

TECM 5280 DESIGNING TECHNICAL DOCUMENTS

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Introduction

Welcome to TECM 5280

Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious and adding the meaningful. –John Maeda

Design cannot rescue failed content. –Edward Tufte

Excellent content should not be undermined by poor design. –Erin Friess

As a student of technical communication or a student who wants to someday teach technical writing or communication, you are probably a better-than-average writer. But you might not know how to do things with the visual elements of the page to enhance the reader experience.

The purpose of this class is to make sure you know what aspects of design can improve your content and what aspects of design can undermine reader comprehension.

I can't promise you will be an outstanding designer by the end of the course. But I can promise you that you will be better equipped to look at documents and determine why they do or do not function as a successful piece of communication from a design perspective.

Goals of the Course

The goals for TECM 5280 are relatively simple.

Goal 1: By the end of the semester, you will know at least three ways to use design elements that don't undermine your content.

Goal 2: By the end of the semester you will know at least three design elements that can enhance your content.

Goal 3: By the end of the semester you will be able to approach communication problems not only from the perspective of content creation/revision but also from the perspective of visual/verbal comprehension.

Tips for Success

Overview

This class is likely unlike many other classes you will take. You will have to learn software that is possibly new to you, and you will have to use that software to convey mastery of concepts that are possibly new to you as well.

I have found that students learn the most when they are required to do many iterations of a project. The point of the iterations isn't to provide you with busy work but for you to learn what aspects of design work and what don't work. When I say that I want 30 iterations, I'm not expecting 30 perfect iterations. I realize that some will be better than others. The iterations aren't busy work. They are small opportunities for you to learn more about yourself as a designer.

In the pages that follow, I outline some tips that students in previous sections have provided.

Time Management

One of the most common comments about the class is that it takes a lot of time. This is an 8-week accelerated class. You should expect to spend somewhere around 10 hours a week working on this class. Some weeks will have more; some weeks will have less.

It's important to realize that two assignments (the Exercise Notebook and the Design Portfolio) are assigned the first week of class and are due the last week of class. But there will be no time dedicated specifically to those assignments. You will need to pay attention to those assignments and work on them throughout the semester.

Get Feedback

You will get feedback from your classmates and me on your items that will be included in the Exercise Notebook throughout the semester in the forums.

However, design is highly subjective. I will be the person grading your work, so it's in your best interest to show me your work. Major problems will likely be able to made minor, and minor problems might disappear.

I will give feedback within 2 business days. However, the last time I will look at any assignment for the Design Portfolio or the Exercise Notebook will be one week prior to the due date.

Learn the Software

Software like InDesign, Illustrator, and PhotoShop can do some really great things, but they have a significant learning curve. Part of most weeks' lessons will be to watch videos. I won't know if you actually watch those videos or not, but if you elect not to watch the videos, you should make sure that you are getting the necessary information elsewhere.

**Things You'll
Need**

Things You'll Need

Readings

Hagan, Rebecca and Golomisky, Kim. White Space is Not Your Enemy: A Beginner's Guide to Communicating Visually through Graphic, Web, and Multimedia Design. Focal Press: New York. 2nd or 3rd edition.

All additional readings will be available on BlackBoard.

Access to the Internet

As an online course, you will need access to the internet. You will be required to watch videos, thus you will need broadband appropriate enough to watch the videos.

Adobe Creative Cloud 2017

You will need Adobe InDesign, Acrobat, and PhotoShop. The way to get it is through Adobe.com. The Creative Cloud costs \$20 a month, and you are required to purchase a 12 month plan.

Storage

Save, save, save! You will have multiple projects that you will be working on. I suggest that you find a cloud-based storage system that works for you. I like DropBox, while other colleagues like Google Drive.

Fine Print

Absences

Since this is an online course, absences are not concern. If you do not participate in the required activities, your grade will be lowered.

