

ASTRAL Website and Branding

Case Study

Written by Rudra Sekhri

Supervisors: Prof. Matthew Bailes, Dr. Chris Flynn

ASTRAL is an organisation dedicated to teaching students necessary skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics through the use of research projects and development of applications. This is to help prepare students for workplaces in the future, whether it be research, data science and much more. Modern astrophysics research incorporates many skills that can be applied in separate fields in industry, from data analytics to programming, to design and most importantly teamwork. students have an innate curiosity for the world around them, and we use astronomy to spark creativity within young students while learning these skills.

The essential aim for this project is to create a brand for ASTRAL, which reflects its vision and modernity.

Objectives

The essential aim for this project is to create a brand for ASTRAL, which reflects its vision and modernity. The branding also needed to reflect S.T.E.M (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), either through text or through the logo itself, while also highlighting through symbolism that this is an Australian-based organisation, primarily (but not exclusively) targeted for Australian students.

Moreover, it needed an element of astronomy, as the program does focus on astronomy, and the full name of ASTRAL (Astronomy, Supercomputing, Technology, Research, Analytics, Leadership) also has an element of astronomy. The definition for astral is also indicative of something related to the stars, and hence needs to be shown in some part of the branding.

At the same time, the word "astral" now has many pseudoscientific connotations attached to it, and it's important to distance ourselves from such pseudoscientific claims, organisations and beliefs.

Solution Part 1. The Logo

The logo has been extensively thought out to reflect the values and vision of ASTRAL, while also having a sense of personality to it without feeling too similar to other logos. The logo is featured below.



The logo itself has two sections, the symbol, and the text itself. The colours, the elements present all serve to address the objectives described above.

The Symbol

The symbol on the outside features a 4-pointed star, showcasing the astronomy aspect in the logo. However, to reflect astronomy even further, a simplified diagram of the Southern Cross is also included in the symbol through the white dots present inside the star shape. The Southern Cross is a staple of the Southern Cross, and is usually associated with countries such as Australia and New Zealand, as the Southern Cross is included in their flags. Hence, the Australian (Aussie) nature of the organisation is also shown subtly through the symbol as well.

The Southern Cross has been simplified in this symbol to add as much symmetry to the symbol as possible, and to conform to the shape of the star in which the Southern Cross is shown.

Alternative designs that were voted out by the 2024 cohort for ASTRAL featured the Southern Cross more prominently, but looked very generic and lacked personality. An example is shown below.





Another problem would've arose with this alternative design above, and that is scalability. Logos must be designed such that they can be viewed in both large and small spaces. While the alternative logo above can be viewed in large spaces (such as here), it cannot be viewed effectively in small spaces.

Keeping this also in mind, the above symbol (in purple) was chosen.

The Text

The text was much simpler, but there was great discussion on the font that was eventually chosen. The font that was eventually chosen was Space Mono, a font in which the width of each of the letters is the same, unlike most other fonts. A sample of the font can be seen below.

Space Mono

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG.

ASTRAL

Initially, there were two fonts in discussion, the first being Gugi and the second Space Mono. Gugi was initially favoured because once again, it leaned into the astronomy, science, futuristic aspect of the organisation because of its futuristic font style. A sample can be seen below

Gugi

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPED OVER THE LAZY DOG.

ASTRAL

An example of the ASTRAL purple symbol as well as the Gugi font can be seen below.



Space Mono, on the other hand, was in discussion for a few different reasons. Firstly, the font is reminiscent of fonts used in code editors, allowing the logo as a whole to also address the technological and coding aspect of the organisation as well, rather than simply focusing on the astronomy aspect. Furthermore, Space Mono had two font weights (regular and bold) compared to Gugi's one (regular only), which would be useful later in the website design and development process. Finally, there was some concern about potential readability issues with Gugi, and ultimately, Space Mono was the font chosen.

