Who We Are: Instructional Systems Designers – Full Speaker Notes

Who Are Instructional Systems Designers?

Instructional Systems Designers aren't just behind-the-scenes tech people—we're learning architects. We shape how people acquire knowledge and skills using a blend of design thinking, systems theory, technology, and pedagogy.

Presentation Objectives

Before we dive in, here's what we aim to accomplish today. We'll define the role of an ISD, show how it's distinct from other tech and support functions, and explore where we work—whether that's in K–12, higher ed, or corporate training. We'll also clear up a few myths and talk about where our field is heading.

Agenda

Here's a quick overview of our roadmap. We'll start by establishing what ISDs really do, then explore how that differs from other roles people often confuse us with. From there, we'll look at our impact across industries, some key challenges we face, and finally wrap up with some takeaways and references for further reading.

What We Are NOT!

Let's start by addressing a common misconception: Instructional Designers are not IT support, computer consultants, or simply web designers. We don't just fix computers or build websites. While we might use technology in our work, our focus is on how people learn—and how to design experiences that support that.

How We Define It!

Instructional Design is a subset of Educational Technology. At its core, it's about using technology to enhance the teaching and learning process. One classic definition highlights our mission: to improve human learning through systems and tools—not just flashy tech, but purposeful integration that supports real outcomes.

Similar Practices, Different Sides

Here we see the subtle distinction: Educational Technology focuses on enhancing how knowledge is delivered, while Instructional Design often zeroes in on how systems and strategies shape that delivery. Technology should support instruction—not overpower it.

The Role of the ISD – At a Glance

ISDs wear many hats. We start by identifying learning gaps, design with intention, test for effectiveness, and continuously improve the experience. It's not just content creation—it's system design.

Instructional Design in Corporations

In the business world, ISDs focus on performance improvement. We create learning experiences that align with company goals—streamlining onboarding, supporting professional development, and improving workflows. Instructional design here means better processes, better results, and better-trained employees.

In Education – K–12 (Kindergarten & Elementary)

In the early years of schooling, ISDs design tools to introduce students to technology and help teachers facilitate success in learning. It's also about applying learning theories to develop engaging, age-appropriate materials and experiences.

In Education – K–12 (Middle & High School)

As students grow, so does the complexity of instruction. Instructional Design here includes aligning content to future career paths, preparing students for tech-rich environments, and in some cases, exposing them to eLearning and foundational instructional models.

In Education – College and University

At the college level, ISDs introduce advanced concepts—design modeling, deep theory, and full-scale eLearning platforms. Instructional Design is not just a practice, but a field of study, and learners are encouraged to explore how knowledge is constructed, transferred, and assessed.

In Business

Returning to corporate environments, ISDs may be working with everything from spreadsheets and process flows to interpersonal communication skills. We're often behind the scenes creating user guides, developing onboarding pathways, and building systems for continuous learning.

Tools & Models We Use

These tools and models help us bring structure to complex learning needs. From project models like ADDIE to content standards like SCORM, we rely on both strategy and technology to deliver results.

Looking to Make Change

Instructional Designers often take on the role of change agents. We help organizations understand who we are, define how learning is applied in different scenarios, and show how instructional models directly influence success in real-world outcomes.

Challenges & Solutions

One challenge we face is ensuring technology supports—not overshadows—learning. We avoid one-size-fits-all models and instead apply design strategies that fit each unique scenario. Our job is to solve problems and improve learning through intentional, well-structured solutions.

Instructional Design & Technology – Facts

Let's talk facts: ISDs improve how instructors teach and how learners engage with material. We assist in the effective use of technology, design models, and instructional strategies to create better outcomes for all learners.

Instructional Design & Technology – Fictions

And now for the myths. We're not here just to fix computers or support online-only training. Instructional Design goes beyond tech tools—we work with strategy, pedagogy, and people. That's a critical distinction.

Why ISDs Matter

Instructional design isn't just a support function—it's strategic. Whether it's onboarding a new employee or delivering cutting-edge education, ISDs ensure learning is effective, accessible, and impactful.

References

This final slide provides foundational resources and research. If you want to dive deeper into the history and scope of our field, these are excellent starting points. They've shaped the way we think about learning and the role technology plays in it.