

## Group Project Assignment

### Background

For your group project in this class, you may choose from among four options: a technical report, an instruction manual, or a science review article, or a web site. You will develop your project as a member of a collaborative team and produce at least 7 pages of text per person. The project will be due the last day of class (see *Specifications* below).

**Technical Report** Technical reports can take many shapes and can serve many specific purposes. Generally, their aim is to provide information (in analytical form) that will help their readers make a decision, or solve a specific problem or task.

For instance, a head engineer at a rocket manufacturing company might be assigned the task of redesigning the payload/cargo door for NASA's space shuttle program. From experience, she knows there are many possible designs for each component of the door. She must determine which design best suits NASA's specifications, and which will work best in concert with other designs. To do this she needs information. So she asks each of her staff engineers to study a major component of the door, research all the possible design variations, and then collect the information in a report for later study.

The report that each staff engineer compiles will involve careful research and analysis. The information will be essential to helping the head engineer solve her problem.

**Technical Instructions** Technical instructions also serve a useful purpose. By explaining procedures or processes step-by-step, technical instructions teach users what to do, why they are doing it, and how to do it safely. They provide textual and visual aids that persuade readers to perform specific tasks accurately and successfully.

For instance, the director of network services for a local service supplier might have the perfect network solution for her client's St. Peter's bearing plant and main offices. But it's a complicated solution involving miles of cables, dozens of workstations, servers, and hubs. Implementing the solution will require hundreds of steps of hardware and software installation, configuration, and testing before

her job will be done.

To make sure everything is installed and configured correctly, she writes up a series of instructional sets based on the manufacturer's recommendations and her own experience for her technicians to follow.

The instructions guide and coach the technicians through the task. They provide background information (when needed), step-by-step directions, and cautionary notes that will help the technicians do the tasks and troubleshoot their performances. Because of the instructions, the task is completed successfully and safely.

**Science Review Article** Science papers (articles, essays, briefs, etc.) produce the body of knowledge on which new knowledge is developed, measured, and validated. Although objective in rhetorical technique, these papers are designed to persuade their audiences to believe in the validity of their claims. Form and content both play important roles in this effort. Consequently, writers must be concerned not only with the soundness of their data and methods, they must also be concerned with the presentation of that data. The papers they produce are carefully reasoned, arranged, worded, and formatted to suit their readers' expectations.

The review article is a special kind of science paper, one that provides the methodical collection and summary of knowledge from the body of literature. This article then offers a carefully reasoned and useful synthesis of the knowledge a synthesis that attempts to answer a question (such as "What do we know now?" or "Have we reached our goal?") framed in the thesis statement. The collection and synthesis is based on a clear research agenda, or worthy purpose.

For instance, a great deal of research has been completed on the human genome project, and much has yet to be done, but given the potential negative social implications of this science, is the research even worth doing? What safeguards are in place to prevent abuses of this science? A review published in *Science* of the current research might give social critics a better idea of the questions scientists are asking themselves as their research unfolds and social dangers become clearer.

**Web Site** Web sites can also serve many purposes, but to be successful they must focus rhetorically on a single purpose (or related group of purposes). Almost anything that can be done on paper or through multimedia can be done through a web site.

For instance, a wildlife biologist working at a local state park might be concerned by recent erosion and stream contamination in his park, and how those disturbances will impact the plants and wildlife. He knows that these problems are

due to public use, and that the best solution will call for preventive and educational measures.

Among the educational measures, he has many options: guided tours, educational programs, and interactive displays are the most common. However, he wants to be able to reach and influence people before they come to the park to prepare them for a safe, fulfilling experience. So he chooses to create a web site to make the information as accessible as possible and he designs it to be fun and motivational as well as educational.

## **Assignment**

As a group you must create something useful *inside* this classroom (i.e., help you learn and practice the skills and knowledge of technical communication) and *outside* of the classroom (i.e., serve a real purpose and satisfy a real audience's needs, and present content to serve those purposes and satisfy those needs).

A new thing that's useful is necessarily original in some important way. As you think about a project, think about what's already been published/produced. Do not waste your time or mine remaking something that already exists (unless you can demonstrate convincingly that what already exists is inferior in some way). Some preliminary research will be needed to find what already exists.

