Designing for Consistency

In this module, you'll learn:

- What the characteristics of a consistent design are.
- Why it's important to create consistent designs.
- How to create consistent designs.
- Best practices to design for consistency.

What are the characteristics of a consistent design?

Creating a consistent design involves the designer stepping back to take a look at the larger picture. The whole of what you've designed will show you how consistent (and accessible, for that matter!) it is on a larger scale. Though the content on individual pages will vary, your design as a whole should:

- Be useable, intuitive, and predictable throughout.
- Position and identify content consistently.
- Present menus in the same relative order.
- Use components consistently.

Why is it important to create consistent designs?

Most end users rely on a certain familiarity with a design's navigation and function. Consistent designs reduce confusion and help all end users understand and navigate it quicker.

It's easier for everyone, particularly people with disabilities, when we don't have to learn new functionality!

> **Example:** People with age-related forgetfulness or cognitive disabilities may have trouble understanding or remembering a new design. It's helpful to them to know what to expect on each page even if the content differs. This reduces cognitive load and makes it more likely they'll be able to complete a task.

How do I create consistent designs?

A consistent design should have clear navigation, forms, search boxes, and other components and work in the way users expect as much as possible. Though the order may be different

across devices (e.g. mobile vs. desktop views), page properties and components should be consistent and easy to identify.

At the same time, your design skills aren't restricted. You can still add or remove content as long as the same order and location is used on each page. For example, you can remove links from the left navigation but the links that remain should keep the same relative order.

To create a consistent design:

- **Plan your design before implementing it and align it with users' expectations.**
    - Consider color palette and font choices, text, links background, navigation, controls, labels, images, layout, organization, and other components or elements on the page.
        - Use predefined components so that when you begin your design, there's no guesswork involved and all components are consistent.

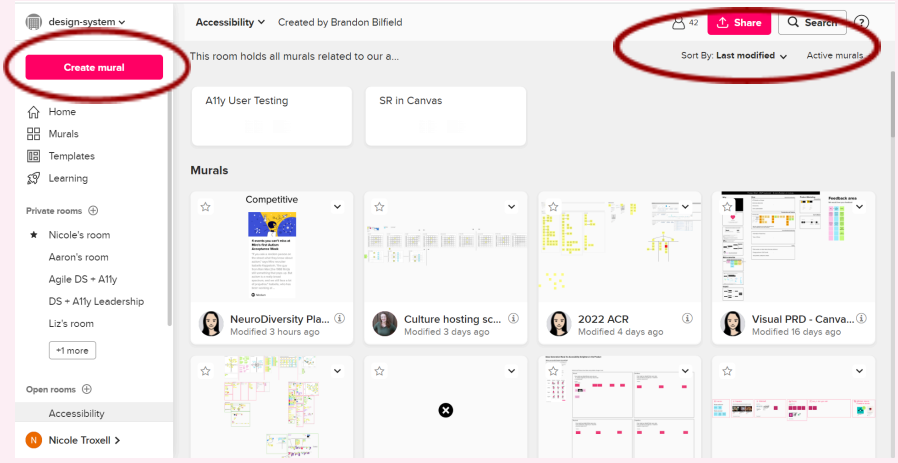
Resources: Refer to the following modules in this training to help in your quest to create both consistent and accessible designs:

- **Avoiding Text Truncation.**
- **Creating Accessible Layouts.**
- **Using Accessible Typography.**
- **Using Color and Sufficient Color Contrast.**

- **Ensure the layout is predictable and consistent.** This helps end users orient themselves quickly and easily and prevents them from having to constantly search for information. Those who look for menu items should know immediately where they are because they're in the same place on each page.
- **Ensure your design is consistent in both visual and functional elements.** Use the same page properties and components. Use familiar visual and functional patterns across elements and repeat them throughout the design.
    - Any changes should be informed by your end users' needs.
    - Components (e.g. controls) with the same functions should look and behave in the same way.
    - Use consistent identification. All controls should contain the same labels that identify their purpose (e.g. search buttons shouldn't be labeled as "search" on one page and "find" on another).

- Ensure alternative text, non-textual content, and associated labels are consistent.
- Ensure all items can be focused, tabbed to, and activated.
- Don’t reuse the same icons and elements for different functions.

Example: MURAL uses the same buttons, cards, and other components throughout the UI as shown in the screenshot below. Additionally, the Create mural button and others always share consistent and descriptive labels and functions.



- **Use organizational consistency (consistently!).** Be consistent in the location, order, and position of related elements and content.
  - Use the same layout on each page.
  - Page headings and titles should be uniform, e.g. use the same heading levels and locations of titles.
  - Keep the same location for common features, e.g. search boxes.
  - Keep the order of components within navigational menus in the same place on each page.
  - Position navigation in the same location on all pages, including skip navigation links.