Colours

A small sample of colours was created by the 2024 cohort based on their personal favourite colours, and these colours ranged from red to yellow to purple and blue. From this initial sample, two colour palettes were created.

The first colour palette consisted of a gradient of orange and yellow shades, along with white and black. The orange and yellow would form accent colours, being a part of the branding of the organisation, while the white and black would be the most used colours throughout the website or any other material produced by ASTRAL. Specifically the following colours were used in this colour palette.



Colours above from left to right: #F58458, #F5B458, #000000, #FFFFFF



Another alternative option (which was eventually chosen) involved a much more “blue” colour selection, with the following colours.



Colours from left to right: #8651F4, #5184F5, #000000, #FFFFFF

The first colour palette was voted out with this colour palette being chosen. However, another reason for this colour palette’s selection is the association between blue and technology. Typically, blue (e.g. blue light) is associated with technology, and this is another reason for its selection.

Moreover, gradients also are associated with a technological, modern organisation, because gradients are only possible through the use of technology.

Therefore, from all the decisions above to fulfill the objectives of making a logo that reflects who we are as ASTRAL, this logo was the final one chosen.



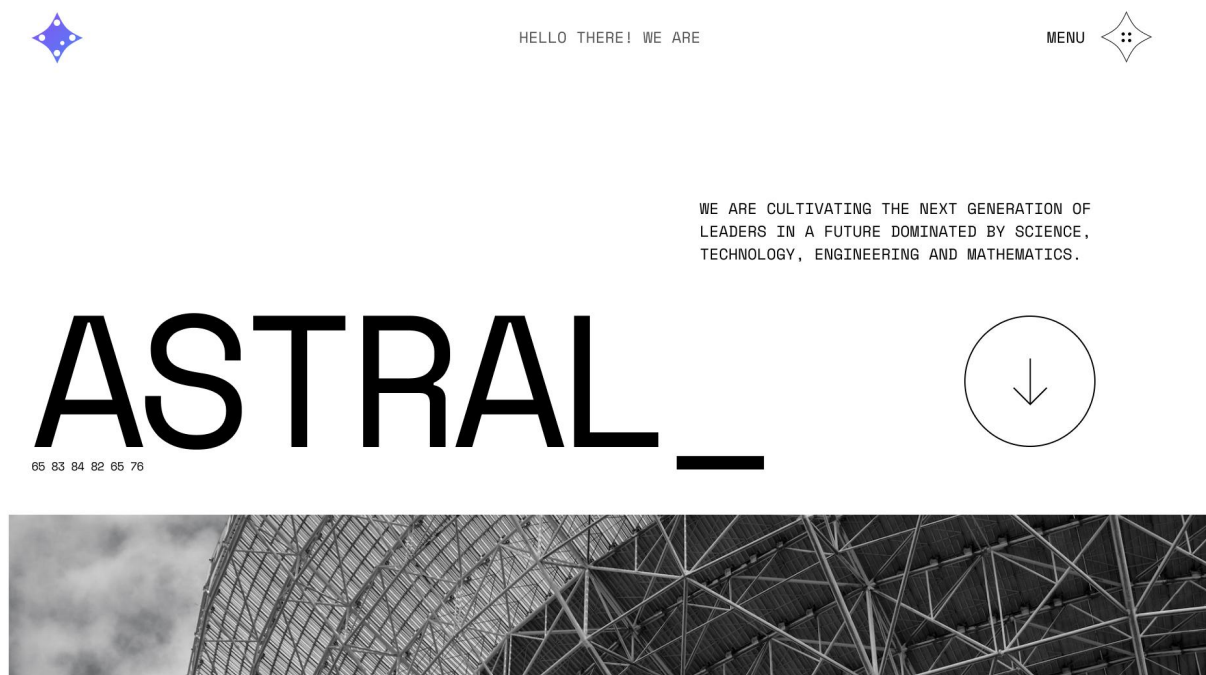
Solution Part 2. The Website

The website also forms an essential part of the branding of any organisation, and for ASTRAL, to portray ourselves as an organisation for the future, and to give this sense of modernity, I decided to create a minimalist, modern web design for our website that caters to both the modern trends and features the web has to offer, but also is usable for everyone.

