



## LEGAL DESIGN AS A DOUBLE ESPRESSO

**The amount of information a good lawyer has to process on a daily basis is overwhelming. One of the challenges is to separate main issues from side-issues, without overlooking essential details. Can legal design help you with this? Absolutely!**

Our working memory is constantly distracted by stimuli and information that have nothing to do with our business at hand. This so-called *extraneous load* may be a conversation you are hearing down the corridor between colleagues, irrelevant parts of the text you are reading or your own plans for the weekend that keep going through your mind. No matter how clever we are, our working memory is unfortunately very limited. If the 'noise' can be reduced, the capacity of the working memory significantly increases. This is exactly where a designer comes in. By designing easily digestible information with text and images, the overload on working memory is reduced and the brain is capable of processing information faster.

Now that your memory has stored this knowledge, you can use this to your advantage. Next time you write something for a client or court, apply the following legal-design principles:

### **1. DARE TO ASK QUESTIONS FIRST**

Ask yourself in advance whether a written document in Word is actually the best option. If you ascertain how the recipient is going to read the information (in print or on a desktop or mobile device), you may arrive at a surprising - but mainly effective - form that will not overload the reader's working memory and therefore leaves more room for processing the key message.

## 2. LESS IS MORE

This may sound obvious, but lawyers are usually overly meticulous. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as it does not lead to unnecessary complexity and distraction. By avoiding this, you also avoid the external cognitive load, i.e. *the extraneous load*.

## 3. USE THE POWER OF REPETITION

Be consistent in both phrasing and terminology. Repetition creates recognition. This relieves the working memory and makes room for new information.

## 4. I SPY...

A messy layout distracts from the content and contributes to an *extraneous load*. By applying different **colours**, fonts or by making use of *italics* or **bold** or of lower-case versus

UPPER-CASE letters, you steer the eye to the information you want it to focus on. This will enable the reader to scan the content faster, to immediately discover a clear hierarchy and process the information better.

## 5. A PICTURE SAYS MORE THAN A 1,000 WORDS

As I have mentioned before, data transfer is most effective when designed as a combination of images and text to represent or support your message visually. This does not always necessarily have to be an infographic or a complicated design. It may also be the use of graphs, organisation charts, timelines or icons.

Legal Design | *Designed to deliver*

— Author: S. van Hecke