English 351, "Hypertext"

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MWF 11:00-11:50 408 Stevenson

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Class blogging site: http://blogs.english.ilstu.edu/eng351

> *Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented*
> *disability should contact Disability Concerns at 350 Fell Hall, 438-5853 (voice), 438-8620*
> *(TDD).*

Textbooks

Beaird, Jason. (2007). *The Principles of Beautiful Web Design*. Sitepoint. 2nd edition
     ISBN 9780980576894

Lessig Lawrence. (2008). *Remix*. Penguin. ISBN 9780143116134
     Available online at http://www.scribd.com/doc/47089238/Remix

Redish, Ginny. (2007). *Letting Go of the Words*. Morgan Kaufman. 2nd edition ISBN 9780123859303

Wolf, Matt. (2012). *Wordpress Revealed*. Wolfe Empire   ISBN 9780615684741
          This last book is recommended only as I could not review it before class

Creating and Managing Online Content in a Web 2.0 World

I define 'hypertext' as non linear reading and writing. Today we associate hypertext with websites and online publishing, but hypertext exists in both print and digital form. Books can be hypertextual (you can jump nonlinearly to a specific page in a manual, an encyclopedia, a dictionary, or a cookbook) and poetry is often deeply nonlinear. I have been teaching English 351 as a class in creating nonlinear documents on the web since 1995 and with good success. For much of this time, I focused on the process by which people create websites from scratch (handmade websites). For some students, it could be a painful process, but the students who stuck with it created some amazing work (see http://english.illinoisstate.edu/kalmbach/351/course/finalprojects.html), and many of those students have gone on to have successful careers in the field.

While my approach may have been working, the world was changing. With the rise of web 2.0, social media, and content management software like wordpress, drupal, and joomla, students needed a different skill set. It has become fairly rare any more for ISU students to get an internship (or an entry-level writing job) in which they are asked to create a website from scratch. It was not that

learning to use Dreamweaver or a text editor to manipulate a hand-made web pages was no longer important; rather those skills were no longer enough. Today's students need to be able to function in both worlds: a world of DIY websites and a world of content management systems.

This new web 2.0 world plays directly your strengths as an English major. Really. Today, people working on the web need strong skills in managing content: writing, analyzing, reading, thinking. The organizations that own websites need people who are good at identifying hierarchy, structure, and purpose in text, people who are good at working in groups, who are good at thinking about users and how those users interact with web site, and who can edit text, images, and designs thoughtfully and generously. **They need you.** Skills such as the ability to manipulate html and CSS and the ability to tweek images are still important, but theses days, the heaving lifting of code and graphics creation (that my earlier students had to master) is more often done by the people creating the templates that drive websites, not by the people creating and managing content within those templates.

As a result, I have re-envisioned the class so that it has feet in both worlds: During the semester, you will create a small website in a Content Management System (WordPress), and then you will re-create that website in Dreamweaver. After you have gotten your foot in the water, you will do a major final project using whatever software most appeals to you and fits your purpose, and your audience. It can be Wordpress, Dreamweaver, or something totally different like Weebly, Wix, Pbwiki, etc.

Throughout all of these projects, you will learn about personas and scenarios, Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), usability testing, user interfaces, images and color, web writing and editing, and above all templates: You will learn to work with templates and how to make templates work for you for above all else Web 2.0 means **learning to write through and against templates.**

Here are the elements of the class and their weight

1. Reading and responding (10%)
You will write a response to each assigned reading and post these responses to our class blog (http://blogs.english.ilstu.edu/eng351). I am looking for reflective responses that engage with the ideas in the text and not ones that summarize the reading or dismiss it (it was great or it sucked). Responses that are one to two screens long are a good general goal while responses that consist of one of two sentences are a bad goal. I really don't care if you hate a reading (or love one), just tell me why and ground your observations in the text. I also suggest that you try to relate the ideas in the readings to your projects and to things you have learned in other classes.

In the past I have had problems with students not doing the responses. Don't make this mistake. I use responses instead of giving tests because I find that students learn more when they write reflectively about what they have read. **Not writing all of the responses to the readings is probably the main reason students receive a lower grades than they want in this class.**

2. A Trio of Introductions: To the Web, To Cascading Style Sheets and To Content Management (10%)

For the past few years, I have started the class with a group project in which students use personas and scenarios to critique the English website. While this project has been fun (and persona and scenario analysis continue to be critical), I have come to realize that starting with a small group project tended to kill class momentum: it kept students from doing the hard (really hard) identity work that lies at the heart of learning to make meaning on the web. So this semester, I am trying something new and experimental. I am calling it a trio of introductions. We are going to spend the first few weeks, reflecting on how the web works for better or worse, how CSS (cascading style sheets, the rules that create visual style on the web) works, and how templates work. I plan for you to do a series of mini projects, mostly in class. These will include something really cool that I haven't thought of yet, a CSS mini project in which you will hopefully use CSS to manipulate the typography of one of your favorite poems in order to communicate your experience of reading that poem, and finally, you will do a critique of a CMS template as a transition into the CMS/Dreamweaver unit. You will also write some sort of reflection at the end of this project.

