In their quite aptly named “streamlined, practical guide,” Larson and Lockee take on an ambitious set of aspirations and do so with relative ease. In less than 300 pages, readers with skillsets ranging from novice to experienced instructional design professional will learn the ins and outs of the instructional design (ID) process, inclusive of the items one must consider from the inception through the implementation stages. Larson and Lockee offer this to readers through an eclectic menagerie of charts, tables, diagrams, text-based lists, and most interestingly of all, examples from multiple disciplines and industries. It does not matter if the reader works in healthcare, government, K-12, or higher education, the examples and material discussed cogently connect to their work in instructional...
design and training, and the respective multiple stakeholders one must consider in design and implementation. This book is “streamlined,” yet comprehensive, practical yet even more determined than this plan initially appeared in the opening pages.

In chapter 1, Larson and Lockee lay the foundation for the book’s scope and cohesively yet concisely define instructional design. They examine the history of instructional design, the types of problems often encountered, and highlight the ADDIE model. In turn, Larson and Lockee reflect upon what it looks like when we “streamline” the process, ranging from how we examine the environment, the technology, and the instructional design approach. Larson and Lockee end this chapter with a call-to-action for readers not to take the “streamlining” to the point that it avoids deep critical thinking, reflection, and as a means for ignoring the principles of good/quality instructional design (p. 16-18). Instead, they advocate that readers take “streamlining” to the level needed to expose the “bigger picture” of what instructional design is and should be, so that instructional designers can in fact implement quality, proactive rather than reactive, design.

Chapter 2 quickly delves into “analyzing needs to define the project,” showing all the dimensions instructional designers need to start their projects. The authors cleverly begin with examples where people did not think effectively in design about the other factors that could be resulting in the outcomes people encounter (a trend they use to start each subsequent chapter). It is one thing to have a design not implemented; it is another to think about why that design is not being implemented and what failures or lacks of foresight pre-empted the plans. From there, Larson and Lockee strategically walk readers through the project management responsibilities instructional designers encounter, ranging from identifying stakeholders (p. 24-25) to identifying “needs, resources, and constraints” (p. 29). Larson and Lockee do not approach these discussions with very lengthy paragraphs but rather with a “streamlined” process, inclusive of many useful charts that instructional designers could use as reference at the start of each new work or portfolio project. The latter half of chapter 2 was quite interdisciplinary in scope despite the fact that it involved setting the framework for identifying, developing, and
working from the project’s goals. Larson and Lockee emphasized that “streamlining” needs focus on (1) “optimizing” the data already at one’s disposal on campus/at the company and determining a point-person to continue collecting data, (2) establishing “sustainability” of the project, and (3) developing ways to have “continuous improvement” (p. 39). These three items make the workload more manageable, effective, and productive. The authors conclude with how this “streamlined” plan would help and how it would look in multiple workforce sectors.

The next three chapters (Chapters 3 through 5) effectively examine instructional designers’ primary concerns: learners, context of learning, and learning content. Chapter 3 reflects on the universality and individuality of learners, items all of them want, need, and expect, and other things separate cohorts might want, need, and expect. This third chapter takes a more educational psychological approach to chronicling how and for what reasons identifying diverse audience members (in types of learners, age, and other demographics) is crucial in the construction of effective learning environments.

It follows that chapter 4 logically progresses into what Larson and Lockee summarize as “analyzing the contexts of instruction,” where readers and the authors should situate themselves in thinking about “performance, learning, cultural, and theoretical context” (p. 60-61). This chapter elucidates the “physical, personnel, time, and compatibility with learner needs” traits (p. 66). This highly analytical chapter develops what helps learners and what blocks learners from effective learning. The last half of chapter 4 strategically concept maps all of the classic and contemporary “learning theories” with primary emphasis on thorough explanation of “instructivist, constructivist, and connectivist approaches” (p. 78-80). This portion includes very detailed tables showing points of comparison, contrast, and examples of each within instructional design.

Subsequently, chapter 5 brings together the audience and context to develop what questions and concepts go into content building. What does the instructional designer need to find out about the scope and context of learning and why is this information essential early on for
“streamlined instructional design?” Larson and Lockee want readers to think of this in terms of “identify[ing] the different knowledge, attitudes, skills, and interpersonal skills (KASI) required to enable the learner to competently complete the goals...because the current increased prominence of social learning communities and collaborative learning experiences justifies additional emphasis on interpersonal and social skills” (p. 97). This chapter concentrates on Bloom’s and Gagné’s means of “organizing taxonomies and identifying learning outcomes” (p. 101-102). Chapter 5 shows instructional designers (and readers overall) that one must think about the immersive learning experience being designed. Priorities need constant assessment and affirmation, as they must not become lost, obscured, or misaligned with the objectives and outcomes. It is a good thing to take a step back and look at the growing designs from the perspective of the learner and to collect feedback (p. 112).

