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English 308: Summer 2009

Quick Reference Card Assignment

A quick reference card is fundamentally about your group's ability to clearly outline directions to a particular type of user. It is a form of technical documentation that provides a "jump start" to using a program or learning a script or code. This form of documentation emphasizes the visual dimensions of the page, using the space to highlight specific information. Quick reference cards also use visuals to help convey information and enhance learning. One of the key dimensions of creating an effective quick reference card is assessing the users' knowledge and needs.

In this assignment, you and a peer will create a two-page quick reference card for other members of our course. Your card will document certain scripting codes or specific features of a software package that can be used to develop future course projects. For example, in our redesign project you will create storyboards and web templates and give PowerPoint presentations. Thus, a quick reference card for HTML (HyperText Markup Language) code or the interface of Dreamweaver MX (a web editing program) can be useful. Or, you may want to develop a quick reference card about altering screen shot images in Macromedia Fireworks. Regardless of the scripting code or software you document, you will learn to consider how purposes, audiences, situations, and methods affect writers', readers', and/or users' perceptions of written documents.

- Analyze various professional writing genres to consider how stylistic constraints (and potentials) affect the presentation and perception of information.
- Write persuasive, ethically responsible documents that demonstrate—via their form and content—an awareness of the audience's abilities, needs, and interests.
- Develop a set of investigative strategies for learning unfamiliar computer technologies and applications.
- Recognize and analyze the forms and roles that research plays in determining and meeting project goals and users'/readers' needs.
- Apply strategies for collaborating successfully and equitably with peers on course projects.
- Understand and implement theories of document design (e.g., format, layout, graphics) in course projects.
- Conduct and manage short-term project collaboratively.

Components: Documentation memo, design template and quick reference card

1. Documentation memo

Information to discuss in your memo includes, but is not necessarily limited to,

the following:

- Among our class members, what is the range of technical expertise?
- What is the audience's general comfort level with learning new software and coding?
- What is your audience's "typical" approach to learning unfamiliar technologies?
- What particular aspects of the software/coding do your peers want to learn?
- What possible course-related tasks will they need to complete with this software/coding?
- How will your quick reference card address the audience's learning goals and task-related needs?
- Based upon the audience's expertise, comfort, goals, and needs, what specific aspects of the program will you document in your card?
- What functions and features you will highlight in your card?
- What descriptions and procedures will you provide to make your audience more knowledgeable about your selected software/coding?
- What visuals will you integrate into your project?
- What is your own background and experience with the software you will be documenting? What steps will you need to take to familiarize yourself with the software?

Formatting the memo

The body of your memo should address the questions provided above as well as any other information that you deem pertinent to this assignment. Remember you want to establish a professional tone of competency and thoughtfulness. Consider the body's development more carefully:

- Begin your memo with a brief one- or two-sentence overview that quickly summarizes the purpose of the memo. (**Note:** This summary sentence should *not* have a heading. Most of your other memo sections should have a level-one heading unless otherwise specified.)
- Offer brief well-organized paragraphs that respond to the questions provided.
- Add level-one headings for sections to help readers locate information of interest more quickly.
- End your memo with a request for action--in our case, approval for the project as you have outlined it. (**Note:** Just as with the overview of your memo, this section should *not* have a heading).

2. Design template

Your design template should provide specific page layout and design attributes for your quick reference card project. This project component allows you to explore your own design aesthetic while applying design principles to meet your users' needs. Following design and layout principles discussed in class meetings, you will develop your template to include both thumbnail sketches of your quick reference card page layout and a listing and/or depiction of your chosen design

attributes. Your design template should provide specific page layout and design attributes for your quick reference card project. This project component allows you to explore your own design aesthetic while applying design principles to meet your users' needs. Following design and layout principles discussed in class meetings, you will develop your template to include both thumbnail sketches of your quick reference card page layout and a listing and/or depiction of your chosen design attributes.

Using Microsoft Publisher or Microsoft Word, you will create a design template containing the following information:

- Title for your design template.
- Your name and date the design template was last updated. Thumbnail sketch of your two-page quick reference card layout including specifications for margins, justification, paragraph spacing, column layout, image/icon placement, image captions, note/tip/warning placement, white space use, border placement, and header/footer placement. **Note:** The only layout limitations for your quick reference card project are 1) it must *not* be longer than two 8 ¹/₂ X 11 pages and 2) it must have printer-friendly margins.
- Listing and/or depiction of design attributes including font color, face, size, emphasis for title, header, body, caption, callout, header, footer, and any other text; color scheme for document; bullet styles for unordered and ordered lists; table design attributes; callout format; and file formats and resolution for icons and graphics.

Quick reference card

The quick reference card should be no longer than two pages that are 8 1/2" by 11".

Web resources

Example of quick reference card: "Writing reports":

<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/service/ltd/campus/reportwr.pdf>

Purdue memo writing: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/590/01/>