This project must be grounded in verifiable research, and so you will need to keep track of the sources you draw from, and then find a way to cite those sources in your project using traditional academic formats.

Note: Your final project is a semester-long project, and therefore should show a semester's worth of work in depth of thought, careful planning, and application of knowledge and skills. Please guard against procrastination. Instead, use the opportunity to help you learn ways to manage your time and effort. Meet with your group often and consistently, do your part, do your best, and stick to your timetable.

### **Option 1: Write a Technical Report**

1. Choose a topic in your area of specialization that poses a problem for professionals in your field.
2. Identify an audience that would benefit from knowing more about the topic. Determine the purposes that you feel must be served by a report on the topic.
3. Research the topic, analyze the information you gather, and then carefully plan

and write a report that will help that audience understand the problem better. Your report should both satisfy the reader's needs and serve the purposes you determine.

4. Design your report so readers can find easily the most significant information in the report.

5. Cite your sources using the citation system appropriate to the content and rhetorical situation.

### **Option 2: Write an Instructional Set**

1. Choose a series of tasks that requires careful instructions to complete the tasks safely and properly. (The tasks need to be significant enough to merit the time and energy spent on writing and reading the instructions.)

2. Identify the audience that would benefit most from the instructional set. Determine precisely what goals your instructions will/should accomplish (i.e., what you wish your reader to learn and why?; what will your organization benefit most from your audience knowing?).

3. Prepare a background section, directions section, and troubleshooting section that will guide the reader toward successful completion of the task. Illustrate your instructions.

4. Test the instructions carefully on someone who exhibits your target audience's characteristics, then revise and reformat for publication.

5. Cite your sources using the citation system appropriate to the content and rhetorical situation.

### **Option 3: Write a Science Review Article**

1. Identify a subject in your field that needs to be reviewed, and write down a purpose for your review. The review should address the actual needs of people in your field. (Journals often request these reviews to serve their subscribers' interests.)

2. Choose a professional journal (or some other venue) in which you could publish your review. Your choice should be guided by both journal subject matter and audiences addressed. Choose one that might actually publish your paper.

3. Identify the special interests your journal serves and develop an analysis and interpretation that would further those common interests.

4. Format your paper according to journal guidelines. Cite your sources using the citation system appropriate to the journal.

5. Ask a professor in your department to read and review the content of your paper. Attach a cover sheet to the front of your paper, which the professor can sign. (This paper may be able to satisfy a requirement in the other class, so check into this possibility.)

Note: A science paper can be undertaken as either a group-written or individually-written project.

#### **Option 4: Write a Web Site**

1. Choose a topic and perspective on that topic that would benefit most from presentation on the Web. Do a web search for similar sites and adjust your perspective to avoid overlap.

2. Identify and analyze the audience of the site. Look for other sites on the Web that appeal to the same audience.

3. Define an overall purpose that will serve both your organization and the audience.

4. Design and develop the site architecture, text, and graphics that will best help you achieve your purposes.

5. Code the html and test for accuracy and usability, then revise accordingly.

6. Cite your sources using the citation protocol appropriate to the content and rhetorical situation and place the citation either at the bottom of each page by use of an anchor, or on a separate page by way of a link.

#### **Specifications**

In addition to the requirements of usefulness, originality, and research,

1. Your project should be typed, bound, and formatted for a formal occasion. (Consider your own personal budget and don't exceed it.) Web sites should be uploaded to UMSL's web server, and then copied to disk that can be turned in for a grade.

2. The length of the text (i.e., the report itself, beginning with the introduction and ending with the conclusions, recommendations, and/or summary) should be no less than 7 pages per person. A four person group should then expect to produce a 28 page web- or paper-based document.

3. All projects must include full documentation of sources. Projects should use a documentation style that is appropriate to the genre, the content, and the rhetorical situation. Projects without documentation will be returned without a grade, but can be resubmitted if/when proper full documentation is provided.

4. The final project will be due on the last day of regular class (see your syllabus for the date).

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