

Syllabus--English 391—Advanced Software for Professional Writing—Spring 2012

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Overview

What does it mean to be a professional and technical writer in today's world? What new writing technologies do writers need to be competent with in order to effectively engage in modern communication? And how can writers find a balance between rhetorical and technical skill to create a professional online presence? These are some of the larger questions we will explore throughout the semester.

With the development of Web 2.0, the WWW has moved from a static model to a dynamic and interactive one. Blogs, apps, wikis, youtube and data-base driven websites all signal a potentially more democratic online world where users post their own content using "free" services based on database technology. In the process, the design of websites has changed too and there has been a proliferation of website genres to accompany it. For the purposes of this course, our goal is to first develop an awareness of these different genres and conventions, and then design an online portfolio that reflects this understanding and showcases the work you have completed in the PWTC program at UMass Amherst.

Thus you have two missions for this course: One, demonstrate an awareness of web genres and the rhetorical and design practices that each exhibit; and two, demonstrate your proficiency with digital writing software by building an effective online portfolio as well as a prototype website for a company or nonprofit. In addition, you will also be expected to share and articulate your understanding of web design by presenting your work to your classmates.

Course Text

The Principles of Beautiful Web Design—Jason Beard, Sitepoint Press, Second Edition, 2009. Available at Amherst Books.

Major Components of the Course

1. Portfolio

Content Expectations:

- Purpose of your site—how do you want to welcome visitors to your site? How will they know this is a portfolio? What kind of persona do you want to project?
- Who is your audience? Are you designing with them in mind? What kinds of content will they be expecting to see?
 - an explanation of your theories/ideas of good visual/technical design.
 - discuss and/or summarize what you've learned from ENGL 381 and 382. Consider adding links to websites about graphic design and other sites you have deemed worthy to share.
 - career aspirations and professional goals--veterans of ENGL 379 might copy and paste from the cover letter you wrote last semester.
- Will you have any interactive elements (a blog, a contact page)?
- A polished and updated resume in both HTML and PDF.

- Appropriate work from other college and writing courses. PWTC students may include their grant proposal from ENGL 379, your MS Word Manual from 380, your Robohelp and Framemaker projects and any other relevant material you feel represent your best work.

Design/Technical Expectations:

- Does the portfolio/proto site effectively showing both design and technical skill?
- Is the navigation clear, functional and intuitive?
- Does the portfolio demonstrate a knowledge of color theory?
- Do the use of images and graphics show competence in visual rhetoric?
- Is Flash incorporated effectively (a subtle animation, a drop down menu, a photo album)?
- Is the site architecture designed well?
- Is the site html and css valid by W3C standards? Does it consider accessibility issues?

* Students not enrolled in the PWTC program will have to meet with me to see what we can substitute for writing examples and other content.

2. Proto-site for a company or non-profit

Following the same content questions above, your proto-site should demonstrate both the rhetorical and technical conventions that currently define the site genre you are building.

3. Progress Reports and Presentation

Progress Reports

You will give two progress reports in class on your work. The use of PowerPoint or other presentation software will be useful here. In both cases you will be expected to apply technical and design concepts in the description of your work.

These progress reports should outline where you have been and where you are going. You may discuss design decisions, technical problems, and you may conclude by soliciting advice and suggestions from your peers. Speak for about five minutes, and allow three minutes for questions and suggestions from the audience. Make sure you are taking screen captures throughout your design process so you can share your site development with the class.

On the days of your presentation you will submit to me a progress report of your work. The report should be one page, single spaced, written in memo format. You should also include a site map that shows the developing structure of your proto-site. More details will be given later in class.

Presentation

Each student will be asked to present to the class one online resource they have found to be useful for their own developing web design skills.

4. Tutorials and assignments

Throughout the semester you will be assigned tutorials and other assignments. All tutorials and assignments will be given due dates and are expected to be completed on time. Most will be based on a (√+, √, √-) scale. Assignments will be assessed by the following criteria:

- timely completion
- depth of engagement with readings
- technical skills

- visual interest—page layout and design
- quality of content

Late assignments will be penalized. A central assignment that will be given more weight will be an in-depth analysis of two websites of your choosing. Most work will be posted online on your allotted UMass server space to share with others in the course.

5. Attendance and participation

You are allowed two absences for the semester. Every absence beyond that will result in a lowering of your final grade by half a letter grade (A becomes A-, B+ becomes a B and so on.) If you miss six or more class periods you will be required to drop the course. Being prepared and active in class discussion is expected and will be taken into consideration for the final grade. Excessive tardiness will be noted.

Grading:

attendance and participation	10%
tutorials and assignments	15%
progress reports and presentations	45%
portfolio at end of term	30%