

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature

ENGL 110: Visual Rhetoric and Digital Document Design for Writers

Instructor:	Mark Thompson
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Office Hours:	T 2:00-3:45. <i>Make an appointment through the advising portal.</i> Online until further notice. (I can also meet other times if this doesn't work.)
Class Days/Time:	T/TH 12:30–1:45
Classroom:	Tuesday: Clark 111/Thursday: The Internets
Prerequisites:	Upper-division standing

Canvas

All course materials such as readings, syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. will be found on Canvas. I will also email you using Canvas.

The login site for Canvas is: <https://sjsu.instructure.com/>

Use your standard SJSU login to access the class. We will cover basic login in class, but there are additional resources to learn Canvas here:

<http://guides.instructure.com/>

NOTE: The syllabus template I'm forced to use from the university has a text-spacing issue that randomly smashes words together. Word *thinks* there's a space, but it sure doesn't look like there's one. These are not typos. These are due to discrepancies in the different versions of Word and one of the many reasons Word is terrible.

Course Description

Visual Rhetoric and Digital Document Design for Writers combines visual rhetorical theory, visual design, and digital-design software to introduce students to what Gunter Kress has called the “visual grammar” of technical communication. Visual rhetoric sees design and images as cultural objects to be read and interpreted. Building on this premise, training in visual literacy is increasingly seen as a fundamental requirement of technical writers entering the modern workforce. In the workplace, technical writers are expected to work with design templates, design original documents, and collaborate with artists and graphic designers already well-versed in this field. The goal of this course is to bring our professional writing students into the conversation of applied visual design in a meaningful and practical way, and to equip them with the tools—both conceptual and digital—that will prepare them for the next step in their professional writing careers.

This course begins with readings in rhetorical theory and social semiotics to help students “read” visual design. We then move to the principles of document design, bringing theory and practice together in projects which draw upon digital tools like Photoshop, InDesign, and WordPress to create websites, interactive apps, and other genres of digital communication students will encounter as they move into the workplace.

Lastly, we look at UX Design, or User Experience Design. How do we help create things that are easy for our users to use? How do we balance the many demands that clients have with what our users are attempting to do? What if we're asked to do something purposefully unethical because it makes our client money?

Throughout the process, students will engage in usability studies of their documents, letting them test the effectiveness of their documents in real-world use.

One-Unit Enhancement: This is a four-unit class. The unit enhancement comes from an added infographics module/project and an extensively expanded final project.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives

Course Goals

- To introduce students to the visual grammar of design and the relationship of visual elements to the written word in technical and professional documents.
- To provide a vocabulary and theoretical grounding from which to conceptualize design and to develop practical design skills appropriate for technical writers.
- To give students rhetorical training in the interpretation and analysis of visual artifacts.
- To compliment theoretical models of visual design with hands-on practice with a number of software tools across multiple genres of technical communication.
- To introduce students to the field of UX and the best practices of usability.

Student Learning Objectives:

The standard Student Learning Objectives of the English Department are:

SLO1 Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.

SLO2 Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.

SLO3 Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.

SLO4 Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.

SLO5 Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Because Professional and Technical Writing does not choose literary works as its topic, this course augments SLO2 with three additional SLOs specific to the Career Writing Concentration.

SLO6 Thoughtfully analyze and critique design from ideological, aesthetic, and functional perspectives.

SLO7 Improve the design and functionality of technical documents encountered in their professional and academic contexts.

SLO8 Use current authoring and design software to both edit existing technical documents and see projects through from inception to completion.

SLO9 Use appropriate design and visual elements to compliment text in explaining complex technical processes to lay audiences.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [Syllabus Information web page](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>). Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Canvas. The whole class is run over Canvas and Zoom this semester. I will use Canvas to communicate with you during the week, and will be giving feedback and grading over ~~Canvas~~

I will also use Canvas to make your grades available to you throughout the semester, so you know where you stand at all times.

Readings. There is no reader or textbook for this class. All readings will be posted on Canvas. This allows me to pick and choose from the best writing out there, as well as adjust reading difficulty to the level of our class. I fully understand that this isn't always the most interesting reading in the world. However, these chapters and articles are crucial to building a classroom vocabulary for the work we are doing. There is no busy work in this class. All readings have been curated to make sure they are of use to class projects.