In this section, we'll discuss the thinking process for some of the elements and sections of the website, but note that this is not an extensive and exhaustive list of every decision made during the design process, but is meant to give a sense of the direction and thought process in which this website was designed.

Homepage Hero Section

The hero section for any given webpage is the topmost section, the first section anyone sees when the webpage has loaded. For the homepage, the design looks as follows.



An older version of the homepage. The image at the bottom of the hero section has now been replaced with an automatically playing video.

This hero section was inspired by the hero section for Capsule Studio, a website that was featured on CSS Design Awards, and the aim with this hero section is to immediately tell users about what our vision is, while also showcasing a modern-looking website.

The video itself serves as another medium not only to showcase our work, but to highlight that we cater for all types of students and people, and for all mediums. Moreover, the video also serves to emphasise the positive experience past students have had with the program, and to inspire up and coming students that if students like us can do it, then so can they.

The big arrow button is for convenience to allow users to quickly and easily travel to the next section on the webpage, which naturally, goes into more detail about why this program was set up, and what ASTRAL is trying to achieve.

Navigation Menu

The website is built on interactivity, something that is very prominent in modern websites, as it allows users to interact with elements in unique and engaging ways. The navigation menu is one such example.

The symbol used (the star like symbol to the right of "menu") is non-standard; typically, instead of that symbol, you have an icon called a "hamburger icon" (an icon with three lines). However, I decided to lean into the personality of ASTRAL and create a unique icon to represent the menu.

Once clicked, links pop up, and the positions of these links are correlated with the position of the mouse cursor, adding a layer of interactivity. This has been tested to ensure that this does not cause a problem to users who might be trying to click on certain links, and has also been tested on small screens to ensure everything works as per usual.



