

## **Assignment Prompt: Designing and Documenting an Interactive Learning Environment**

### **Project Overview**

As we have discussed throughout the semester, technical writing is a rhetorical negotiation between authors and audiences insofar as technical writers often try to elicit specific actions on the part of an intended readership. In other words, to be a rhetorically aware technical writer means that you are able to anticipate the perspectives of your audience and acknowledge how your writing can influence the ways in which your readership engages with a given piece of technology.

For this group project, you and 3-4 of your classmates will design and document an interactive learning environment using Minecraft. The goal of this learning environment will be to teach your audience about a procedure, process, or policy that is actively used by professionals in real-world scenarios. Undertaking this project will test your ability to compose rhetorically aware technical documentation by creating interactive scenarios that allow your audience to actively participate in or experiment with a complex concept.

This assignment will have a written and digital component. Each group will compose a single Design Portfolio, which will be a multi-section document that explains the specific mechanics of your Minecraft learning environment and outlines the types of interactive experiences you want to create for your audience. The Design Portfolio will also examine the larger context(s) surrounding the development and potential deployment of this learning environment. Additionally, each group will create a working prototype of their learning environment and offer a brief end-of-semester presentation that demonstrates the basic functionality of your proposed Minecraft realm.

To clarify, this project will not be graded based on the overall polish or entertainment value of your Minecraft learning environment. Rather, this project will be evaluated based on your ability to clearly articulate the interactive experiences you want to design for your audience and rationalize how/why these interactive experiences can grant your audience a better understanding of the ideas being simulated in your Minecraft realm. Hence, actively building a prototype of your Minecraft realm will help you get a better sense of how other users might navigate or respond to your virtual gamespace, which will allow you to refine the types of designed experiences that are explained in the Design Portfolio.

### **Rationale and Purpose**

This project has two main learning outcomes. First, this assignment will give you an opportunity to refine the writing skills you have cultivated throughout our class. The Design Portfolio is meant to mimic the types of technical documentation that facilitates the development of video games and other types of digital media technologies. However, "technical documentation" is not a single genre but, instead, is an umbrella term for the numerous formats, scenarios, and writing strategies used throughout different professional contexts. Consequently, each section of the

[This file is supplemental material to Kelly, *Writing for Players: Using Video Game Documentation to Explore the Role of Audience Agency in Technical Writing*, prompt 5.2 (2021), doi: 10.31719/pjaw.v5i2.60]

Design Portfolio is designed to test out a writing strategy that can be applied to different professional communication scenarios.

For instance, one section of the Design Portfolio asks you to explain the concept or process you want your audience to learn about. In offering this explanation, you can apply the same writing strategies you used in the Technical Description project from earlier in the semester. In another section, you will need to describe the types of interactive experiences or actions you want your audience to undertake. Narrating intended user experiences will test many of the same skills you used when creating your Instruction Set. In short, it might be useful to think of the Design Portfolio as a "toolbox" of different writing strategies that are used in real-world technical communication scenarios.

In terms of the second main learning outcome, this project will help you further comprehend the rhetorical dimensions of technical communication. Throughout the semester, we have discussed how technical documentation simultaneously coordinates the design of new technologies while also attempting to elicit specific types of actions on the part of an intended audience. In a similar fashion, your Design Portfolio will explain how key design decisions can lend themselves to intended experiences and reactions on the part of your audience. That is to say, designing an interactive gamespace will require you to produce documentation that balances a technical understanding of the features/affordances of a given technology (i.e., the unique mechanics of your Minecraft realm) with a rhetorical understanding of how users might respond to said features/affordances.

### **Structure and Criteria**

Your group's Design Portfolio will include the following sections, each of which will need to respond to a list of specific questions. Please note that you do not need to answer these questions in a linear, step-by-step fashion. Instead, these questions are meant to represent the goals/aims and criteria that are associated with project proposals in real-world professional scenarios.

Introduction (200-300 words):

- What is the general structure and purpose of your Minecraft project?
- What will your audience learn from navigating this learning environment?
- What are the potential benefits of your Minecraft project and the types of learning experiences that occur therein?

Context and Motivation (500-600 words):

- What specific process, procedure, practice, or policy do you want to simulate? When answering this question, you will need to clearly define the main focus of your learning environment in such a way that someone with little-to-no background knowledge can understand it.
- How does your chosen topic actually function in real-world professional scenarios? In other words, what is the real-world importance or value of your chosen topic?
- Who is your intended audience and why would they benefit from learning about your chosen topic via interactive experiences in Minecraft?