You are expected to read EVERYTHING and come to class prepared to discuss each article. If you start slacking here, I can guarantee you will struggle with the assignments.

Classroom Tools: Software

- Unless otherwise specified, assignments should be turned in as a Word (.doc) file. Microsoft Office is free to SJSU students.
- Additionally, we will be learning some of the most common applications used in design, such as *Adobe InDesign*, *Illustrator*, and *Photoshop*. Download Adobe Creative Cloud and install these programs before classes that feature them because installing these things takes forever.
- If there are ANY other applications that you would like to learn, please don't hesitate to ask me about them. I'm happy to accommodate your individual research interests.

Software Links:

- Microsoft Office:
<http://its.sjsu.edu/services/software/microsoft-students/index.html>
- InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator (Part of the Adobe Creative Cloud):
<https://www.sjsu.edu/ecampus/teaching-tools/adobe/index.html>

Additional Training

- Your library card gives you access to Lynda.com. There are tutorials on all the design tools we use in this class. <https://www.lynda.com/portal/patron?org=sjlibrary.org>

Course Requirements and Assignments

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, students are expected to spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on. More details about student workload can be found in [University Policy S12-3](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

Major Projects:

Project #1: Phone App or Website User Interface Analysis (10% of grade)

SLO: 3, 4, 6, 7

Choose an app on your phone or a website. Drawing on terminology, user testing, and theory, write a three-page white paper assessing the concept, design, and functionality of the app/website. Visual hierarchy, visual themes, color use, animation, iconography, textual elements, and intuitiveness should all be assessed. Your white paper should reflect the principles of information design and will be assessed on its usability.

Project #2: User Interface Design (10% of grade)

SLO: 3, 4, 6, 7, 8

In this project, you will establish a style guide and design the user interface for the front page of a website or phone app, drawing upon best practices of visual design and usability.

Project #3: Brochure Design and Layout (10%)

1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 For this project you will use Adobe InDesign to design and lay out the content for an eight-page high tech or non-profit investor brochure.

Project #4: UX Proposal and Report (15% of grade)

SLO: 1, 3, 4, 8

You will plan, prototype, and write a report on a real-world user experience improvement with an app, product, or service.

Project #5: Client Redesign/Gamify the Major (15%)

1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

In groups, we will design and prototype an app that gamifies the tech writing major. Students will focus on app hierarchy, content, UX design, and usability and provide all the materials needed to build and implement an actual app.

OR

In groups, we will redesign professional documents for local nonprofit organizations. Each group will choose a client, develop a plan to redesign their promotional material and their websites, and then implement that plan, creating professional-looking, error-free makeover for the organization.

Class Readings

SLOL 1, 2, 5, 6

University policy F69-24, “Students should attend all meetings of their classes, not only because they are responsible for material discussed therein, but because active participation is frequently essential to insure maximum benefit for all members of the class. Attendance per se shall not be used as a criterion for grading.”

Assignments and Grading Policy

A+ = 100-97%	A = 96-93%	A- = 92-90%
B+ = 89-87%	B = 86-83%	B- = 82-80%
C+ = 79-77%	C = 76-73%	C- = 72-70%
D+ = 69-67%	D = 66-63%	D- = 62-60%
F = 59-0% Unsatisfactory		

Grading/Weight

Project #1: Web/Phone App UI Analysis	10%
Project #2: Web/Phone App UI Design	10 %
Project #3: Brochure Layout	10%
Project #4: UX Prototype and Report	15%
Project #5: Client Redesign/Gamify the Major	15%
Weekly Assignments, In-Class Assignments	40%

Grading Criteria: The following paragraphs sum up my criteria for grading work. Though I assign number grades for each essay, here is a general guide to my grading.

A=Professional. An "A" is awarded to work that is consistently excellent. It is professional, publishable, generically appropriate, and contains no more than two minor errors.

B=Intern. A "B" is awarded to work that is above average—and occasionally excellent. While documents may not exhibit the same depth of research, analysis, or polish, the author has done a competent job. This document would be publishable with another round of revision.