Chapter 5 moves seamlessly into discussion of “outcomes” and planned “alignment” in Chapter 6. Using the “learning theories” from chapter 4, Larson and Lockee both demonstrate how to write outcomes and how to align design plans with them. In turn, Larson and Lockee even show how to write better outcomes and bring further alignment in instructional design, keeping in mind this book’s conceptualization as a book for all levels of readers and expertise levels. This chapter’s strength resides in its design, as readers can readily reference the tables/charts to check outcomes written and alignment principles they wish to frame/situate their design in.

After discussion of alignment, it makes sense that Larson and Lockee next venture into assessment in chapter 7. For those who are entering or currently working in instructional design with experience in teaching, a lot of this chapter follows the assessment discussions in K-12 and higher education, but with that said, this book is written for a more inclusive audience and this information is still useful for those in other sectors and industries. This chapter discusses both “diagnostic and alternative assessments” (p. 134-136), such as those provided through portfolios, games, case studies, and more holistic, higher-order Bloom’s means of evaluation (p. 136). Larson and Lockee meticulously seam together pedagogy, outcomes, feedback between learners and instructors, and even delve
into how it is important to consider plagiarism risks and concerns within these assessments (p. 144).

Chapters 8 and 9 ease into what Larson and Lockee subtitle the eighth chapter as and what I felt as a reader to be, “the heart of instructional design.” Chapter 8 expands the dimensions and directions instructional design can venture, with all of the possibilities for establishing ties among learners, instructors, course content, outcomes, forms of assessment; in short, all of these items coming together is likely why it takes almost 180 pages in a “streamlined” discourse to reach this summit. With ease, Larson and Lockee combine Gagne and Keller’s frameworks to develop intuitive yet intricate charts that instructional designers could refer to at any time when they reach a problem or technical element in design. In turn, chapter 9’s discussion of technology options is equally chockfull of means for integration and for meta-commentary on what we want the role of technology to be: used as a means for learning with, not as a delivery channel or as an add-on unconnected to the larger pedagogical plans. In chapter 9, we at last see discussion of the varied forms of technology use (in class, hybrid, online only, mixed modes of presentation) and what questions we need to weigh with each. This chapter ends with ways to obtain and keep up with “emerging technologies” (p. 195 and 198) and how to align them with the classical ID theory (p. 196-197).

The final two chapters of Streamlined ID focus upon organization/flow (Chapter 10) and “producing and implementing” (Chapter 11). The authors effectively argue for looking at the entire process again, whether through reverse construction to make sure all errors and stopgaps are remedied or in the average length of time goes into each set of classes (fully asynchronous, hybrid, etc.). These two chapters convincingly show that no matter how much theory one uses to build, it is essential to go through and consider how things “flow” or are arranged from the users’ perspectives (both as course facilitator and as student-learner). Everything from discussion of copyright to accessibility enters discussion in this final section.

Ultimately, this book exemplifies not only effective instructional design in discourse, but in layout and design of the book itself. Larson’s daughter illustrated the book,
adding a fresher feel in design and a quite effective way of modeling what the sections said about considering all types of learners and audiences. At any time, one could navigate the book to refer to a previous passage or cross-reference, and in turn, when the material started to feel a bit theory-dense/laden or overwhelming in steps, Larson and Locke had a chart, table, or bulleted list right there. In short, the “streamlining” was as much the focus of the arguments concerning instructional design as it was about the meta-discourse of thinking about and discussing of instructional design. Instead of starting only with the theory or the history, Larson and Locke interspersed that information within points in the process where the instructional designers could benefit most from thinking about that information. Instead of having exclusive chapters to copyright and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for instance, Larson and Locke wove them in, as the issues organically would arise during the ID process. They wrote this book as they would hope instructional designers would design: with clarity, mixed forms of delivery, with brevity, and with more than anything, appropriate examples spanning across the disciplines and industries.

In fact, my one true qualm about this book is that even more examples proffered could generate even deeper and more critical points of learning especially for advanced ID professionals, but then again, with “streamlining,” one only needs enough examples to convey the “bigger picture,” something this book does with ease and in a way readers could only but admire. Clearly, Larson and Locke have spent much of their careers deeply engaged in instructional design. In altruism, they have given the industry and the discipline everything they know in a “streamlined” manner through Streamlined ID: A Practical Guide to Instructional Design, a book with lessons to learn and tools to use, regardless if one is a novice or a near expert, a teacher or a trainer, in education or in other industries. In turn, through their writing, they have given a written example of quality design, taking into consideration multiple audiences, disciplines, years of experience, and learning methods.
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Alison Diefenderfer currently serves as an adjunct instructor at several institutions in Pennsylvania, facilitating college-level sociology and anthropology courses, both online and face-to-face. She currently attends a top-five graduate school of education, focusing on educational anthropology and online teaching and learning cultures and environments. She has previously published book reviews in anthropology and education, including in Anthropology & Education Quarterly, and presents at anthropology, teaching and learning, educational innovation, globalization, and cultural studies conferences.

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