

ENC 3416: New Media for Technical Communication

Lauren Cagle
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University of South Florida

cagle@mail.usf.edu
Office: CPR 301K
Office Hours: M 11-12; W 12:30-2:30

Contacting Me

Canvas messaging is the very best way to contact me. I also love chatting during office hours, so feel free to drop in. If need be, you can also email me at cagle@mail.usf.edu.

My **guarantee** to you is that I'll answer any messages Monday through Friday within 24 hours. Any messages sent over the weekend, I'll answer the following Monday.

My **request** for you is that you check the syllabus and other course materials for answers to any questions before you email me. Of course, please feel free to email for clarification if you do find the answer, but need more explanation.

Course Description

Many technical communicators working with new media work in user experience, a field with as many definitions as sub-specialties. For our purposes, you can start by thinking of usability as focused on the interfaces where people and designed objects come into contact with each other. More specifically, usability raises the question of what kinds of experiences result from that contact, with an eye towards creating good experiences for people (or “users,” in the usability parlance). Usability is a discipline that can be applied to any designed object, from road signs to gym equipment to paint chips at Home Depot. In the realm of new media, technical communicators are usually called upon to assess usability of software and websites (the distinction between which is increasingly blurry in the world of Web 2.0+).

New media is a contested term; some would even call it outdated as the march of technology means that media is forever new. The internet of things, increasing social media integration, and as-yet-undreamed-of (or at least unfunded) technologies all suggest that the ground of new media is shifting under our feet even as we speak.

In this course, we will spend some time grappling with the term *new media* in an attempt to understand and define it. The term is elusive, so we will settle for developing a working definition. The majority of the course is production-oriented, so this theoretical work will be in service of understanding how to analyze, assess, and evaluate new media using the principles and methods of usability and user experience testing and reporting.

ENC 3416 will expose you to some types of writing and other work you might be called on to do as a technical communicator supporting new media development, as well as some new media tools you can expect to use and/or understand to do this work.

As an introduction, this course relies on a survey, rather than in-depth, approach. My hope is that you will walk away with a clearer understanding of how new media systems and objects get made

and improved. Based on that understanding, you will have the basic knowledge you need to continue pursuing what you find most interesting and compelling about usability.

This introduction to new media development and production relies on framing new media in ways that are relevant to technical communication. For example, we can approach new media as:

- writing and making for technology-driven industries (e.g., software development, health care, engineering)
- writing and making in technology-oriented positions (e.g. business or computer systems analyst, technical writer, information architect)
- writing and making with new technologies (e.g., Help authoring tools, Darwinian Information Typing Architecture/XML, HTML5/CSS3, app development tools)
- writing and making to facilitate the creation and development of new technologies (e.g., user personas, wireframes, test plans, usability testing and reporting, quality assurance, interface design)

We will adopt all four perspectives in this class, as they are frequently inextricable in the actual work done by technical communicators.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, you'll be able to:

- Provide working definition of new media and user experience
- Understand and describe the role of usability in new media development
- Write documents relevant to usability testing and reporting
- Understand and describe the concept of usability and the technical communicator's role in implementing usability principles
- Recommend new media object designs that are competently executed and rhetorically effective
- Apply focused strategies to learning independently about new media technologies and related technical communication

To achieve the course objectives, you will:

- Read about and discuss concepts of new media and the role of rhetoric in new media
- Read about and discuss theories of usability
- Identify and research new media users
- Write usability testing documents
- Compose usability reports
- Analyze new media objects as manifestations of usability theories and practices
- Compose technical documentation that supports new media production
- Present research showcasing independent learning about new media technologies and documentation practices

Course Requirements

This semester, you are required to complete the following assignments:

1. TechWhirl Presentation (5%)

At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up for the TECHWR-L listserv, which features over 2500 technical communicators discussing their work, asking questions, and debating issues ranging from choice of technology to defining the field. I expect you to scan this listserv weekly to get a sense of what technical communicators' jobs currently look like and to find out what technologies and expertise are relevant to the field. During the semester, you will select one technical topic being discussed on the listserv and conduct independent research on that topic in order to understand it and its applications to technical communication work. You will present your research findings in a 5-minute, in-class presentation. You will also create a hand-out summarizing your findings. At the end of the semester, you'll have a collection of hand-outs from your classmates, giving you a set of quick reference guides to some of the topics that are likely to come up as you continue your educational and professional career in technical communication.