C=Student. A "C" is awarded to work that is in the ballpark of what a document is attempting to achieve. The author does many things right, but there are omissions or errors that significantly damage a document's usefulness. The author is producing competent work that would require significant revision on the part of a more experienced writer.

A "D" is awarded to work that shows developing competence. The author understands the conversation to be addressed, but it's a poor effort. This is the type of work that would be rejected and assigned to another writer.

An "F" is awarded to work that demonstrates incompetence. The author flounders in researching the subject. The author commands neither the forms and principles of composition, nor the mechanics of good writing.

“A minimum aggregate GPA of 2.0 SJSU Studies (R, S, & V) shall be required of all students as a graduation requirement.” To see full text, review [University Policy S11-3](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S11-3.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S11-3.pdf>.

My Classroom Policies

Understanding. I understand that we are in a global pandemic generously seasoned with fires, heat waves, power outages, evacuations, Constitutional crises, murder hornets, etc. I also understand that many of us are cramped at home with family or roommates. Some of us are trying to get our own kids through school. Some of us have nine other people trying to use the internet in our places. Some of us have lousy or no internet. I understand all of this and factor it into grading. Keep in contact with me and let me know how I can help.

Netiquette. Lordy, what a terrible word. Remember that you are in a professional environment and that you’re training to be in an ever-more professional environment. Be yourselves, but be respectful of each other. No trolling. I’m the only one allowed to troll. Being able to disagree or critique without being mean is a skill you need to develop AS IS the ability to take fair criticism without getting your feelings hurt.

Cameras. Talking to black boxes sucks. I would prefer you to keep your camera on during class. This is the professional standard at the places you’ll end up working. Wear a hat and sunglasses if you need to, pause if you have a huge sneeze coming on. If there’s a reason you can’t leave your camera on, please let me know.

Attendance. I guarantee that missing more than a few days will significantly affect your understanding of the material. Please notify me if you are unable to attend class. **DO NOT DISAPPEAR ON ME.** In the past, students who have vanished without explanation for more than two or three classes have failed this class. I am a human being. If you are experiencing an ongoing crisis, please let me know and we will come to some sort of arrangement.

Lateness. I understand that we're all late every now and then, but a routine failure to arrive on time will significantly affect your participation grade in this class. If there is something that will make you late to class, whether reoccurring or not, please let me know. *That being said, don't let potential lateness keep you from coming to class.*

Grading class participation. I expect everyone to participate in class. This means you are awake and engaged, having done the readings and the homework, are actively participating in discussion and are working constructively when we break into small groups. A participation grade allows me to reward those students who are actively engaged in each class, while being able to account for students who are routinely late, absent, sleepy, or engaged in non-class related activity during our brief time together. An "A" means always engaged, a "B" means mostly engaged. A "C" is sometimes engaged. A "D" is a blank box with a name that I never hear from.

Late work. I don't accept it. Part of being a writer is, though the Earth itself may be aflame, you meet your deadlines. All of them. I understand your life is complicated, with many responsibilities pulling you in multiple directions. If you are unable to attend on a day that an assignment is due, it is up to you to make sure that you get your work before the beginning of that class. *Some assignments are due at midnight, some are due before class. Be sure to check with Canvas.*

Acting with academic integrity. In both your academic and professional careers, you are expected to act with integrity. You are in this class for more than a grade, you are here to emerge with actual skills—skills which are not developed through cheating. I am well aware of the essay mills, and have designed this class to make the purchase of or plagiarism from other writing sources painfully obvious. Though it most likely will not be an issue, any plagiarism will earn you an automatic "F" in my class. Just do your own work.

Technology use. I realize the temptation to refresh your Instagram feed as we delve into the intricacies of dangling participles may be strong. Emailing, texting, swiping right, decapitating orcs, and engaging in unrelated activities are discourteous and distracting to me and your classmates. When potential employers ask about you, this is usually the second thing they ask about. Try not to get distracted.

Food and beverages. Feel free to eat and drink during class. No slurping noises, please.

My open-door policy. I want you to succeed in this class. I'm happy to talk with you at any time about the readings, assignments, and any other aspect of the course. Just talk to me after class, send me an email, or arrange to meet with me outside class.

