English 481U: Document usability testing

FALL 1994
First class 12 September, 10:00 AM.
Subsequent meeting times to be decided then.

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Hours: Monday, 9:00-11:00; Tuesday, 1:00-3:00; or whenever you can catch me.

COURSE EPITOME:
A small-group, experimental course in document usability, organized around the UWRPW Newsgroup user guide. You will investigate usability collaboratively, conduct at least one usability study (of the guide), and prepare a new version of the user guide based on that study, or perhaps it will take a new form (maybe a quick reference card) or evolve into a different guide (maybe of newsgroups and lists generally).

I will meet with you for group discussions as needed, but you will meet much more regularly on your own, according to whatever timeline you establish.

TEXTS:
No text will be required, since no text is very good in this area. However, the 1992 Proceedings of the CPW Third Conference on Quality in Documentation might be a useful resource, and there are various studies you might want to consult; we can discuss these issues on the first day, and discuss a possible photocopying budget.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Due (approx.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REQUIREMENTS: Annotated bibliography</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28 Oct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Usability report</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>25 Nov</td>
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<tr>
<td>UWRPW News Group User Guide (incorporating usability findings)</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9 Dec</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer assessment memo</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10 Dec</td>
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RULES: All Assignments except the memo will be done collaboratively; the group will decide and allocate responsibility on its own, and establish all deadlines.

The gun-to-the-forehead date, however, is 10 December. Because of the nature of the course, I will not be granting any incompletes, except in extraordinary circumstances (serious health or personal issues), and I will need all assignments by 10 December to get my grades in to the registrar.

COLLABORATION Many of you have experience with collaborative work, and you know it can be the most rewarding or the most aggravating way to learn possible, depending on who you’re working with and what you’re working on. But don’t assume it will be easy. You’re going to have to put as much effort into working effectively with each other as you will into the assignments, maybe more. If knives and clubs come out, you can call on me; short of that, conflict resolution is up to you.

Each assignment should probably have a team leader, and probably a different one, to coordinate it, and you will likely have a variety of other roles as well. But responsibility should be shared equally, and if someone puts in more work on one project than everybody else, their involvement in the next assignment should probably (by mutual consent) be correspondingly lower.

GRADING: For the three collaborative assignments, your grade will be based half on my (subjective, willful, opinionated, but informed) judgment of the final product, and half on the (subjective, willful, opinionated, but informed) judgment of your peers on how much you contributed. For example, if the assignment gets an A and the consensus of the group is that your contribution rates an A, you get an A for the assignment; if the consensus of the group is that your contribution rates a C-, you get a B ((87.5 + 61) / 2 = 74.25).

For the peer assessment memo, you get 100% for submitting it, 0.00% for not submitting it; it will not be graded.