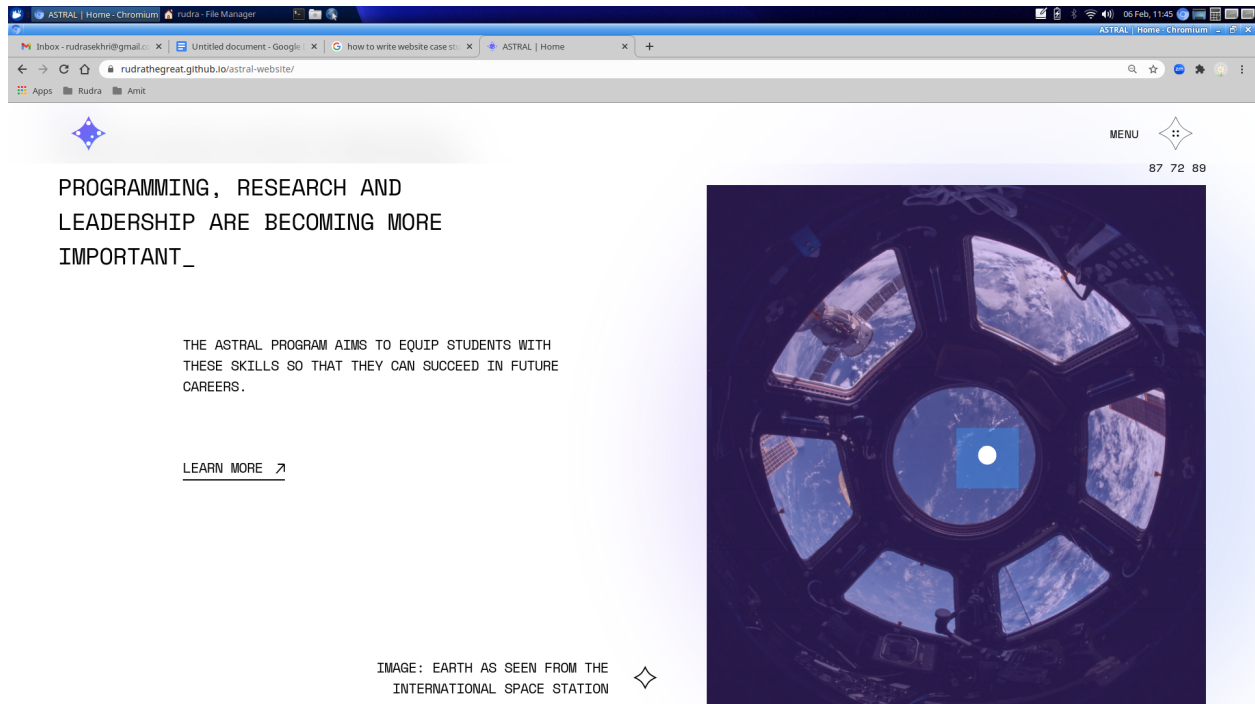
CLOSE 

HOME ABOUT PROJECTS
TEAM COHORT APPLY
CONTACTS FAQs

What the current navigation menu looks like for ASTRAL when you click on the the star to the right hand corner (next to menu)

Static Images

Most static images on the website also have their own interactive effects when users hover over them using their mouse. Static images have this grid of cells on top of them, and when a person hover their mouse on any given cell, that cell lights up. This fun, interactive effect continues to build on the modernity of the website.



A grid of dim purple cells cover the image. When the mouse cursor hovers over one of the cells, the cell lights up and changes colour to blue.

ASTRAL section and Reviews Section

Most modern websites now also include elements that follow the mouse, either on hover, or all the time. For instance, there is the custom cursor (discussed later), the purple and blue blob throughout the website (discussed later) and there are also images.

An entire section has been dedicated to stating what ASTRAL stands for, and for each part of the acronym, there is a separate section. When a person hovers over that section, an image follows them around showcasing some aspect of that part of the acronym. An example is shown below.



ASTROPHYSICS

01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11 12

An image depicting astrophysics following the mouse cursor as the person hovers over "ASTROPHYSICS"

This is once again to add interactivity. The same thing has been done in the reviews section, where an image of the person who provided the review pops up and follows the mouse cursor when the person hovers over their review.

Projects Section

The projects section is also just another section showcasing interactivity. In this case, the interactivity is dragged-based, where a person drags their mouse to see the other projects. Moreover, it allows us to showcase our projects in a much more unique way than just listing them out like on most other websites, adding further personality to the website.

