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<tr>
<th><strong>Course number</strong></th>
<th><strong>English 392A – Fall 2014</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Course title</strong></td>
<td>Information Design</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Meetings</strong></td>
<td>Mondays, 4:00-6:50 p.m., ECH 1205</td>
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<td><strong>Instructor</strong></td>
<td>Neil Randall</td>
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<td><strong>Office hours</strong></td>
<td>Tuesdays 12:30-2:00 p.m., HH 224 (starting Sept 16 but not Sept 23 or Oct 21)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Email</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:nrandall@uwaterloo.ca">nrandall@uwaterloo.ca</a> (contact by email highly recommended)</td>
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| **Rationale**     | English 392A explores a wide range of information design theory and practice. The projects provide a controlled practice ground for you to implement your information design ideas and understanding. One of the projects provides a real-world situation in which you are asked to work within the information needs of an external client. |

| **Assignments**   | A. **Assignment A (20%)**—**Individual**—In-class exam on the Wu book. |
|                   | B. **Assignment B (25%)**—**Individual**—Response to the Turkle book. |
|                   | C. **Assignment C (25%)**—**Individual**—Technical Communication document. Professionally prepared hardware or software guide, using Adobe InDesign (available on ECH computers) or equivalent, on an example of your choice. Clear the topic with the instructor by **Nov 18**. |
|                   | D. **Assignment D (30%)**—**Groups of 4**—Interactive Study Guide for *The Diary of Anne Frank* or *The Sound of Music*, two plays to be staged in the 2015 season at the Stratford Festival. The study guide must include historical background in both cases. |

**Note**: In all cases calling for a submission to the LEARN dropbox, the deadline is 11:59 pm Eastern time on that specific date. Be absolutely certain that the filename contains your name (a filename such as “assignment.docx” isn’t useful); in the case of groups, be sure the assignment itself contains all names.
| Schedule | Sept 8 | 1. Introductions, syllabus, assignment overview  
|          |       | 2. Discussion: What is information design?  
|          |       | 3. Information design workshop: *Scottish independence referendum*  
|          | Sep 15 (mandatory attendance) | 1. Visit from Calvin Wood, Director, Marketing and Digital, Stratford Festival [tentative]  
|          |       | 2. Discussion: Interactive study guides  
|          |       | 3. Group formation/organization for Assignment D  
|          |       | 4. Information design workshop: *World War I causes and timeline (as interactive study guide)*  
|          | Sep 22 (class start: 4:30 – mandatory attendance) | 1. Discussion: Wu (Part I)  
|          |       | 2. Group meeting for Assignment D  
|          |       | 3. Information design workshop: *WW I study guide (continued)*  
|          |       | 4. Presentations of WWI study guide ideas  
|          | Oct 6 | 1. Discussion: Wu (Parts II and III)  
|          |       | 2. Discussion: GamerGate controversy  
|          |       | 3. Information design workshop: *CRTC pick-and-play proposal – explanation, implications, benefits and drawbacks*  
|          | Oct 13 | **No class – Thanksgiving holiday**  
|          | Oct 20 | **Group work on Study Guide project (Instructor at research meeting)**  
|          | Oct 27 | 1. Discussion: Wu (Parts IV and V)  
|          |       | 2. Discussion: Technical communication – technical explanations and descriptions (principles and examples)  
|          |       | 3. Technical communication workshop: *technical explanation of Web 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0*  
|          | Nov 3 (mandatory attendance) | 1. *In-class exam on Wu (80 minutes)*  
|          |       | 2. Technical communication workshop: *technical explanation of Web 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 continued, including how social media works.*  
|          | Nov 10 | 1. Discussion: Turkle (Chapters 1-7)  
|          |       | 2. Discussion: *hardware and software instructions (principles and practice)*  
|          |       | 3. Technical communication workshop: *instructions*
**A Note on Grading**

I’m an English prof. Admittedly, my fields of research go well beyond traditional English studies, but I still assess according to how I know best. This means that grades are assigned subjectively (compared with other disciplines), because that’s what English profs believe is best for the kinds of assignment we give. There are no precise checklists of what goes into an assignment, and everything depends on how well you justify what you do. I understand that some of you come from various disciplines and been graded otherwise in the past, but those systems aren’t my system, nor that of the discipline I was trained to understand. We’ll discuss grading as we proceed.

**Attendance**

Five classes are denoted “mandatory attendance”. These are primarily classes involving group meetings for Assignment D. At these classes, I will actually take attendance. After calculating your final grade (out of 100), I will subtract 3 for each of these classes that you miss. I do this entirely for the good of the group you’re working with.

