

# Web Design

COMM 306, Section 61 – Spring 2011

Thursday, 6:15–9 PM

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## Course Description & Objectives

Much like a living organism, the Internet grows and changes every day. The medium of the web may be the single most important advancement in how we communicate since the invention of the printing press. Because of the Internet's pervasiveness and its near-ubiquitous role in our day-to-day existence, it is critical for future media practitioners, regardless of their specialty, to have a fundamental grasp of the basics of the Internet and to be conversant in web technologies and techniques

Over the course of the semester, COMM 306 will cover the following topics:

- The history of the Internet and its precursors
- HTML, the primary “language” of the World Wide Web, and CSS, its stylistic companion
- Basic web page design
- Website usability, usability testing and the web development process

## Textbooks

The following two textbooks are required for this course:

Krug, Steve. *Don't Make Me Think!: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Berkeley: New Riders, 2005.

Niederst Robbins, Jennifer, and Aaron Gustafson. *Learning Web Design: A Beginner's Guide to (X)HTML, Stylesheets and Web Graphics*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media, 2007.

Suggested, but not required, for this course are the following two books:

McNeil, Patrick. *The Web Designer's Idea Book*. Cincinnati: HOW, 2008.

As you will be expected to design your own web pages over the duration of this course, you may wish you use McNeil's book as a starting point for your own ideas if you find yourself at a loss creatively.

McFarland, David. *CSS: The Missing Manual*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media, 2009.

Cascading style sheets, or CSS, are employed as the primary means of styling web pages in this course. They can be a bit unwieldy, and this book may prove useful as a ready reference in taming your style sheets.

## Attendance and Participation

Because our class only meets once weekly, I must adhere to a strict attendance policy. You may miss *one and only one* class session without penalty. For each unexcused absence beyond that, your final grade will be docked by a full letter. As this could very easily mean the difference between passing and failing, I strongly encourage you to make every effort to attend every class session.

Your active participation in class is also essential. Class sessions oftentimes require student input, and your contributions will also provide me with a good gauge of your grasp of the material. Your contributions will also make the course more enjoyable and productive for your fellow classmates.

## Grading Breakdown

|                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Usability Test .....                  | 15% |
| Assignment I: Notepad HTML .....      | 15% |
| Assignment II: Personal Website ..... | 20% |
| Assignment III: Final .....           | 50% |

## Grading Exceptions

Because this course is designed to help prepare you for the kinds of expectations placed on real-world practitioners of web design, there are two additional—but extremely important—course requirements that may (but hopefully will not) impact your grade. Please read them carefully.

- Any work containing **more than three grammatical, functional or typographical errors** will receive an automatic grade of “F.”
- Any assignments completed **using pre-made web templates** (i.e., those included with iWeb or similar software) are unacceptable, and will receive an automatic grade of “F.” This does not include bare-bones CSS templates (those are OK). The difference between the two types of templates is significant and will be elaborated on more fully in class.

Because you are being made aware of these rules up front, *there will be absolutely no exceptions.*

Check your own work carefully! If you have any doubts whatsoever, ask a classmate to check your work for you—and return the favor. Failing that, ask me, and I’ll be happy to provide an answer.

Finally, as a student of Manhattan College, you are, of course, expected to abide by the school’s Statement of Academic Integrity, which is available from the Department of Communication if you wish to obtain a copy.

## Course Assignments

- **Usability Test (15%)**

It is my sincere belief that understanding web usability—how people use the Internet—is the key to designing effective web sites that work. Therefore, at an unannounced point during the semester, you will be tested on your knowledge of web usability. Think of this as a “quiz” of your reading.

- **Assignment I: Notepad HTML (15%)**

Because we will be learning HTML from the ground up, I want you to gain an intimate familiarity with the way a HTML document should be structured, so your first assignment will be to construct a single web page using Notepad (or TextEdit or some other basic no-frills text editor). I will be scrutinizing this assignment, so be absolutely certain that it's as perfect as you can make it!