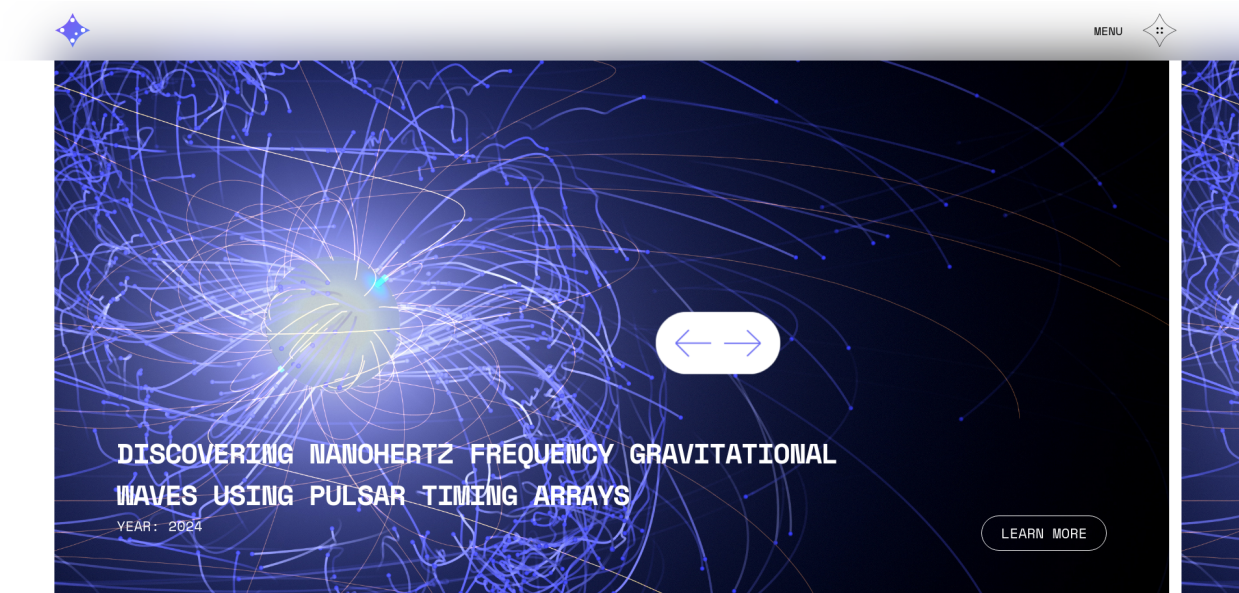
Custom Cursor

Default cursors have always been boring, and most modern websites design their own custom cursors to add personality to their sites. This has become a staple of modern web design and web development, and since we're an organisation dedicated to technology and the future, I also decided to add a custom cursor.

However, this custom cursor wasn't simply going to be a gimmick, but rather a tool that helps users who might be new to modern websites and helps the user understand what they can do.

This custom cursor, for example, tells users that by clicking, they can unmute a video, or view more information about a person, and even give instructions such as the need to click and drag to see the projects listed in the projects section.

Overall, the cursor serves as a guide on the website.



The projects section with an indicator from the mouse cursor that this is a draggable section.

Blob

During the design process, I noticed that the website looked very plain with a white background. After multiple discussions with the rest of the 2024 cohort, an idea popped up. What if there was a blob that follows your mouse cursor? This blob, which is extremely diffuse, but also large, serves two roles. The first is to fill out some of the empty space on the website and make it feel less empty. The second is to act as a second layer of interactivity on the website. It also aims to add a slight bit of colour that would otherwise be lacking on the website.

Glass-Look

Some sections have a glass-look to them. This is referred to as glass-morphism, a web design trend where developers add a glass look (typically frosted glass look) to their user interface. This was first introduced by Apple in their iOS system and has been a staple of modern web design



since. I decided to add glass-like elements to the website to make the site feel modern, but also to add some dynamics to the website and make it feel less plain and static.

ASCII

You might have noticed weird numbers underneath headings, and these are actually certain "easter eggs" written in ASCII. ASCII is a form of low-level computer code, and it's main aim is to not only add personality to the website, but also to address the technology aspect of the organisation.

Glitch Text Effect

When you hover over certain headings, the heading itself might "glitch". Again, the purpose is fairly simple - to add to the interactivity of the website and to also reflect technology in the organisation.

Results

The results are very obvious, the website is up and running currently on <https://rudrathegreat.github.io/astral-website>

The website currently works on all devices, however, there may be small bugs that appear from time to time. Current development is focusing on fixing the mechanics of the projects section and making it smoother and easier.

Credits

Logo designed by Rudra Sekhri

Website designed by Rudra Sekhri

Website developed by Rudra Sekhri

Video (has not been uploaded yet) created by Evie Spilias.



Thank you to Hendrik Combrinck for his support in testing the website during the initial stages of deployment on the test environment. Thank you to Ruoyao, Evie, Rebecca and Hendrik for providing their reviews of the ASTRAL program to the website. Thank you to Dr. Chris Flynn and Prof. Matthew Bailes for supervising this project. This project is funded by ASTRAL.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this website was developed, the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging and recognise their deep connection with the land, sea and sky.

Last updated: 6th February 2024