COME TO MY ONLINE OFFICE HOURS! My highest compliments from students

have always come from the one-on-one help I give outside of class. In addition to teaching, I've worked as a professional writer and editor for the past 20 years. I'm here to mentor you and help you transition into the workplace. Come talk to me!

Contacting me. Please use email to contact me (I don't check voice messages and I don't answer the phone if I'm busy). I check email at 10 am and 2 pm Monday- Thursday and 3pm on Fridays. So, don't expect a response from a panicked email sent at midnight about an assignment due the next day.

After this class. In addition to my assistance in this class, I extend to all my students an offer to help with any future writing issues which may arise once this class is over. In the past, I have assisted former students with cover letters, updated resumes, grad school applications, and have even helped with the abstract of a scientific paper.

Additionally, for all students who receive an A in this class, I will happily write a letter of recommendation for any grants, schools, programs, or internships you maybe applying to. Also, if you receive an A in this class, you may include me as a reference in any jobs you might apply to—as long as you haven't committed any felonies in the interim.

We get approximately 20 requests per year from local employers looking for graduates from our program. If you do well in this class, I pass your name along and do what I can to make sure you get an interview. Last year alone, 12 students got full-time writing jobs with my help. Work hard, and you can be the next.

Student Technology Resources

Computer labs for student use are available in the Academic Success Center located on the 1st floor of Clark Hall and on the 2nd floor of the Student Union. Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college. Computers are also available in the Martin Luther King Library.

A wide variety of audio-visual equipment is available for student checkout from Media Services located in IRC 112. These items include digital and VHS camcorders, VHS and Beta video players, 16 mm, slide, overhead, DVD, CD, and audiotape players, sound systems, wireless microphones, projection screens and monitors.

SJSU Writing Center

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Clark Hall, Suite 126. All Writing Specialists have gone through a rigorous hiring process, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. In addition to one-on-one tutoring services, the Writing Center also offers workshops every semester on a variety of writing topics. To make an appointment or to refer to the numerous online resources offered through the Writing Center, visit the [Writing Center website](http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter): <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>. For additional resources and updated information, follow the Writing Center on Twitter and become a fan of the SJSU Writing Center on Facebook.

SJSU Peer Connections

The Learning Assistance Resource Center (LARC) and the Peer Mentor Program have merged to become Peer Connections. Peer Connections is the new campus-wide resource for mentoring and tutoring. Our staff is here to inspire students to develop their potential as independent learners while they learn to successfully navigate through their university experience. Students are encouraged to take advantage of our services which include course-content based tutoring, enhanced study and time management skills, more effective critical thinking strategies, decision making and problem-solving abilities, and campus resource referrals.

In addition to offering small group, individual, and drop-in tutoring for a number of undergraduate courses, consultation with mentors is available on a drop-in or by appointment basis. Workshops are offered on a wide variety of topics including preparing for the Writing Skills Test (WST), improving your learning and memory, alleviating procrastination, surviving your first semester at SJSU, and other related topics. A computer lab and study space are also available for student use in Room 600 of Student Services Center (SSC).

Peer Connections is located in three locations: SSC, Room 600 (10th Street Garage on the corner of 10th and San Fernando Street), at the 1st floor entrance of Clark Hall, and in the Living Learning Center (LLC) in Campus Village Housing Building B. Visit [Peer Connections website](http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu) at <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu> for more information

