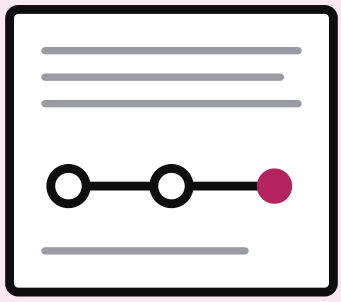
Concept

Contract visualization

Using diagrams, timelines, tables, and icons alongside a contract's text so that the people who must comply with it understand, faster and better, what it binds them to.



In Spanish
Visualización de contratos

Origin
Several antecedents; studied experimentally by Passera (2015) and Passera, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2017)

What problem it addresses

Contracts are written as a wall of text for lawyers, but they are carried out by people who are not lawyers. Design takes a testable idea from here: deadlines, steps, and responsibilities are understood better when drawn than when narrated.

An example

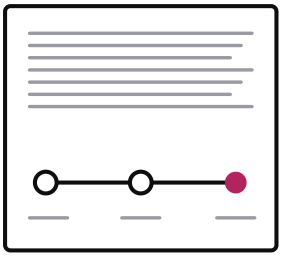
An illustrative example: a clause that sets when an order is delivered, when it is reviewed, and when it is paid.

Text only



Three linked deadlines in a single paragraph, each counted from the one before. **You have to reread it to know what comes first.**

Text with a timeline



The same text, with a timeline that shows the three deadlines in order. **The order is clear at a glance.**

The diagram doesn't replace the clause: it goes with it and makes visible what the text forces you to rebuild in your head.

Why it happens

1

A long contract is tiring, and non-lawyers get lost among deadlines and conditions.

2

A diagram shows the order and the relationships that the text tells one after another.

3

It is understood faster and better, especially if the contract isn't in your native language.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Draw what the text tells in sequence: deadlines, steps, who does what, and what happens if something fails.

Avoid

Decorative drawings that clarify nothing or that say something different from the clause.

Don't fall for it

Review every diagram with a lawyer: if it contradicts the text, it creates exactly the confusion you wanted to avoid.

3.01 → 4.35



What the research says

Average correct answers, out of 6, from 122 contract professionals in 24 countries with a text-only contract and with diagrams; they also answered faster (Passera, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, 2017).

● ○ ○ **Single study.** The improvement was greater for those whose native language was not English. There are few experiments, almost all from the same group and with test contracts.

Connections

Used in

- Comic contracts
- Information design

Related to

- Cognitive load
- Plain language

Authors and works

2015	**Stefania Passera**	Showed in an experiment that reordering a contract's text was not enough: the improvement came when careful layout and visual elements were added.
2017	**Stefania Passera, Anne Kankaanranta and Leena Louhiala-Salminen**	Measured with professionals from several countries that diagrams make a contract understood faster and with fewer errors.

Sources

Original sources

- Passera, S., Kankaanranta, A., & Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2017). Diagrams in contracts: Fostering understanding in global business communication. IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, 60(2), 118–146. View source (https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2017.2656678)
- Passera, S. (2015). Beyond the wall of text: How information design can make contracts user-friendly. In A. Marcus (Ed.), Design, User Experience, and Usability: Users and Interactions (DUXU 2015), Lecture Notes in Computer Science, 9187. Springer. View source (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20898-5_33)

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