

Memo

Re: Project Assessment

To: Dr. Wickliff

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From: Hannah Yarrington, Lacy Kitchin, Marian Cowhig Owen

1. Process & technical goals for the project

For our project, we were working with Adobe Acrobat. Our main goals for this project were to create an easy-to-read and navigate document for first-time users while also growing our skills as technical writers.

Thankfully, everyone in our group already had some experience working with the software, so navigating the software wasn't difficult. We began the tutorial in Google Docs so we could easily edit our steps before transferring them to InDesign. While we were together, we went through each step, documenting each step we took to complete each task. We also decided that including screen captures would be essential to our instructions, so we began to go through the application to grab those, and we were able to grab those by using our individual windows laptops. We added those to the Google Doc first so we could use it for our first usability testing; however, we were not able to get all of our images on the first round of testing, so we were able to test how important screen captures were to our tutorial.

After each usability test, we went back to our document and edited it to continue improving on our language use and what we needed to include or take out to make the experience better for each user. Having a diverse usability group for each test was very important and helped us understand the different aspects different users may come across when using our tutorial, whether it be because of a particular image or the way something was worded. We specifically received lots of good feedback on our links section, it being one of the harder sections for users to follow. This allowed us to essentially "dumb it down more" so it wasn't so daunting for users. It was also mentioned to include instructions for each section to improve clarity, so that was also very helpful.

As for putting the tutorial in InDesign, this process brought some difficulties. Not being able to share this document with each other was difficult, so we decided to split up our sections so we could work on them individually outside of class and later compare our progress with each other for consistency. We found that having hard copies of our documents was the easiest to use

when comparing each section. But using the application itself was no issue, as all of us were already familiar with InDesign.

Overall, we've learned a lot about ourselves as technical writers and learned how important it is to have the user in mind when creating these documents. Otherwise, your document is useless!

2. Key results of peer review and user tests

Our three rounds of usability tests confirmed our belief that images were key to the tutorial's success. Most of our testers had not used the full version of Acrobat before, so they were new to the program and relied on screenshots and directional instructions ("top of the screen," etc.) to find the tools they needed. In the tests where we did not have all our images in place, users commented that more images would be helpful; in subsequent tests, they mentioned how helpful the images were as they completed their tasks.

The final section of the tutorial, covering links, was the most difficult for us and subsequently for our testers as well. Each successive tester gave us feedback that helped us improve that section, and we feel the final result was as clear as we could make it. Since the linking process is more labor intensive compared to other word processors, we included user tips at the top of the page. We also decided to inform the user that we were presenting four different types of links, and they could decide which one best suited their project. In early tests, users thought they were meant to complete the steps for each type of link, and we felt it was important to differentiate the different options. In comparison, the steps provided by Adobe Tutorials were not very helpful in learning the process ourselves. We found the directions to be somewhat unclear and missing vital information. For example, when creating a link you must insert a link box that will initially be borderless and essentially invisible. You must then layer an additional text box or icon on top of it. The link is not live until you close the editing menu. This was not clear in the tutorial, and we tried to explain the process by considering our own trial and error.

We reviewed the document for design and editorial consistency before sending it for peer review. Since we had worked on our sections individually, we expected there to be subtle differences between our pages. This extra check was time well spent, as our peer reviewers commented that typography was consistent across the document. Peer reviewers also made suggestions about image cropping and typographic hierarchy.

3. Overall assessment of the final document and design process

Overall, our team worked exceedingly well together. We developed a good rapport (aided by previous class relationships) and we were able to play to our individual strengths as we divided up the work. Looking back, our division of labor was rather loose, but we checked in with each other frequently enough that tasks didn't fall through the cracks.

In retrospect, it would have been a good idea to start with a defined layout template, so that we could all work with the same design elements and we didn't need to worry about page

consistency. However, we changed our design a few times before the final draft, so it might have been wasted effort to finalize a design at the start of the project. Additionally, our final check caught most of the discrepancies between pages.

Based on our own assessment and that of our testers and peer reviewers, we feel our final tutorial explains several Adobe Acrobat tasks clearly and succinctly. We provided visual aids to help novice users, but not so many that experienced users will feel talked down to. The section on linking was difficult to create, and the effort likely shows in the final product. Still, we know that the final product is better than our initial version, thanks to input from testers.