UNIT 3: Technical Instructions

**Goals, Means, Outcomes**

During this project you will learn:

* To analyze and evaluate technical instructions.
* To develop a systematic process for developing your own technical instructions.
* To consider the function of visual diagrams in technical instructions.
* To explore the differences between standard, print forms of technical instructions and online procedural formats.

**Overview:**

Similar to the technical description, the technical instructions project will require you to direct technical language toward a specific audience. Unlike the description, however, the instructions unit will ask you to write collaboratively and include an online audience.

Through the course of this unit you and your group will study the instructables approach to technical instructions, and will create online instructions for a specific product or process. By using instructables as our medium to create technical instructions, you will be accessing a real user base with authentic concerns about usability.

**Selecting a Project**

*Topics*

Your first step will be to determine what process or product your group will focus on. You will need to decide on a product or process that is neither too simple nor too complex, as well as a product or process that you can demonstrate in the course of a class period. To this end, try to select a product or process that will take at least 7-10 steps to complete. Finally, you will need to decide on a product or process that is cost-effective, since you will need to actually build whatever product you choose.

Effective Past Topics:

* Recipes
* Original Coasters
* Yoga
* Ball Launcher
* Creative Shoe-Lace Tying
* Origami
* Candles

Some ways to decide on a product or process:

* Port a DIY project from elsewhere on the web into instructables
* Use a DIY project or recipe that you have made before
* Redesign an existing instructables project into something new
* Look on the forums for suggestions from average instructables users’ needs.
* Look at the current contests on Instrucables.

*Note*

Though you might look at other sources for inspiration, you cannot simply copy a pre-existing project and insert it into instructables. In your first memo for this unit your group will explain the project and how it is different than pre-existing sources. You can remix an existing project or apply an idea to a new situation (think of the altoids survival kits). However, in your first memo you will need to argue how your project differs from existing instructions online.

**Deliverables:**

*Instructable*

The first text your team will build will be an instruction set on the instructables website. This means someone in your group will need to create an account and allow the other members of the group to contribute to the document.

*Technical Instruction Document*

Your group will also be required to create a set of print instructions. These instructions do not need to be set on an 8.5 x 11 inch document, in fact, most instructions will not work well with a full-page format. Think carefully about the kind of document that would be the most useful for your audience. Unlike other documents you’ve created for the class, you will need to print out these instruction.

*3 Professional Memos*

As with the two previous units, you will be asked to compose 3 professional memos to keep me informed of your periodic progress on this project. The group leader is ultimately responsible for submitting each memo by the appropriate deadline, but may delegate the job to other group members if need be. The first two memos will consist of progress reports, while the final memo will be completed by all group members, and will entail an evaluation of the project as well as fellow group members.

**Notes about Group Work**

Collaboration is an extremely important aspect of technical communication, which is why this project will be completed in teams. To this end, you should define clear roles early on in order to avoid confusion/frustration later in the project. Here are some questions that may help you define roles and responsibilities early in the project:

* Who will be the group leader?
* Who will be in charge of background research about the process or product elsewhere online?
* Who will be responsible for purchasing and bringing the materials for constructing the product?
* Who will monitor the instructions for appropriate tone?
* Who will take the images to post on the site?
* Who will be the head designer to create the poster-version of your instructions?

I will evaluate your role in the group through the final memo for this project, where you will rate the performance of the other group members and provide a brief discussion of the tasks performed by each member.

**Grading and Timeline**

Grading for this project will be based on your ability to tailor your documents to each specific audience, both in the textual and visual composition of your materials. Likewise, the effectiveness of these documents will hinge on your ability to write in a clear and concise fashion.

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| **Document** | **Points** | **Due Date** |
| Instructable | 40 | Aug 7th |
| Technical Instruction Document | 40 | Aug 7th |
| Drafts of both documents | 10 | July 27th, July 31st |
|  | **Total: 100 points** |  |