- **Assignment II: Personal Website (20%)**

Your next assignment emphasizes basic functionality—that is, everything must work and be functional. The site must include text, images and valid links to other pages (both your own and other sites on the Internet).

Design is a secondary consideration for this assignment. While I want you to at least give aesthetics some thought while constructing your site, your grade will not be dependent upon it. I will largely be considering usability above anything else when evaluating your site. A relatively unattractive site that is highly usable will score much higher than a heavily ornamented site that has an indecipherable navigation structure, for example.

- **Assignment III: Final (50%)**

For your final assignment (in lieu of a written final examination), you will work in small groups to design and construct a website for a hypothetical entity (e.g., law firm, restaurant, library, doctor's office, etc.). You will each be held equally responsible for the end result and will share one single final grade. How you divide your responsibilities, however, are entirely up to you.

The trick to this assignment: *Keep it simple*. Ambition is certainly admirable, but don't set a goal that is so high that you cannot reach it. Designing a website for a restaurant, for example, would be far easier and more doable than redesigning the Food Network's website.

The ultimate purpose of this assignment is for you to display, through your teamwork and your craftsmanship, the information that you have learned (and taught yourself) over the duration of this course. You are expected to approach this assignment with the same sort of diligence that you would a real-world application. This is intended to be a practical and realistic learning experience that reflects some of the same obstacles you would encounter in the workplace.

## Course Calendar

The course calendar is tentative and subject to change.

|               |   |                    |  |
|---------------|---|--------------------|--|
| <b>Week 1</b> | Thursday, January 27<br><b>Introduction</b><br>Intro to the course, history of the Internet, basic terms, mechanics of the web  | <b>Week 7</b>      | Thursday, March 24<br><b>Introduction to CSS</b><br>Differences between HTML & CSS, using CSS  |
| <b>Week 2</b> | Thursday, February 3<br><b>“Brainlessness”</b><br>Understanding how people use the web, conventions, “average” users, learning from other people’s mistakes             | <b>Week 8</b>      | Thursday, March 31<br><b>More CSS</b><br>Layouts, positioning, templates, floating   |
| <b>Week 3</b> | Thursday, February 10<br><b>HTML</b><br>Starting with HTML from scratch   | <b>Week 9</b>      | Thursday, April 7<br><b>Dreamweaver</b><br>Setting up and getting started with Adobe Dreamweaver   |
| <b>Week 4</b> | Thursday, February 17<br><b>More HTML</b><br>More nitty-gritty details of HTML<br><br>Thursday, February 24<br>Instructor out of town<br>NO CLASS                       | <b>Week 10</b>     | Thursday, April 14<br><b>More Dreamweaver</b><br>Shortcuts, setups and templates<br><b>★ ASSIGNMENT II DUE</b><br>In-class presentations                             |
| <b>Week 5</b> | Thursday, March 3<br><b>Images and Optimization</b><br>Types of images, image optimization using Photoshop, backgrounds<br><b>★ ASSIGNMENT I DUE</b>                    | <b>Week 11</b>     | Thursday, April 21<br><b>Standards, Validation, HTML5</b><br>Differences between versions of HTML, HTML5, what it all means<br><i>Time provided to work in class</i> |
| <b>Week 6</b> | Thursday, March 10<br><b>More Images and Optimization</b><br>More Photoshop techniques, manipulating photos, more<br><br>Thursday, March 17<br>Spring Break<br>NO CLASS | <b>Week 12</b>     | Thursday, April 28<br><b>Students’ Choice</b><br>Tell me what you want to know—and we’ll figure it out together<br><i>Time provided to work in class</i>             |
|               |   | <b>Week 13</b>     | Thursday, May 5<br><b>More Students’ Choice</b><br><i>Time provided to work in class</i>   |
|               |   | <b>Exam Period</b> | Thursday, May 12<br><b>★ ASSIGNMENT III DUE</b><br>In-class presentations  |