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- Are there other parties, organizations, or types of individuals who would directly or indirectly benefit from your learning environment? For example, how can teaching your intended audience about a specific topic help organizations who are equally invested in this topic (or invested in the success of your intended audience)?

#### Project Summary and Intended Outcomes (500-600 words)

- How will you translate the topic you mentioned in the Context and Motivation section into Minecraft? What specific mechanics or features of this game will be used to familiarize your audience with your chosen topic?
- What types of experiences and actions do you want your audience to undertake? In other words, how will your audience actually interact with your learning environment? In answering these questions, it would be helpful to provide at least one example of an interactive experience that uses specific gameplay mechanics or scenarios to elicit certain types of actions/reactions on the part of your audience.
- What in-game goals/objectives will your audience achieve? How will your learning environment communicate these goals/objectives?
- How can undertaking certain actions and achieving in-game goals/objective help your audience understand the complexities and intricacies of your given topic?

#### Project Planning (300-400 words)

- How will you begin approaching this project? What steps will you take first, second, etc?
- What implementation issues or challenges do you foresee arising as you conduct this project?
- What outside technologies and/or resources will you utilize when designing, documenting, and creating your interactive learning environment?
- How will you split up the work within your group? What tasks will be handled by individuals and what tasks will be handled as an entire group?

#### Conclusion (250-350 words)

- If given the proper support, how might your project continue to grow in the future? What new features or applications might be possible?
- How might your project be incorporated into institutional or commercial organizations?

### **Evaluation**

Your Design Portfolio will be evaluated based on how well each section responds to the respective questions outlined above. Additionally, this project will be evaluated based on the standards and best practices associated with effective communication strategies used in professional scenarios. Hence, structural issues such as typos, grammatical errors, and late submissions of rough/final drafts will result in grade penalties.

### **Preparation**

Student groups will be organized into groups based on similar majors or overlapping research fields. This does not mean that each group will consist of members from the exact same major. In

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fact, most groups will have some diversity in regards to each students' discipline. Having a diversity of perspectives can enhance the impact of your virtual learning environments in the sense that each group member can contribute their own expertise when selecting a topic and designing interactive scenarios for your audience. This, in turn, can lend itself to more nuanced and complex learning environments.

For example, your group may include students from electrical engineering and architecture. In this case, your group could create a learning environment that demonstrates how multiple disciplines must work together when designing and creating buildings or public projects. This means that your Minecraft project would help users understand how building infrastructure must abide by multiple disciplinary-specific codes, regulations, and conventions. In creating this project, each member would be able to discuss how their own discipline approaches infrastructure projects and the entire group would decide on how to communicate the intersection between multiple disciplines to an intended audience via interactive gameplay scenarios.

### **Assignment Sequence**

The following is a tentative schedule for the remainder of the semester. Abiding by this schedule will allow enough time to coordinate a feasible workflow with your group members, allow me to provide feedback on rough drafts of your Design Portfolio, conduct peer-review sessions with your peers, and create/modify the working prototype of your Minecraft learning environment.

#### **Week One**

- Decide on a specific process, procedure, practice, or policy you want to design your project around
- Locate at least two scholarly sources that discuss the importance of your chosen topic for a specific professional community
- Locate at least one current event/example that demonstrates how your chosen topic functions in real-world professional scenarios

#### **Week Two**

- Brainstorm possible user experiences that will help your audience learn about your chosen topic
- Identify 2-3 specific Minecraft mechanics that can be to facilitate/foster the possible user experiences you brainstormed
- Begin drafting "Context and Motivation" section
- Begin drafting "Project Summary and Intended Outcomes" section
- Begin drafting "Project Planning" section

#### **Week Three**

- Set up multiplayer Minecraft server or purchase a subscription to "Minecraft Realms"
- Finalize rough draft of "Context and Motivation" section
- Finalize rough draft of "Project Summary and Intended Outcomes" section
- Finalize rough draft of "Project Planning" section

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#### Week Four

- Begin creating Minecraft learning environment
- Complete First Progress Report

#### Week Five

- Review comments on rough draft of Design Portfolio sections and compose a 100-word cover letter that explains how you plan to revise each section in conjunction with my comments (please note: there needs to be a cover letter for EACH section of the Design Portfolio)
- Continue creating Minecraft learning environment
- Complete Second Progress Report

#### Week Six

- Bring functional prototype of your Minecraft project to class so classmates can test out your learning environment
- Complete worksheet for prototype testing

#### Week Seven

- Revise and submit final draft of Design Portfolio based on class workshops and my feedback
- Finalize and conduct end-of-semester presentation for your Minecraft learning environment