The purpose of Usability and Instructions Writing is to provide advanced instruction in the production and testing of print and on-line instructional texts. The course will focus on many of the theoretical/historical issues and practical skills necessary to understand “the how-to, the what, and the why” of these documents and the production practices necessary to make them. In summary, in this course you will:

- design and produce instructional texts,
- design and carry out evaluations and tests of the communications you create,
- write various documents (reports, proposals, memos) that support your work,
- work with clients to achieve common communication goals,
- work collaboratively with your colleagues,
- schedule and manage several projects at one time,
- read research on technical and scientific communications for the purpose of bringing this research to your writing practices,
- read about historical and theoretical contexts relevant to technical and scientific communication,
- develop your own strategies for solving the problems you encounter in your everyday writing and designing tasks, and
- develop your professional portfolio.

Course Requirements

There will be four components to the class: two major projects, some short writing and usability analysis assignments, and several “common readings” during the semester. In addition, you will prepare what you do in this class for inclusion in your professional portfolio. I will give you an individual handout for each project as we proceed through the semester, but below is a summary of the projects.

1. Usability and Instructions Writing White Paper (30%)
   - conduct research into a topic relevant to usability and/or instructions writing
   - write a white paper on your research findings
   - present your research to the class

2. Writing for User Contexts (40%)
   - do readings on usability and instructions writing and design
   - write a project definition memo
   - prepare a usability design proposal
   - write progress reports
   - conduct observations and interviews with users in context; interpretation of data
   - produce final documents (end-of-project report; user document deliverable)

3. Portfolio Design and Presentation (15%)
   - visual mock-up of overall portfolio design
   - preparation of portfolio section on instructions and usability
   - in-class presentation of portfolio design

4. Common Readings (15%)
   - do assigned readings on topics relevant to usability and instructions writing
   - participate in class discussions; help to lead one session during semester
You will be evaluated in three ways. The first method of evaluation will be grades given on the major projects as you finish them throughout the semester. The approximate percentages for each project are listed above in the overview of each project; documents within each project will be apportioned according to their “weight” in terms of the entire project.

The second measure will be grades on your short assignments. These will be given as +/- or a 0 if you do not hand anything in.

The third measure will be your performance as a member of the class. Here I will be looking at your attendance, participation, and professionalism. Any in-class presentations will fall under this area of evaluation, too. Examples of the criteria here are • active participation in discussions and in group work • a sense that you are willing to contribute to the knowledge of the class • your ability to manage and maintain client relationships • your ability to manage deadlines • and a sense of humor (there are other more important things in life, you know).

Week-By-Week Assignments w/Some Readings (others will be added as needed)

• Week 1: What Is Usability?
  Short Written Assignment: Define Usability in 250 words for Thursday

• Week 2: What Are Instructions?
  Short Writing Assignment: Define Instructions Writing in 250 words for Thursday
  Common Reading: “Reading to Learn to Do”

• Week 3: How Do We Integrate Usability and Instructions Writing?
  Short Writing Assignment: Explain “minimalism” to your project manager as a possible approach that your company should use for developing user documents in 500 words for Thursday.

• Week 4: How Can We Evaluate Instructions?
  Common Reading: “How Can Text and Graphics be Integrated Effectively?”
• Week 5: How Can We Revise Instructions to Make Them Better?
  Common Reading: “How Can TW’s Effectively Revise Functional Documents?”
• Week 6: How Can We Plan an Instructions Project?
  Common Reading: “Planning and Writing Your Documents”
• Week 7: How Do We Propose an Instructions and Usability Project?
• Weeks 8-11: How Do I Find Enough Time to Do All of This ;-)?
• Weeks 12-13: How Do We Present Our Deliverables?
• Week 14: What Have We Learned?