Assignment 6 Directions

Assignment 6: Redesign Project

Design is an increasingly important facet of technical communication. With even basic computer programs like Microsoft Word, writers can adjust the visual aspects of their documents to enhance communication and clarity. They can also design text in sophisticated ways. This assignment will require you to redesign a document for a specific rhetorical situation and to reflect on the decisions you made in the design process.

This assignment functions as something of a final exam. Your redesign should demonstrate that you understand the principles and practices of technical communication discussed in this course. You can't cover everything, but you should work to convince me that you understand the key ideas we have been working with this semester. The process you will follow in this assignment is relatively straightforward. You will identify (with my approval) a document to be redesigned and context for that redesign. You will then redesign the document based on a rubric I will provide. Finally, you will write a reflective commentary that discusses why you redesigned the document the way that you did.

This redesign project is not simply an academic exercise meant to test what you have learned (although I care about that!). Technical communication documents are living documents; technical communicators constantly redesign their work in order to improve it. For example, visit the Way Back Machine at [http://www.archive.org (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.](http://www.archive.org/). At this site, you can enter a website address and see how the site has evolved over time. Try looking at the Penn State website. You will see how the site has developed over more than a decade of both textual and visual revisions. With each version of the site, the technical communicators were working to improve its effectiveness for users.

There are three steps to this assignment:

1. Choose a piece of technical communication to redesign. Look for something on a topic that you already know something about. That way you'll be in a good position to rethink the content as well as the design. I would also encourage you to look for a relatively brief document. Although you can redesign a section of a longer document, working with a brief document should prove to be easier. By brief, I mean approximately 3 to 5 pages of written text or an equivalent amount of a website.

For examples of the scope of your redesign, let's look at the documents you analyzed in your Basic Rhetorical Analysis. (These are just examples; you'll be choosing new documents for this assignment.) The first was an application for low-income home energy assistance. At four pages this is a relatively short document, but is complex enough (it contains enough different elements) to be appropriate for the assignment. You would redesign the whole thing. The second document was a booklet for a Science Fair. Although this document is 16 pages, the body pages are all relatively similar in structure. You might choose to redesign the title page, introduction, one or two body pages, and the glossary. That way you'll have a number of different components to work with in different ways. (You won't be able to meet the requirements of the assignment if the document is too simple or uniform - five body pages would not be enough.) The third document was a guide for developing a first aid program. This is a very long document, much too long for the assignment. But you could easily pick one section to redesign - each section has a number of document elements for you to work with.

You will submit your document to me for approval before you begin redesigning.

1. Redesign your chosen document. This will involve redesigning both textual and visual aspects, paying attention to the rhetorical context for the document. I provide specific areas for redesign below. This assignment assumes that you will use at least a word processing program to redesign your document. (You may also use photo editing, desktop publishing, web design, or other software.) In other words, you should not hand-draw, photocopy, or paste-up the new version. Rather, you should re-create the document as a new file that includes your changes. (You have to be able to submit your project via the drop box).
2. Write a reflective memo to me that explains why you redesigned the document the way that you did. (I am your audience.) Follow the memo format described by Markel in his chapter on writing memos. To see sample memos, see figures 14.11 and 14.12 in the textbook.
   1. Be concrete in your discussion. That is, use examples from the document as you make your key points.
   2. Be sure to analyze and not just describe your redesign. This will require you to justify both content and design decisions.
   3. Be sure your reflective points are well organized.

Your analysis should be at least 2 single-spaced pages (approximately 1000 words). However, don't mistake brevity for superficiality. I'm looking for a high-quality reflection that shows you can talk in relatively sophisticated ways about the techniques and practices of technical communication.

**Redesign Areas**

You can redesign your document in any number of ways. The list of considerations below is broken into general categories to help you manage this large amount of information. While your reflective memo should not go through this list item-by-item (some items will be more important than others for your redesign, and some may not be important at all), it should take each larger category into consideration.

Note: The Genre Considerations category references some chapters we did not read for class. If your selected document falls into one of these genres, read the chapter to help you with the redesign.

**Rhetorical Considerations**

* Audience (Ch. 5)
* Purpose (Ch. 5)
* Context (Chs. 1, 5)
* Persuasiveness (Ch. 8)
* Ethical and legal (Ch. 2)

**Textual Considerations**

* Organization (Ch. 7)
* Style (Chs. 10, 11)
* Textual coherence (Ch. 9)

**Visual Considerations**

* Design (Ch. 11)
* Graphics (Ch. 12)
* Visual coherence (Ch. 9)

**Genre Considerations**

* Job application (Ch. 15)
* Definitions and descriptions (Ch. 20)
* Instructions and manuals (Ch. 20)
* Reports (Chs. 17-19)
* Proposals (Ch. 16)
* Websites (Ch. 11)

**Evaluation Criteria**

I will evaluate your redesign projects according to these criteria:

* + Content: The redesign represents a significant revision of the original document. In other words, the revision should not be superficial or minor.

* + Effectiveness: The redesign improves on (and does not just change) the document's rhetorical effectiveness. The redesign speaks better to the audience, purpose, and context. The reflective memo discusses why the redesign is more effective than the original.

* + Professionalism: The redesign adheres to not just rhetorical but conventional patterns in technical communication. The redesign and memo are free of grammatical and mechanical errors.

* + Reflection: The reflective memo analyzes more than it describes. It focuses on why you did what you did rather than what you did. I can see what you did in the redesign itself, so the memo should provide a justification for your redesign choices.

* AND: The redesign and memo demonstrate that you can understand and apply the many elements of technical communication discussed in the course.