2. Midterm Exam (10%)

During Week 8 of the semester, you will complete a 1-hour midterm exam in class. This exam will consist of a combination of questions, short answers, and essays. It will cover the topics and concepts we have addressed to this point in the course, drawn from textbook readings, PDF readings, class discussions, and TechWhirl presentations.

3. Participation (10%)

Your active participation is crucial to effective learning for everyone involved. Therefore, active and meaningful participation is required.

Active and meaningful participation means that you are invested in the course, in your classmates, your course work, and your education. It means that you complete the readings and come to class prepared to discuss and apply them. It means that you find ways to connect the work to your own interests, rather than relying on others to make connections for you. It means that you collaborate with others and strive not to be the "dead weight" on a team. It means that you spend time and brainpower on the work we're doing.

If you do not attend class, you cannot participate. If you give the minimum effort to every assignment, you are not participating. And if you talk about readings you have not read, I will be saddened by the lack of respect you are showing to the material and to your colleagues.

For every class meeting, I will assign a participation grade. If you miss class, you cannot make up the participation grade. If you miss class for university-sanctioned reason, I will drop that participation grade from your total.

As an instructor, I strive to provide opportunities for you to learn and engage in ways that are valuable to you now and in the future. I will work with you all semester in support of your learning and your work.

But please remember: Ultimately, you are responsible for your education.

4. Minor Assignments (20%)

Throughout the semester, you will complete minor assignments both in and out of class. These include small exercises intended to support your engagement with the readings and your major MyReviewers Usability Testing Project.

5. MyReviewers Usability Project (55%)

In the course's major assignment, you will work with a team of 3-4 fellow new media-ites to test and document the usability of a major software system: MyReviewers. This assignment will give you hands-on experience with testing and documentation that will give you better insight into the readings and discussion of various development and usability theories. The MyReviewers Usability Project consists of the following four deliverables, which we will discuss in detail throughout the semester:

1. *Test Plan (15%)*
2. *Deliverable-of-Your-Choice (15%)*
3. *Client Presentation (5%)*
4. *Findings and Recommendations Report (20%)*

ANOTHER NOTE: There is no final exam for this course. Your Findings and Recommendations Report will be due during exam week.

Course Materials

There are three required books. You're welcome to purchase them online, and I've supplied the ISBNs below to facilitate that. I will also supply readings occasionally online or in PDF format.

1. *Usable Usability*
Eric Reiss
ISBN-13: 978-1118185476
2. *Don't Make Me Think (3rd edition)*
Steve Krug
ISBN-13: 978-0321965516
3. *Team Writing: A Guide to Working in Groups*
Joanna Wolfe
ISBN-13: 978-0312565824

Disability Services & Accessibility

The course content consists mostly of text. There are, however, some visuals, and I may post links to video. I am committed to making all course materials as accessible as possible, so plan to post image descriptions and video transcripts. If I leave out alt-text, or if I can contribute in

other ways to making this course as accessible as possible, please let me know. I am happy to take extra steps to ensure accessibility for all students.

Students in need of academic accommodations for a disability may consult with the office of Students with Disabilities Services to arrange appropriate accommodations. Students are required to give reasonable notice prior to requesting an accommodation. Students may request accommodations at any point during the semester. As accommodations are retroactive, any grades earned before a student requests accommodations will stand. Each student must bring a current Memorandum of Accommodations from the Office of Student Disability Services that is prerequisite for receiving accommodations. Accommodated examinations through the Office of Student Disability Services require two weeks' notice. All course documents are available in alternate format if requested in the students' Memorandum of Accommodations (see [faculty responsibilities](http://www.asasd.usf.edu/faculty.asp) [http://www.asasd.usf.edu/faculty.asp]).

Attendance

This is an upper-level course in the major. By this point, you are a seasoned and mature college student. As such, you are expected to attend every class. If you miss a class, the penalty is the loss of the participation grade for that class. If you miss more than three classes, you will lose a partial letter grade from your final grade (e.g. an A- in the course becomes a B+).

I will grant exceptions to this penalty and drop missed participation grades from your final grades only in cases of university-sanctioned absences (see the university policy: <http://www.ugs.usf.edu/policy/GeneralAttendance.pdf>). Other than university-sanctioned absences, I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. It does not matter why you miss class; everybody gets three absences for whatever reason.

If you anticipate needing to miss class, please get in touch with me as early as possible to discuss the possibility of dropping any missed participation grades. I am much less likely to drop grades if you wait until after the absence to talk to me.

Turning In Work & Late Policy

All work will be submitted through Canvas unless specifically noted otherwise. I **will not** accept work that has been emailed to me.

