

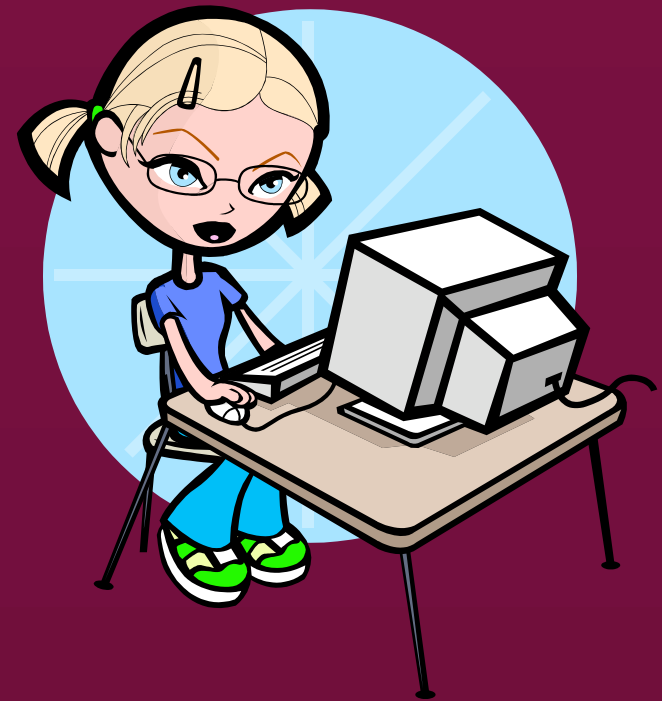
# **WRA 320**

# **Technical Writing**

**Fall 2004**

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**Session 13: Intro to UA Project**

# Web Tech User Assistance Project

See project overview at

<http://www.msu.edu/~hartdav2/tw.html>

- goals of the project
- deliverables
- due dates & schedule

# UA: deliverables

Each 2-3 person team will produce:

1. User Assistance Materials
2. A short report to your Library contact

# UA: process documents

Each 2-3 person team will produce:

1. A storyboard
2. A walkthrough
3. A script for the walkthrough
4. A process log

# UA: schedule

Dates of interest for the UA project:

- TODAY - Project Ideas Submitted
- Oct 14 - Team Selection
- Oct. 26 – Storyboards Due
- Nov. 16 – Full draft of UA Materials
- Nov. 18 – Walkthrough Day 1
- Nov. 23 – Walkthrough Day 2
- Dec. 2 – All materials ready for evaluation

# UA: topics

**Your topic must be task-oriented. This means that it should focus on a hands-on, how-to-do-something specific...with a concrete outcome.**

**It should also be a real, pressing need. No low-hanging fruit!**

## Good

“View an article in an online journal from off-campus”

## Bad

“What is a Journal?”

“How to Order Coffee at the Cybercafe”

## UA: topic ideas

- Off-campus access to MSU electronic resources

<http://www.lib.msu.edu/proxy/netscape7.htm>

- 2

- 3

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- 6

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## UA: teams & topics

Teams will consist of 2-3 people.

1. Everybody must come up with one topic; e-mail it to me today.
2. I will go over the list, remove duplicates, and send the list to our library contacts for feedback.
3. I'll choose 5-7 topics as “go” projects.
4. Next time, you'll form a team by selecting a project you want to work on.

# What is User Assistance?

## A Mini Genre Analysis

- Background on the UA Genre
- Authors
- Readers/Users
- Format & Features
- Formality
- Visuals
- Range of Variation

# UA: Background

User assistance, aka “help” or “documentation,” is a common genre on the web.

UA comes in two predominant flavors:

conceptual UA: “what is” information

procedural UA: “how-to” information

Most UA includes some of each. Common examples include recipes, software “quick start” guides, and the famous steps on the back of shampoo bottles: wash, rinse, repeat.

# UA: Authors

UA is generally created by those with know-how and those with an interest in (be it financial, humanitarian, or otherwise) providing help to users seeking information.

On the web, you can find UA written by manufacturers, by third-party providers, and by users for users in a variety of formats.



# UA: Format & Features

UA is organized in a task-oriented manner, often in the form of discrete steps which the user follows.

**F  
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s**

**Overview of task**

**Pre-reqs**

**Steps 1 through N**

**Troubleshooting**

**Variations**

Formats can vary quite a bit in length and style, ranging from whole books (e.g. Web Design for Dummies) to user forums where specific queries are made

# UA: Visuals

UA visuals tend to be functional in nature and include text and type elements, graphic elements, diagrams, and pictures. They serve 2 general purposes...

To illustrate a procedure or feature

To orient the user

examples

Arrows that indicate the direction to turn a knob, screen shot highlighting a menu choice

Arrows that point to the next step, type that distinguishes a “Warning”, numbers for steps

# UA: Formality

The level of formality in UA really depends on the expertise of the audience and how high-stakes the task is.

Very precise language and highly-tested procedures will be used in UA for diffusing a bomb.

UA given on a user forum for a game website might be considerably less formal & reliable but just as precise and technical for advanced users, etc.

# UA: Range of Variation

## Scale

## Changes...

Novice to  
Expert

Ratio of conceptual to procedural information, amount of technical information, “grain size” of procedures, tone.

Low to  
High  
Stakes

Amount of testing done on information, # of options presented to users, # of points of verification along the way, # of warnings & cautions.

# UA: Signs of Quality

User can understand the information easily and make their way through the procedures without getting lost.

Authors let users know ahead of time what the outcome will be, and what they must do to prepare for the task.

Authors give users a way to gauge progress at every step. And ways to recover from mistakes along the way.

# Web UA: Signs of Quality

1. Navigating the UA, in itself, is not challenging.
2. Page layout (e.g. the grid), white space, and visual elements help the user do the task.
3. Interactive features are used to give users feedback (e.g. links to before and after versions)
4. Text is short, always follows the given-new contract, and is tightly integrated with visuals.

# Good Web UA follows Wodkte's First Principles

1. Wayfinding
2. Set Expectations/Give Feedback
3. Comfort & Safety
4. Be consistent
5. Error support – prevent, protect, inform
6. Recognition vs. recall
7. Tailored for user skill levels

Have a look at the library's UA for configuring browsers to use the web proxy.

How does it measure up?