Day	What We're Doing During Class	Homework For Next Class	What's Due
WEEK 1: Aug 24 & 26			
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intro to Course 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 1: Theories of Design</i> 	
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theories of Design Group Presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Homework 1: Mini-Analysis</i> 	
WEEK 2: Aug 31 & Sept 2			
Tuesday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finish Presentations Visual Rhetoric 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Homework #2: Finding an Artifact</i> 	Homework 1: Mini-Analysis
Thursday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visual Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 2: What is Document Design?</i> <i>Homework #3: Visual Analysis</i> 	Homework #2: Finding an Artifact
WEEK 3: Sept 7 & 9			
Tuesday	What is Document Design? Introduce Project #1: User Interface Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 3: Don't Make Me Think, #1</i> 	Homework #3: Visual Analysis
Thursday	Don't Make Me Think #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 4: Don't Make Me Think, #2</i> 	
WEEK 4: Sept 14 & 16			
Tuesday	Don't Make Me Think #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 5: What is Usability?</i> 	Homework #4: Usability Critique
Thursday	What is Usability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 6: Principles of Design</i> 	
Sunday Sept 19			Project #1: UI Analysis
WEEK 5: Sept 21 & 23			
Tuesday	Principles of Design Introduce Project #2: UI Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 7: Proximity & Alignment, Repetition & Contrast</i> 	Homework #5: CRAP critique
Thursday	Cover Readings Tutorial: Designing/Building Styles Templates in Word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Reading 7: Working with Type</i> 	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Homework #6: Client Template in Word</i> 	
WEEK 6: Sept 28 & 30			
Tuesday	Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 8: Designing with Type, Pt 2</i> 	Homework #6: Client Template in Word
Thursday	Type, Pt 2 Tutorial: Word-Basic Document Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Finish Tutorial Assignment</i> • <i>Reading 9: Use of Color</i> 	
Sunday, Oct 3			Project #2: UI Design
WEEK 7: Oct 5 & 7			
Tuesday	Use of Color Introduce Project #3: Brochure Design and Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading: 10 Use of Images</i> • <i>Homework 7: Choosing a color palate, Finding an image style</i> 	
Thursday	Use of Images Tutorial: Intro to InDesign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Finish Tutorial Assignment</i> • <i>Reading 11: Page Design</i> 	Homework 7: Choosing a color palate, Finding an image style
WEEK 8: Oct 12 & 14			
Tuesday	Page Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 12: The Whole Document</i> 	
Thursday	The Whole Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Finding Your Own Personal HUD</i> 	
Sunday Oct 17			Project #3: Brochure Design and Layout
WEEK 9: Oct 19 & 21			
Tuesday	In Groups: Designing/Prototyping a HUD Introduce "Learn HTML" project for Code Academy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Work on Your HUD</i> 	
Thursday	Group Check-In, Group Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Finish Your HUD, build presentation</i> 	
WEEK 10: Oct 26 & 28			

Tuesday	Presentations: Team HUDs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 13: User Experience</i> 	Group HUD Project
Thursday	Intro to UX Introduce Project #4: UX Improvement Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 14: User Experience #2</i> • <i>Homework X: Find a US project</i> 	
WEEK 11: Nov 2 & 4			
Tuesday	UX Design Introduce Code Academy, “How to Make a Website with NameCheap”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 15: UX Testing</i> • <i>Homework X: Refining your UX project</i> 	
Thursday	UX Testing Group Meetings to Discuss Your Project 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 16: Team Projects</i> • <i>Homework X: UX Testing plan for your Project #4</i> 	
Sunday, Nov 7			Completion of Code Academy, “Learn HTML”.
WEEK 12: Nov 9 & 11			
Tuesday	Team Projects, Introduce Project 5: Final Project. Form Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 16: Don't Make Me Think, pt 3.</i> • <i>Finish Project #4.</i> 	
Thursday	Veteran's Day	No	Class
Sunday Nov 14			Project #4: UX Improvement Project
WEEK 13: Nov 16 & 18			
Tuesday	Reading 16: Don't Make Me Think, Pt 3 XD Tutorial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 17: Don't Make Me Think, Pt 4.</i> • <i>Finish Project #5 Planning Document</i> 	
Thursday	Reading 16: Don't Make Me Think, Pt 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Work on Final Project</i> 	Project #5 Planning Document
WEEK 14: Nov 23 & 25			

Tuesday	ONLINE--GROUP MEETING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reading 18: UX TESTING</i> 	
Thursday	Thanksgiving	No	Class
WEEK 15: Nov 30 & Dec 2			
Tuesday	UX Testing, Final Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Finish Presentations</i> 	Code Academy, "How to Make a Website with NameCheap".
Thursday	Presentations, Class Wrap Up		Project #5 Presentations
FINAL PROJECT DUE ON THURS, DEC 9 AT 5:00 PM			