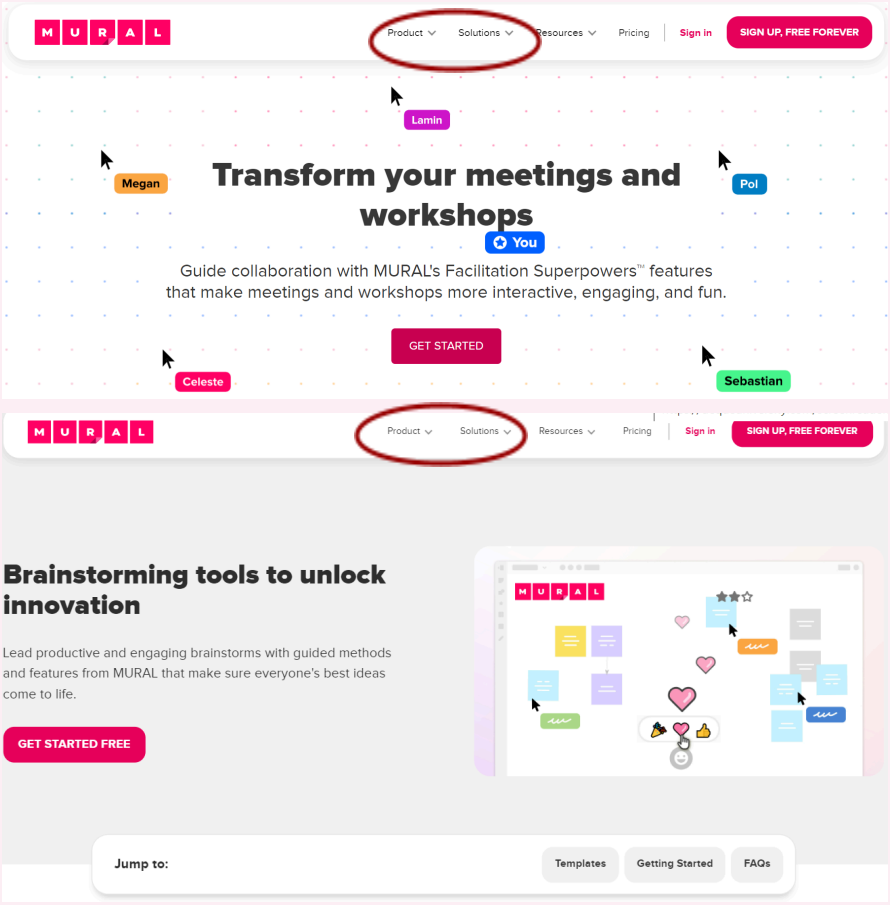
Example: The two screenshots below show how MURAL’s website uses consistent organization, location, and position of elements even when the content on pages differs.

- The Faciltation Superpowers page in the first screenshot is found through the product

menu at the top.

- The second screenshot shows the Brainstorming and Ideation page found through the Solutions menu.

No matter what page you're on, these menus and the information within them are located in the same position and organized the same way, as is the MURAL logo and sign up option.



- **Leverage and contribute to your team's design system as much as possible.**
    - The more you share at the component level, the more your team will be able to achieve consistent and accessible designs.
    - Predefine components and properties with your design team to ensure everyone is on the same page from the start.

Best practices, in a nutshell

- **Plan your design before implementing it and align it with end users' expectations.**
- **Ensure your design is consistent in both visual and functional elements.**
- **Use organizational consistency (consistently!).**
- **Leverage and contribute to your team's design system as much as possible.**

Test your knowledge

Choose one or more answers to the following questions.

1. As a MURAL designer, you're tasked with creating a design element that may not be familiar to your audience. What should you do?
    A. Just reuse the same icons and elements for different functions. They'll know the difference!
    B. Ensure that these new design elements align with your end users' needs. They're the boss of you!
    C. Use different labels for the same controls. This will clue your end users in on how to use these elements.
2. Some of your end users have low vision and navigate with keyboards. What's something you can do to ensure they can access what you've created?
    A. Use different colors on different pages. Novelty will keep any end user engaged!
    B. Switch up the order of components so that they'll know each page is different.
    C. Keep the order of components within navigational menus in the same place on each page. That way, they'll know what to expect.
3. The best way to create a consistent design is to:
    A. Prepare, plan, think about it before you begin. There's a lot to consider.
    B. Dive right in and figure it out as you!
    C. Switch up the layout on each page. Everyone loves guesswork.
    D. None of the above.