Absences for Religious Holidays

A student should notify a faculty member of anticipated absence to observe religious holy days as early in the semester as possible. A student will be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable period after the absence. The faculty member may take appropriate action if a student fails to satisfactorily complete an assignment or examination within a reasonable time.

If a student and faculty member disagree about whether the absence is due to observance of a religious holy day or whether the student has been given reasonable time to complete any missed assignment or examination, they may appeal the decision using the process outlined in UNT Policy 18.1.13, Student Complaint Policy or UNT [Policy 06.040](#), Grade Appeals

ADA Accommodations

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion

regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at [940.565.4323](tel:940.565.4323).

Due Dates

All assignments are due when noted.
No extensions will be given.

Academic Integrity

All work in this class must be your own and original. Please see https://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/06.003_StudentStandardsOfAcademicIntegrity_2017.pdf for details on UNT's policy on academic integrity, including collusion, plagiarism, and cheating, which are all grounds for expulsion from the university.

Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with the ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr.

Email Policy

I will only email to official UNT accounts. I will answer all email within 2 business days.

Office Hours Policy

Early in the semester, I will ask you to complete a survey indicating when you would be available to chat for office hours. Based on that survey, I will set up standing office hours in which I will be available for chats.

Assignments

Daily Work (25%)

Throughout the semester, you will have opportunities to submit work for feedback and for you to give feedback to your fellow classmates in forums. These activities are considered daily work and will make up 25% of your final grade. For these assignments, I am looking for a good faith effort in completion. Check each assignment for the rubric to see exactly what I am looking for.

Professionalism (5%)

In order for us to have discussions in the forums, you will need to complete work. That work will often not be graded. However, failure to submit anything to the appropriate forum will affect your final professionalism grade. Everyone will start the semester with 100% for professionalism, and I will deduct points accordingly. I will notify you via email if I deduct points.

Mid-Term Exam (15%)

Midway through the semester, you will take a 4-hour open book, open note, open everything exam. You will be given a poorly designed document. You will then write an explanation about what about the document is poorly designed. Additionally, you will revise the document. You will have to complete the assignment in one four hour block; you will not be allowed to save and return to the assignment.

Exercise Notebook (30%)

You will produce many iterations of your document throughout the semester. By and large, you will just receive feedback of those documents. You will not submit the documents for a grade until you create your Exercise Notebook. Your notebook will be a compilation of all your work. I expect that you will have made modifications to the work throughout the semester. Only the notebook, due the last week of the semester, will be graded. The specifications for the Exercise Notebook are available on the assignment on BlackBoard.

Design Portfolio (25%)

In the Design Portfolio, you will compile and create documents that you would want to show a future employer. Specifications for the Design Portfolio are available on the assignment on BlackBoard.

**A Few More
Words**

UNT Technology Requirements

To successfully complete this course, you should have access to a reliable internet source. You should also have these technical skills:

- Using the learning management system
- Using email with attachments
- Creating and submitting files in commonly used word processing program formats
- Copying and pasting
- Downloading and installing software
- Using spreadsheet programs
- Headset/Microphone (if required for synchronous chats)
- Word Processor

Remember that your password is the only thing protecting you from pranks or more serious harm.

- Don't share your password with anyone.
- Change your password if you think someone else might know it.
- Always log out when you are finished using the learning management system.

The following information has been provided to assist you with the technological aspect of the course.

- UIT Help Desk: <http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm>

- Hardware and software necessary to use Bb Learn:
<http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/bblearn/>

- Browser requirements:

<http://kb.blackboard.com/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=84639794> - Computer and Internet Literacy: http://clt.odu.edu/oso/index.php?src=pe_comp_lit

UNT Nettiquette Guide

When communicating online, you should

- Treat others with the same respect you would show in a face-to-face classroom.
- Err on the side of being too formal rather than too informal. You should take your cue for the right level from how your professor interacts with you and other students.
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm as it can easily be misunderstood.
- Be careful with personal information (both your own and other people's).