3. Critical Writing (15%)

During the semester you will do a variety of critical writing. Some will of this writing be graded some will not. It will include:

- Persona/Scenario Analyses for your two major projects (see items 4 & 5).
- A reflection about both your CMS and your final project.
- A genre analysis in preparation for your final project.
- A website plan for your final project.
- Reflections about all of your CMS/Dreamweaver project and your final project,
- A CMS template critique
- Other projects as needed

4. The Content Management/Dreamweaver Project (25%)

While expertise in using content management systems to managing complex websites is an important skill, it is not the only skills web writers need in a web 2.0 world. You also need to have experience using Dreamweaver which is still the best tool out there for creating and managing small to medium sized websites (the English department web site is a good example of a medium-sized Dreamweaver site with about 600 pages). I do not expect you to become expert in either of these software packages over the course of one semester, but I do expect you to learn enough so that you can make a conscious decision about whether you want to develop more skills in these areas. During the semester, you will initially create a small (five page or so) website in a content management system and then re-create that site in Dreamweaver. Your re-imagined site does not have to be an exact duplicate of your CMS site: You can use the occasion to fix issues you could not fix in your CMS or to modify the scope or purpose of the site. Part of the value of looking at a website from the perspective of two different software packages is the opportunity it affords to rethink what you are doing. This project will include at least two peer review sessions to discuss your evolving project.

5. Web Publishing Project (40%)

In the second half of the semester, our attention will shift to a major web publishing project which you will create using any software package that you choose: Dreamweaver, a content management system, or some other software. (Though not Apple's iweb; students had very bad experiences with iweb.) Picking the right platform for your project is an important part of the process. You will want to pick software that supports your goals, your purpose, and your audience.

Your project can be on any topic that interests you: Children's Literature, Creative Writing, Technical Writing, Literary Criticism in virtually any genre (see http://english.illinoisstate.edu/kalmbach/351/course/finalprojects.html for some examples of past projects). Pick a topic that you are passionate about, that is aligned with your long term professional goals.

I expect you to create an ambitious and substantial project, but I will give you an enormous amount of freedom to ground that project in your interests. You will write a variety of documents about the project: a proposal, a genre analysis, a reflection, among others. I will say more about the final project as the course progresses. There will be at least two peer review sessions to discuss your evolving project. Peer review is a critical component in a web design class.

6. Graduate Project

The graduate students in the class must create an additional project which can be a paper, a web project, or extended reading and reflection in a scholarly topic related to web culture. Please see http://english.illinoisstate.edu/kalmbach/351/course/gradpapers.html for more information. I want you to pick a project that supports your academic and professional goals.

A Note on Grading

You should know that I hate putting letter grades on student work. I hate it because attaching letter grades to student work tends to stop that work before it is done, freezing out the potential of further improvement. I have learned the hard way, however, that giving no grades creates too much anxiety; what works best for me is to grade the minor projects in a class (so that people can let those projects go) but not grade major projects that I want you to revise and revise. Anything I grade, you will have the option of rewriting, and I will give you plenty of opportunities to get feedback on ungraded work while it is in progress.

I will not grade your web sites at any time in the semester. I do not grade websites because my emphasis is on **improvement** more than the quality of each project. Although I do not grade your web sites, I will do formal evaluations of them at the conclusion of each project after you have written your reflection. In these evaluations, I try to give you a sense of how you are doing, what you did well, what areas you need to work on, and I will try to help you establish goals for your next project.

In deciding on final grades, I look at your growth over the semester, the quality of your web work, the quality of your written work, on your completion of other class requirements, and on your participation in class. I especially value improvement. Your CMS/DW project is your first website, and I expect there to be problems. Instead, I compare your CMS/DW sites to your final project. Have you grown? Have you built on your strengths while recognizing and addressing weaknesses. Is your final project should be substantially more ambitious than your CMS project? Whether done in a CMS, DW or some other software it should be more complex, with a stronger sense of audience and purpose, deeper content and greater intellectual complexity. Your final project should also be complete, with no broken links no "Untitled Document" document titles, no missing content. It should be well proofread.

People tend to do well as the class is designed to support growth through hands on activities and engagement through self-selected projects. Those students who do poorly, make a deliberate effort to fail. Nonetheless, each semester, some students end up with lower grades than they had hoped for. Looking back, I can see the following problems in their work:

- Students did not complete all of the assigned work for the class: they didn't do the readings or all of the reading responses, or all of the critical work.
- Students chose a modest final project, one that was not substantially more ambitious than their CMS/Dreamweaver project.
- Students did a poor job on the critical writing in the class and did not take advantage of the opportunities to revise.
- The CMS/DW project or especially the final project was incomplete. There were majors parts of this project left undone when the class is over. They may have done a particularly bad job of proofreading or testing the site.

If your goal is to get an A in this class, **do the work and revise constantly.** If you are not sure whether you have kept up or if your final project is ambitious enough, please talk to me about it. I will be happy to discuss how you are doing in the class with you, though I prefer to have these discussions in my office rather than 408.