improvement/Development

Given that this is already a thoroughly developed suite of online learning modules from a content perspective, I have focused my recommendations in two areas: accessibility and interactivity.

Accessibility

Accessibility is a critical component of the development of online learning objects, especially where we need resources to be inclusive. Accessibility practices not only improve the experience for users with disabilities, but many accessibility practices have the knock-on effect of assisting users with poor internet connectivity or who may need to access modules in non-ideal learning conditions (eg. a noisy living or working environment, or while caregiving).

I recommend the careful addition of image alt-text for all images included in this resource. Please see Appendix A for what I believe to be a comprehensive list of images in need of alt-text. Alt-text refers to "alternative text," and it is what is read aloud by screen readers employed by users with visual impairments or processing issues. In addition, when an internet connection is slow or unreliable, users can browse with images turned off and view alt-text instead. If alt-text is not specified, the user will not have access to the information in the images; this can sometimes merely be an inconvenience, but in places where information

communicated in images is not available elsewhere, it could prevent a user from completing this course. Where images are purely decorative, consider what affective experience they were chosen to evoke, and consider what users miss out on by not having access to the images.

When composing alt-text, be descriptive and detailed, but succinct. If the image is being used to convey an emotion or tone, ensure that it is captured in the alt-text. Include all the content if textual content is part of the image. An important caveat here is that many assistive technologies process text in 125-character chunks, which means that for text-heavy images you may need to provide the description on another page and link out to it below the image. Alternately, you may choose to break an infographic up into multiple smaller images.

In addition to addressing alt-text, some of the images (flagged in Appendix A) are difficult to read either for sizing or compression issues, and some colour contrast is ineffective. This may be an accessibility issue for users who don't identify as disabled and who may not be using screen readers or other accommodations, and it may make it difficult to gather necessary information. Suggestions for improvement can be found in Appendix A, [and the Thinkific support materials on using images may also be useful here](#).

In considering the videos, they already include good, accurate captions. I recommend also linking to a transcript of the videos since this work has already largely been completed. This can assist users with cognitive or processing issues, can be a welcome additional resource for language learners, and can stand in for the video for users who are accessing the course on remote or rural internet and may not be able to stream video. If posting these as PDFs, check accessibility of the documents before posting.

Indeed, PDF accessibility should also be checked for all existing documents and handouts. They look to work well for text-to-speech purposes, except for those handouts that are intended as worksheets. I would recommend reworking the worksheet PDFs to be form-fillable PDFs instead. This will not only ensure that all fields are correctly defined but will encourage users to actually make use of the resource. We know that learners are more likely to complete tasks when space is made available for them to do so and when limited barriers are in place. Removing the barrier of needing to access a printer is a great way to ensure learners make use of the excellent resources you are providing.

I want to stress here that I am not an accessibility expert, and there are firms that can do a proper accessibility audit of your resources. What I have provided here is my best professional advice as I would provide it to anyone developing coursework or materials based on my understanding of the field and the literature at this time.

Interactivity

The feedback shared by learners who have already been through these modules indicated that while they enjoyed the content, they would prefer additional options for interactivity. This also tracks with best practices in learning design. In particular, I recommend developing an

opportunity for students to do the reflective practice sections right in the resource. Unfortunately, we tend to prioritize what is given visual real estate, and we also tend to avoid tasks that are cognitively challenging. As the course is set up right now, I am likely to read the questions posed and perhaps I will intend to work through them, but it's likely that only the most highly motivated learners will do so.

One solution to this is to use the Survey tool built into Thinkific. The drawback of this method is that those surveys will be sent to the course manager and may expect/anticipate response, even if expectations of users are managed. Another solution is to create another series of form-fillable PDFs, but this does not really address the issue of interactivity within the course space. My recommendation is to use H5P for these interactives. H5P is a free, open-source tool¹ for building learning objects, [and its use is supported by Thinkific](#). H5P will also provide a solution for the desire to create case study interactives.

I recommend the Documentation tool for the reflective practice component and the Branching Scenario tool for the case studies. I have created a mock-up [for the Documentation tool here](#). This Documentation tool object can be implemented as-is throughout the courses; I would recommend reusing the same Documentation tool, as it will be easier for you to manage and will become familiar to users over time. You can test it using the Embed code as it is hosted in the above link, if you like.

