

**University of Washington  
Department of Communication**

**Winter 2008  
COM 585: Message Design & Content Creation**

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**Dates: 8 January – 21 March  
Time: Tuesday, 6 pm  
Classroom: CMU 302**

**Instructor: Kathy E. Gill  
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***1. Course Overview***  
**Description**

This course focuses on digital content planning, creation, management and deployment. The course focuses on the work that begins before words are written or images are shot – the planning that is essential to successful communication. “Know your audience” is more than an axiom: it is essential advice for developing effective, efficient, and profitable web sites (“web sites” will be used as a shorthand for the various forms of digital communication).

This course introduces the terminology, history and evolution of web design and the use of hypertext; provides an overview of effective web page design and efficient site architecture; introduces project management techniques needed to organize digital assets, allocate resources, and meet deadlines. Covers the identification, creation and evaluation of message design to meet needs of the target customers.

For sites to be effective in meeting business and user goals, they must be based upon principles from visual design, rhetoric, usability research, and information architecture. This course incorporates principles and ideas from visual design and information architecture. However, rhetorical concepts are the focus of later courses.

The course is structured like a workshop or seminar; each class member is responsible for formally and informally contributing to discussion of readings, activities and assignments.

**Learning Outcomes**

- Analyze and create key communications deliverables needed for effective digital project management
- Build fluency in web-based communication by examining roles played by writers,

owners and users of web sites.

- Identify different roles on a typical Web team
- Identify the website genres and website navigational structures
- Describe the purpose and organization of a typical home page
- Analyze and create personas to help guide design decisions
- Create wireframes, storyboards and navigation flowcharts
- Select appropriate graphics formats and understand issues related to color and typography

### **Student Responsibilities**

- Be prepared for class; have reading and assignments done on time
- Spend time outside of class working on readings, projects, and correspondence
- Participate in active learning inside and outside of class (in other words, both on-line and face-to-face). That means asking questions, helping classmates answer questions, and working with one another to solve problems.
- Regardless of your experience with design or project management at the start of the class, I expect you to challenge yourself so that your skills are greater at the end of the quarter than at the start.

### **Course Requirements**

Required readings include book chapters and articles from scholarly journals, trade magazines and popular publications. Assigned readings may be found through the library's eReserve system.

### **Required Books:**

- Communicating Design. Dan Brown. New Riders (2007)
- About Face 3. Alan Cooper et al. Wiley (2007)

### **Recommended Book:**

- Designing Interactions. Bill Moggridge. MIT (2007)
- Design of Everyday Things. Don Norman. Currency (1990, paper)

**Students must have a working UW e-mail address and check mail regularly.**

Internet access is required. Basic computer literacy is required.

## ***II. Course Structure and Teaching Strategies***

Teaching methods for this course will include lectures, demonstrations, student presentations, guest lecturers, reading, and writing assignments. The class functions more like a workshop than a traditional lecture-driven survey course. Students will have the chance to explore topics of interest in their projects and writings.

Classes may feature a guest lecturer who is a leading professional or scholar in digital

media. Class discussions are a key element of the course, and students are encouraged to ask questions, offer their own observations, and share their own experiences with new technology.

The course instructor will coordinate all class material, keep in close touch with each student in order to assess and meet individual needs, and evaluate all course assignments. Communication outside of class will be via a class mailing list; students must have a working e-mail address. All material is available on the class web site:

<http://com585.wordpress.com/>

### **Instructor's Educational Philosophy**

My goal is to provide a stimulating environment for learning. Course material includes both theory and application, with an emphasis on application to real world problems and situations. Written and oral reports are required because these skills are needed in the work environment in general, and in web development, management, and consulting in particular. Students are required to comment and collaborate as these are practical skills; the means used demonstrates theories and technologies explored in class.

### **Schedule**

Subject to change. Authoritative schedule available on the class website.

- **Week 1: Course Overview/The Challenge of Design**
- **Week 2: User-Centered Design**
- **Week 3: Web Site Genres**
- **Week 4: Conceptual Models**
- **Week 5: Task Identification**
- **Week 6: Competitive Analysis**
- **Week 7: Personas and Audience Analysis**
- **Week 8: Color and Typography**
- **Week 9: No Class**
- **Week 10: Sitemaps, Wireframes and Storyboards**
- **Week 11: Wrap-Up**

### ***III. Evaluation***

There are no exams in this course; instead, there are several assignments.

Your grade for this class will be based on a possible total of 1000 points; your score will be directly translated into the 4.0 scale. Participation in the class and lab discussions will count towards your final grade. Regular attendance, contributions to the discussion of themes, and engagement and leadership in class exercises will result in a high participation

grade.

Assignments will be turned in via Catalyst Collect-It or on your blog. We will create blogs at WordPress.com. Students with work or family conflicts should make arrangements with the instructor before missing class or an assignment. Late assignments policy varies per assignment.