I **do not** accept late work without an approved extension. Particularly when you're providing work for your fellow writers to review or when you're reviewing their work, you'll come to appreciate timeliness. If your work isn't in on time, then the writers that you're having a conversation with about writing can't respond in time. And then we're all sad. So please turn your work in on time.

That being said, unusual circumstances such as hospital stays and bereavement do arise. Please be in touch with me as early as possible if you unfortunately encounter such circumstances. If you require an extension, I will discuss it with you. If you do not ask for and receive an extension, however, I **will not** accept late work.

Getting Feedback on Work

I will provide written feedback in Canvas on your work.

I will provide all feedback to you within a week of the assignments' due dates. If, for some reason (e.g. hurricanes, raccoons in the house, sentient robots, etc.) I can't get feedback to you within a week, I'll let you know in writing and provide you with a new estimate for when you can expect your grades and feedback. One thing that's guaranteed to **not** speed up my grading and commenting process is for you to email me and ask if/when your work has been/will be graded. Each email along those lines that I read and respond to takes 3-5 minutes that I could have spent grading. Please trust that I want to read your work, that I enjoy reading your work, and that I respect your time and will get your work back to you soon.

Emergency Policy

In the event of an emergency, it may be necessary for USF to suspend normal operations. During this time, USF may opt to continue delivery of instruction through methods that include but are not limited to: Canvas, Elluminate, Skype, and email messaging and/or an alternate schedule. It's your responsibility to monitor Blackboard site for each class for course specific communication, and the main USF, College, and department Web sites, emails, and MoBull messages for important general information.

Academic Dishonesty and Disruption of Academic Process

Students attending USF are awarded degrees in recognition of successful completion of coursework in their chosen fields of study. Each individual is expected to earn his/her degree on the basis of personal effort. Consequently, any form of cheating on examinations or plagiarism on assigned papers constitutes unacceptable deceit and dishonesty. Plagiarism is defined as "literary theft" and consists of the unattributed quotation of the exact words of a published text, or the unattributed borrowing of original ideas by paraphrase from a published text. On written papers for which the student employs information gathered from books, articles, web sites, or oral sources, each direct quotation, as well as ideas and facts that are not generally known to the public at large, or the form, structure, or style of a secondary source must be attributed to its author by means of the appropriate citation procedure. Only widely known facts and first-hand thoughts and observations original to the student do not require citations. Citations may be made in footnotes or within the body of the text. Plagiarism also consists of passing off as one's own another person's work in part or in total.

A student who submits a plagiarized assignment will receive an "F" with a numerical value of zero on the assignment, and the "F" shall be used to determine the final course grade. The instructor has the right to assign the student a grade of F or FF (the latter indicating dishonesty) in the course. An "FF" grade assigned to indicate academic dishonesty is reflected only on internal records and prevents the student from repeating the course using the Grade Forgiveness Policy. If a student who has been accused of academic dishonesty drops the course, the student's registration in the course may be reinstated until the issue is resolved. A student who is suspected of cheating may not drop a course to avoid a penalty.

See <http://www.ugs.usf.edu/pdf/cat1213/o8ACADEMICPOL.pdf> (page 53) for USF's definitions of plagiarism and its policy on academic honesty. Consult with me if you have any questions about these issues.

Academic Grievance Procedures

If a serious issue or conflict arises, the student should first make an attempt to reach a satisfactory resolution with the course instructor. If the instructor and student are unable to resolve the situation to their mutual satisfaction, the student may, *within three weeks of the incident*, file a letter of notification with Dr. Joyce Karpay, the Assistant to the Chair of the English Department.

Reporting of Gender-Based Crimes

Please be aware that educators must report incidents of gender-based crimes including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, dating violence and domestic violence. If you disclose in class, in papers, or to me personally, I am required by law to report it. The Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention at USF is a confidential resource where you can talk about such situations and receive assistance in confidence. Additional confidential resources on the Tampa campus are the Counseling Center and Student Health Services.

- Center for Victim Advocacy and Violence Prevention:
(813) 974-5757
<http://www.sa.usf.edu/ADVOCACY>
- Counseling Center:
(813) 974-2831
<http://www.usf.edu/student-affairs/counseling-center/>
- Student Health Services
(813) 974-2331
<http://www.usf.edu/student-affairs/student-health-services/>

Schedule

For homework assignments and assignment due dates, please see the schedule posted on Canvas.

****Syllabus is subject to change at instructor's discretion.****

****If I make any changes, I will provide them to you in writing in advance.****