**Late Assignments**

Just don’t. You’re adults, this is a class: just be on time. But if you absolutely have to, let me know well in advance (at least three days). The basic penalty is 10% per week, starting the first day of lateness, plus zero comments on your work. Obviously, some emergencies demand a change in schedule; I’ll deal with each of these individually and privately with you.

**Academic Integrity**

Go here - [https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/). Learn. Do.
Assignment A (20%): In-class exam on Wu, *The Master Switch* (individual)

*Date:* November 3  
*Duration:* 80 minutes

This assignment tests you on your understanding of the principles and issues (including the media history) covered in the Wu book. The exam will consist of three short essay answers.

Assignment B (25%): Response to Turkle, *Alone Together* (individual)

*Due Date:* November 13, 20, 27 (all are Thursdays)  
*Length:* 1000 words each (3000 words total)

The schedule divides discussion of the Turkle book into three groups (see the individual dates). As you read the book, take notes about the ramifications and implications of the points Turkle raises, and be prepared to argue for or against her points (or both for or against). Also be prepared to relate her points to your own observations, which should include your own use of technologies and media as well as uses and behaviours you’ve garnered from reading elsewhere. After each Turkle class, write a one-thousand word response (essay, blog, dialogue, whatever you choose) articulating and justifying your viewpoint.

Assignment C (25%): Technical communication document (individual except by request)

*Due Dates:* November 18 (proposal) and December 9  
*Length:* 2000 words minimum, 3000 word maximum

Submit a professionally prepared hardware or software guide, using Adobe InDesign (available on ECH computers) or equivalent desktop publishing program, on a hardware or software example of your choice. This choice is limited, however, to examples that are not already well covered by documentation either in print or online. In other words, spend some time locating lesser-known examples, particularly those that actually require technical explanations and step-by-step instructions for someone to use them. There is no point documenting how to use a typical smartphone or tablet home screen, for example, since we have documented evidence that pretty much anyone gets it right away, including infants.

You could, however, choose already well-documented programs such as one of the Microsoft applications, or Apple’s Final Cut Pro, as long as you choose a set of functions that few people know about. Such programs are so complex that little-used features abound. You could also choose (and I recommend) the setup and configuration menus of complex programs or most hardware, or, even more interesting from a technical communication standpoint, the internal workings of one of the dozens of utility programs available for free download for an operating system or individual software packages. The best guides for choice are this: If you’re an expert in something and few others are – and by expert I mean that you know extensive bits of minutiae – then it’s probably a good topic. Or, if dig into the guts of a program and find screens and procedures you truly don’t understand, this is also a good topic.
There are two aspects to this assignment: the writing and the presentation. We will discuss primarily the writing in class, but you are required to present it in a professional-looking document. Microsoft Word isn’t good enough to make this happen: you’ll need to work with a desktop publishing program, of which Adobe InDesign is available to you on the ECH computers. This program requires some learning, which you’ll need to do on your own. Other DTP programs can suit as well. If you have a particular need to present your work as a website, please clear it with me. For a technical communication professional, easy-to-use Web editors such as Wix won’t cut it. On the other hand, you don’t need to learn the arcane coding of DreamWeaver either.

Please clear the topic with me by Nov 18.

Assignment D (30%): Interactive Study Guide (groups of 4)

Due Dates: Various dates (group meetings); December 1 (presentation); and December 4 (submission of final guide)

Length: TBD

This assignment provides the opportunity to engage in information design for a professional “client”, in this case the Stratford Festival, a non-profit world-class theatre company internationally renowned for its staging of classic theatre. For the 2015 season, which begins in April 2015, they are presenting, among other plays, The Diary of Anne Frank and The Sound of Music. Both plays are based on conditions under the rule of Nazi Germany during World War II, and the plays are being staged as a memory of that grim historical period.

Each year, the Festival produces study guides for some of its plays, designed for use by teachers and parents to orient students towards the background and production of the plays. To date, these guides have been primarily for print, although some rudimentary interactive elements have appeared recently. The goal of this assignment is to create a study guide, for either of the two plays named above, that will demonstrate the power of interactive media to teach. Stratford’s goal is to make much stronger use of digital media than it has to date to connect with audiences for whom digital interaction is now commonplace, and without which connections between producers and their desired audience is hobbled from the outset. You are a big part of that audience; hence the need to engage people like you in the creation of the guides.

The Stratford Festival will work with us on these guides, and they will inform us of their specific needs and wants. However, you are entirely free to design these as you choose. As a group you may choose to satisfy the Festival as closely as possible, or you may range far afield and do something that they have no interest in. Your grade for this assignment does not depend, in any way, on satisfying the Festival. You are doing the assignment for me, not them. That said, there are specific fascinating challenges to creating a branded study guide on plays such as this, and I think some of you will find it extremely rewarding. We’ll discuss in depth in class.

The ECH computers have numerous software packages that will allow you to create these guides.