Grades are determined as follows:

Assignment	Points
Weekly Blog Posts (reading review)	150
Discussion Leader (once in the quarter)	100
Group Project	150
Four assignments	400
Final essay	100
Participation	100

### 1. Weekly Blog Posts – 150 points

Students will create a **blog** (on WordPress.com) where they will reflect (not summarize!) on **each week's readings**. Students are asked to write about the readings to help gain cognitive understanding of material as well as to hone analytical skills. Weekly reading assignments are not graded, except for completeness. Be sure to check your spelling and grammar, however!

- These are *short* (two-four paragraphs) reviews of assigned readings. Each post must also include three (3) discussion questions about the assigned readings. Length: 250-350 words + questions.
- Each regular weekly reading must be categorized "reading". Each extra credit reading should be categorized "extra credit".
- These posts are due Tuesday at 9 am. No late posts accepted.
- Points assigned per the following list: you do not get extra points by providing both a summary and a reflection! The maximum number of points per week is 13; these will be scaled to account for 15% of the final grade.
  - Reflection within minimum-maximum word count - 10 points
  - Reflection over-or-under word count by more than 5% or with significant grammatical errors- 7 points

- Reading summary (summary instead of reflection) within minimum-maximum word count - 5 points
- Reading summary (summary instead of reflection) over-or-under word count by more than 5% or with significant grammatical errors - 1 point
- Two-Three open-ended discussion questions - 3 points
- One open-ended discussion question – 1 point
- Closed-ended discussion questions - 0 points

## **2. Leading Discussion – 100 points**

Each student will serve **as discussion leader** once, by being assigned to a class session. (Students may swap sessions – make arrangements amongst yourselves and then advise me.)

Leading discussion involves actively engaging class members in a discussion of the topic of the day as it relates to a reading you have identified. Be sure to elicit class member participation through questions or activities. Part of your participation grade is determined by how much you, as a class member, participate in weekly discussions.

Each student will select an outside **scholarly** article that elaborates on the week's general topic. Please use ACM, Lexis-Nexis, ProQuest or another academic database as your source. It is your responsibility to show how your selection relates to that week's topic and readings.

Each student will have 15-20 minutes to relate one reading to the weekly reading(s) and the course material; there will be additional time to engage your classmates in discussion. Be as creative as you'd like to be when presenting your information. You **must** create a Powerpoint presentation, upload it to Slideshare.net, and link it to your student blog.

There are two posts required; no late posts accepted.

- (1) Before class, you must post an abstract (including correct APA citation). The post should also link to your Powerpoint presentation on Slideshare.net and any outside source material (such as YouTube files or web site examples) that you use in the presentation.
- (2) You must also post a reflection on the experience to your blog by 5 pm on Friday the week that you are responsible for leading discussion. You must categorize both posts "Discussion Leader."

## **3. Group Project – 150 points**

TBD

The class will be one team and will develop a project outline and statement of deliverables. The team will make presentations/reports as the quarter progresses, culminating in a final presentation, which will include storyboards. Team members will summarize their lessons learned, which will include an analysis of each team member's contributions to the project. Much – but not all – of the team's collaboration time can be accomplished during the last hour of each class.

Required deliverables (see project deliverables detailed document)

- Project description
- Site map
- Wireframes
- Presentation material

#### **4. Essays/Assignments – 500 points**

There are five essays/assignments.

Each essay will be given a "points/no points" grade based upon its meeting minimum requirements (subject matter, word count, turned in on time). Two will receive a letter grade, one of your choice (you will write a short paragraph explaining why you selected this assignment) and one of the remaining three selected at random.

The last assigned essay is a reflection on your learnings in the course. It substitutes for a final exam and will be due finals week. No late assignments accepted.

#### **5. Participation – 150 points**

Students are expected to attend all classes and are responsible for completing all course material on deadline. You must e-mail me if you miss class because of illness or emergency. This communication is part of your class participation. Moreover, rather than ask me what happened while you were away, you should also check the course blog as well as talk to your classmates to “see what you missed.” In-class assignments cannot be made up except by arrangement.

There are many ways to participate in the class. This is a safe environment, where students can try new ways of engaging in discussion and learning with others. Discussion about readings and other class material will be conducted seminar-style, that is, with an exchange of questions, explanations and viewpoints about readings and key ideas.

- Provide substantive comment (150-200 words) on a on peer member blog post (reading reflection) at least four times during the quarter (two in the first half of the quarter and two in the second half — this is in addition any assigned comments). Students must send an e-mail to the instructor no later than 12

March detailing these four comments.

- Contribute to in-class activities and discussions
- Complete in-class assignments

#### ***IV. Course Policies***

By becoming a member of this class, you agree to abide by these rules and any other policies not explicitly stated here that are detailed in the UW Student Conduct Handbook.

##### **Absences**

You are responsible for all assigned readings and materials presented in class lectures. You should be aware that missing class could adversely affect your performance on assignments and homework. It is your responsibility to obtain all materials missed by working with other students (do not expect the professor to provide this information). It is also your responsibility to complete all assignments, even if you missed the class where the assignment was made. Material is available online.