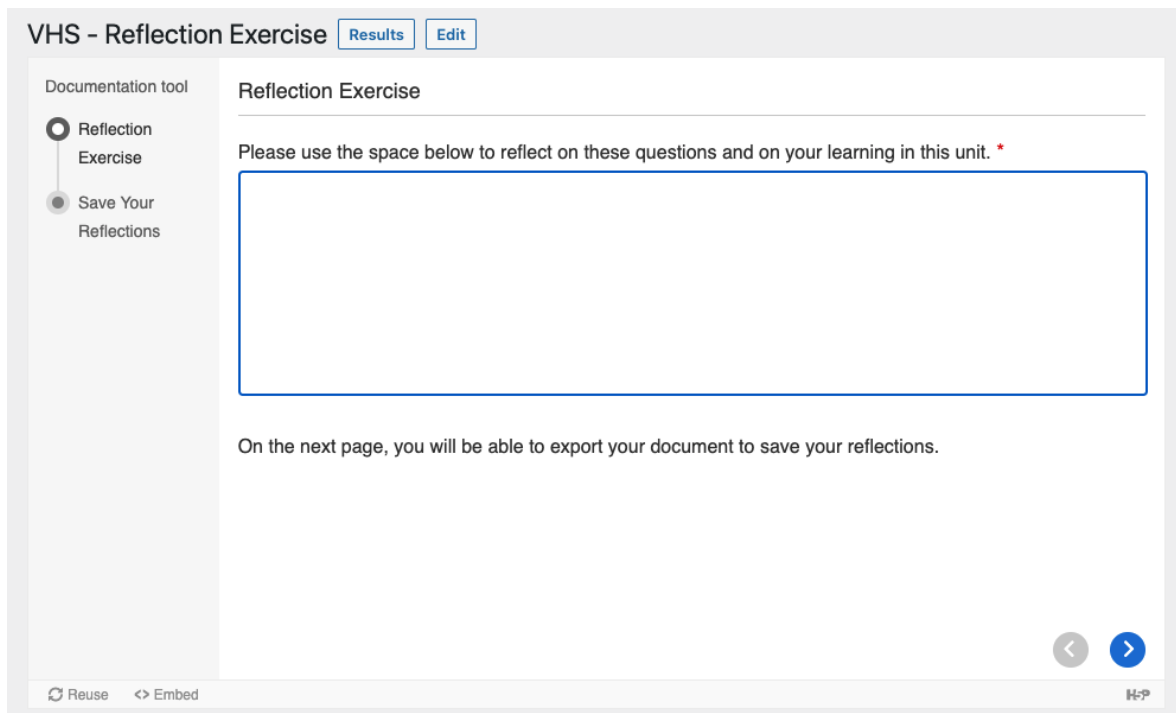


Figure 1: Screenshot of Reflection Exercise

¹ H5P is free to use but needs to be hosted somewhere (typically, a Wordpress site or other hosting option). If that's not available to you, H5P.com is a paid service where you can author and host objects for \$570USD/year for 1-3 authors within an organization.

The Branching Scenario, however, will need to be developed to suit each purpose. I would recommend beginning by delivering a single Branching Scenario for each of the three courses, as they can be time-consuming to build. [It might be helpful to see how this tool is being used to deliver similar content](#); note that video is not required to create compelling Branching Scenarios. The actual technical implementation will be straightforward – all H5P tools use form-authoring, with no coding and technical knowledge, [and the documentation is complete](#) – but planning out a Branching Scenario can be complex. Christy Tucker has developed a resource to guide your subject matter planning for the Branching Scenarios², with resources on [pre-planning](#), [outlining](#), [preparing the right answer or ideal scenario first](#), and [then prepping the “mistakes” or incorrect paths](#).

As I am under the number of expected hours on this project, I am happy to help to develop the activities once the subject matter planning is complete if that would make this task seem more achievable.

H5P offers many robust activity types, and in later iterations of the course you may choose to expand the number of interactives in the courses. However, given the timelines, I advise prioritizing the implementation of the Reflection exercise and the development of the Branching Scenarios.

Other Areas to Consider

This is a text-heavy course. The planned implementation of a narrated option for users is an excellent impulse, and one that also expands usability and accessibility for different learners. There are, however, some sections that do not lend themselves to narration due to the page layout; notably, in the Leadership course, item 2.2. I recommend removing the table and offering this content as a list using natural paragraphing instead. For example:

Competency 1: **Trauma-informed communication.**

- This competency connects before correcting and offers stabilization (provide the why's, likely impacts, and what's next).
- It is important because trauma-informed communication is proactive and intentional and seeks to minimize stress and trauma.
- For example: A leader is not satisfied with the quality of work on a project done by a worker, and they would like to provide feedback on this. Trauma-informed communication would involve intentionally thinking about how, when, and how much information to offer the worker in order to minimize the impact of stress and trauma. The leader might ask the worker what their preferred mode of communication is to discuss the feedback, discuss the feedback in chunks over the course of a few meetings,

² She uses two different tools than H5P. One is called Twine, which I do not recommend as it cannot be embedded in the existing courses like H5P can; the other, Storyline, is a very expensive software suite for instructional designers.

and frame the feedback in a way that allows the worker to understand 'why' it is important.

