

# English 428: Writing Computer Documentation

Fall 2005  
5:30-6:45 TTh  
312 Pray Harold (Mac Lab)

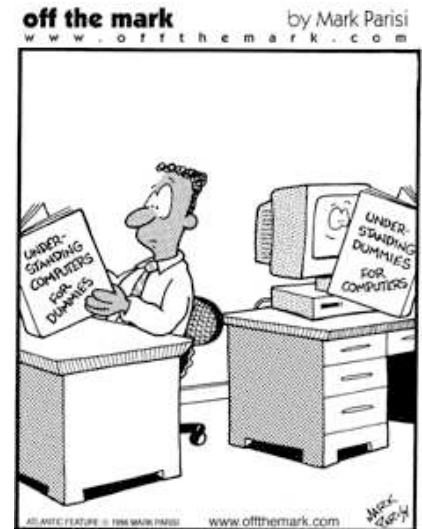
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## NATURE OF THIS COURSE

Writing Computer Documentation is a special course designed to prepare students for writing assignments found in the workplace, especially instructions and documentation. Some people who take this course may be primarily interested in the computer industry; others are rounding out their writing knowledge and skills. Both groups are important to the success of this course, and each has a contribution to make.

This course will prepare you to write as a professional by introducing you to:

- current thinking about how users interact with technology
- strategies for developing documents to meet users' needs
- methods for evaluating documentation
- principles concerning the visual design of meaning
- a range of communications common in the workplace



## TEXTS

Barker, Thomas T. *Writing Software Documentation: A Task Oriented Approach*. 2nd Ed. Allyn & Bacon, 2003.  
(Should be available at all stores)

Batschelet, Margaret W. *Web Writing / Web Designing*. Allyn & Bacon, 2001.

For reference: Barnum, Carol M. *Usability Testing and Research*. Allyn & Bacon, 2002.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

- 1. Understanding users' needs:** You will develop your skills at identifying users of a product and their critical needs, preparing documents that can be evaluated, and evaluating a document's success for its users.
- 2. Developing document design skills:** You will learn to research, create, and select appropriate content for various types of documents, use visual dimensions of meaning in your documents, and control various design elements.
- 3. Increasing professional writing knowledge:** You will develop your skill at managing complex projects, working in groups, and adjusting to projects that change during development. The overlapping project schedule will provide experience with project management. You will also increase your ability to write procedural texts and reports appropriate to particular projects.
- 4. Practicing communication skills:** You will develop your skill at presenting your ideas to others in writing and in person, adhering carefully to professional conventions. You will also increase your skills for working collaboratively with coworkers.
- 5. Growing professionally:** You will increase your familiarity with writing done in industry and will produce portfolio quality work.

## **CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENTS**

This class meets in 312 Pray Harold, the English Department's Macintosh classroom. This is a networked classroom designed to facilitate collaborative work. Respect for all network participants and classroom equipment is, of course, expected. Food and drink may be on the tables in the discussion area, but they are not allowed on the computer tables.

## **GRADING, ATTENDANCE, AND COURSE PARTICIPATION**

Writing courses are designed to use class time to develop your knowledge and skills as well as to provide a place where you can learn through interacting with other writers. Class attendance is essential. You will be expected to attend class and to prepare planning, drafts, and documents according to established time schedules. If you cannot attend class, you will need to write me a memo explaining the reason for your absence and what you will do to make up missed work. More than two absences will affect your final grade. You will be responsible for collecting any notes or handouts for missed class time.

You will be expected to contribute in substantial ways to class projects and discussions as well as to be accountable for your individual work. In addition to the major documents for class projects, you will be producing other related writing for each project. This writing includes an informal proposal and participation in discussions over email.

Save ALL your work. Grades will be based on a portfolio prepared at the end of the semester for which you will select examples of work you have done. Your purpose will be to illustrate how well you have learned and can apply the principles and skills in this course. Each of the major projects should be represented; work from a project may be used to illustrate more than one point. Your work on the various projects for the course will contribute to your final grade in approximately the following proportions:

Traditional tutorial (includes informal proposal) (in pairs)	15 %
Digital documents (HTML, etc.) (individual)	25
Usability study (small group)	25
Portfolio design and presentation	20
Extra project (for grad students as agreed upon with instructor)	Req. for grad. credit
Attendance, participation, collaboration, email	15

I will provide feedback and suggestions on your work throughout the semester, as will classmates in critique sessions, but official grades will be determined when the final portfolio is prepared. This means you will have time to revise your projects after receiving comments. If you wish, I will be happy to meet with you during the semester to talk about your progress and estimated grade to that point. A grade issues at the end of the term is similar to a 6-month evaluation on the job.

## **SEMESTER CALENDAR**

Dates (approximate)	Class Focus
Sept. 8 – 15	Principles of writing documentation.
Sept. 20 – Oct. 13	Tutorial documentation: includes informal proposal & tutorial.
Oct. 6 – Nov. 18	Digital documents (web site, etc.). Work continues through much of semester; includes various tasks and writing abilities.
Oct. 13 – Dec. 3	Usability study: work overlaps with other projects and will include various documents and skills.
Nov. 20 - Dec. 13	Portfolio design and presentation.

See the course website:

<http://benninghoff.emich.edu/428F05/>