##### **Academic Honesty**

You are expected to produce original work and properly cite the thoughts and works of others. All sources must be properly cited; just because information can be found online does not mean it is exempt from citations! Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and are not tolerated by the University. For more information, please refer to the University's Academic Honesty policy.

##### **Assignments**

All work must be completed on time. Late submissions will not be accepted, except with advance notice of extenuating circumstances (sudden illness, death in the family, and so forth). Errors (facts, spelling and grammar) will result in a reduced grade. You are expected to produce original work and properly cite the thoughts and works of others. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and are not tolerated by the University. For more information, please refer to the University's Academic Honesty policy.

##### **Classroom Environment**

Students and faculty are responsible for creating a good learning environment. We will use computing technology in the classroom during labs; specific uses of computing technology will be announced in advance with detailed instructions.

Students may use laptops or other portable devices for taking notes. However, these portable devices should not be used to engage in non-classroom activities, such as surfing the Net, checking e-mail, playing games or listening to music. These activities would certainly divert your attention away from class and could distract other students as well, thus corrupting the learning environment. I reserve the right to end your use of a portable

device, ask you to move, or revoke the privilege of using wireless devices in the classroom.

During class breaks, students may use portable computing devices or lab computers for personal use as long as they respect other class members. Material visible on the computing device should not be offensive or incendiary. Any music played during breaks should be at a level conducive to classroom civility.

**Courteous Discourse**

Whether in class or online, students are expected to conduct themselves with professional courtesy and decorum. Please make constructive comments; flames and insults are not acceptable. Disagree with the idea, not the person!

**Incompletes**

The instructor will not give incompletes except under exceptional circumstances

## Assignment 1

Identify five different websites that will form the basis of much of your analysis this quarter. There should be one from each of these genres:

- an e-commerce web site (must have online ordering)
- a government web site
- a media web site
- an entertainment web site (such as for a movie)
- a social networking site

Include the following information for each site:

- Site name and URL
- Genre (from above list)
- Site description
- Audience (your deduction)
- Business/Site Goals (your deduction)
- Homepage screenshot

On your Wordpress blog, create a page entitled Course Deliverables. This page will serve as the "table of contents" that links to your assignments. Create a page for each of the five websites; its parent page should be the Course Deliverables page. The page title should be the name of the website. Be sure to then list and link each website on the Course Deliverables page in a section/paragraph called Assignment 1.

### **Due 9 am Tuesday, 22 January (Week 3)**

Graded on completeness; late assignments not accepted.

Total points: 100

## Assignment 2

For each of the websites, develop five possible user tasks.

On your Wordpress blog, create a page for this assignment; its parent page should be the Course Deliverables page. List each website from Assignment 1; provide a link to your summary page as well as to the site URL, followed by your narrative. Be sure to link this page on the Course Deliverables page in a section/paragraph called Assignment 2.

### **Due 9 am Tuesday, 5 February (Week 5)**

Graded on completeness; late assignments not accepted.

Total points: 100

### **Assignment 3**

Revisit the tasks you identified in Assignment 2. Revise, making them more precise. In addition, find at least three user tasks that you believe should have been considered in the design (but which you believe were not considered). Elaborate on why you think they are important and how you made the judgment that they were ignored.

Pick one genre for more in-depth analysis. Pick two other examples from other students in the class. What are the similarities in tasks in these three websites? What are the differences? How effective are these three websites at helping users accomplish their tasks? Give evidence for your judgment, based upon identified (by you or other students) user tasks.

On your Wordpress blog, create a page for this assignment; its parent page should be the Course Deliverables page. For part one, list each website from Assignment 1; provide a link to your summary page as well as to the site URL, followed by your narrative. For part two, list each website and provide a link to the appropriate student summary as well as to the site URL, followed by your narrative. Be sure to link this page on the Course Deliverables page in a section/paragraph called Assignment 3.

#### **Due 9 am Tuesday, 19 February (Week 7)**

Graded on completeness and quality of analysis; late assignments not accepted.

Total points: 100

### **Assignment 4**

Pick one genre for more in-depth aesthetic analysis. Pick two other examples from other students in the class. What are the similarities in visual design in these three websites? What are the differences? How effective is the visual design? Give evidence for your judgment.

On your Wordpress blog, create a page for this assignment; its parent page should be the Course Deliverables page. List each website and provide a link to the appropriate student summary as well as to the site URL, followed by your narrative. Be sure to link this page on the Course Deliverables page in a section/paragraph called Assignment 4.

#### **Due 9 am Tuesday, 4 March (Week 9)**

Graded on completeness and quality of analysis; late assignments not accepted.

Total points: 100

## **Assignment 5**

This, the final assignment, substitutes for a final exam. In this essay, you should reflect upon what you have learned in the course; give examples (evidence!); illustrate how your thinking changed or detail other "ah-ha" moments. How will you apply this learning?  
600-800 words.

**Due, via Collect-It, 9 am Thursday, 20 March (Week 11 – Finals Week)**

Graded on quality of insight and analysis, grammar, spelling, general professionalism;  
late assignments not accepted.

Total points: 100