This approach will lend itself to much more natural narration. However, it will create a lengthy page. I recommend giving each of the competencies their own page to break up the text. You might also consider using images to help illustrate the competencies or reflect the tone you wish to evoke.

A note on external links: they open within the existing tab where learners are working on the course, which may confuse some users. I recommend setting external links to open in a new tab, and inserting a note at the beginning of the course to let users know that external links will open in a new tab. This will ensure a distinction between the “continue” button’s progression through the materials, and the links to outside resources as separate from the course materials.

Appendix A: Image Review

Course	Image Location	Image Description	Action Recommended
Implementing	1.1	man and cat	alt-text to be added
	1.1	all branding	alt-text to be added
	1.4	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	2.2	umbrella	alt-text to be added; recommend larger size or link out to larger size
	2.3	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	2.3	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	2.6	cat and woman	alt-text to be added
	3.1	trauma-informed practice image	alt-text to be added; improve contrast on "one welfare," recommend to increase size
	3.3	trauma-informed approaches	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	3.5	examples	alt-text critical ; recommend larger text or more contrast
	3.5	dog in a cone	alt-text to be added
	3.7	two dogs	alt-text to be added
	3.12	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	4.1	MI definition	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	4.2	CAPE	alt-text critical ; improve contrast on "acceptance" and "partnership"
	4.4	style image	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)

	4.6	CUBE image	alt-text to be added; improve contrast on "thoughts" and "feelings," recommend to increase size
	5.1	man and dog	alt-text to be added
	5.2	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
Leadership	1.1	man and cat	alt-text to be added
	1.1	all branding	alt-text to be added
	1.4	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	2.1	systems image	alt-text critical
	2.3	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	3.1	bird mobile	alt-text to be added
	3.2	trauma image	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	3.3	trauma scale	alt-text critical ; recommend larger size or link out to larger size
	3.4	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	3.6	practice diagram	alt-text to be added
	3.7	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	5.1	outreach image	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	5.2	woman and dog	alt-text to be added
	5.4	dog being groomed	alt-text to be added
	5.5	series of images	alt-text to be added; recommend larger size or link out to larger size
	6.1	woman and dog in snow	alt-text to be added
	7.1	couple with dog	alt-text to be added
	7.3	index card	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	8.1	man and dog	alt-text to be added
	8.1	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
Burnout	1.1	man and cat	alt-text to be added
	1.1	all branding	alt-text to be added
	1.4	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	2.1	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	2.1	man and dog	alt-text to be added
	2.2	bird mobile	alt-text to be added

	2.2	responsibilities	alt-text critical ; recommend enlarging; improve contrast on "workers"
	3.1	flowchart	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	3.2	speech bubbles	alt-text critical ; recommend larger size or link out to larger size
	3.2	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	3.5	vicarious trauma	alt-text critical ; improve contrast
	3.7	info box	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	4.1	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	4.2	woman hiking	alt-text to be added
	4.2	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	4.3	debriefing	alt-text to be added; recommend larger size or link out to larger size; improve contrast on "fair warning"
	4.4	empathy	alt-text critical ; sharpen text (perhaps by enlarging)
	4.4	woman journaling	alt-text to be added
	5.3	napping with dog	alt-text to be added
	6.2	thought bubble	alt-text to be added
	6.2	couple with dog	alt-text to be added

Appendix B: Known Errors

Course	Error Description	Location
Implementing	missing / misnumbered	2.4?
	layout issue	purple text 3.8
	missing question 3	4.3
	the Bloom link still works (and better fits the page) if you delete everything after the hashtag	sources
	links not hotlinked	sources
	Naho link incomplete, spacing issue in citation	sources
Leadership	bullets in table throw off layout	2.2
	worksheet may not be accessible	5.2
	reflection image missing?	6.2
	links not hotlinked	sources
	incomplete citation (VHS report?)	sources

Burnout	safety plan may not be accessible	5.2
	link out using "here" (not accessible)	5.2
	link not hotlinked	sources
	incomplete citation (mental health first aid)	sources