

ENGW 3335 Unit #2: Instructions

(Worth 20% of your grade; due October 7)

Overview

Instructions are the quintessential genre of technical communication. Not a day goes by that we don't encounter some type of formal instructions, whether in a user manual that came with a technical device, on a help screen in a software program, or on a debit card reader at the grocery store. In recent years, instructions have become increasingly visual, spurred on by the ubiquity of computers and the internet in modern America. Today, instructions on almost any topic can be found online. For this assignment, you will create a step-by-step guide to help other people accomplish a specific task, then post your instructions on the internet and interact with the people who have read and/or used your instructions.

Step One: Familiarize Yourself with Instructables

You will share your instructions with the world using a website called Instructables, “a web-based documentation platform where passionate people share what they do and how they do it, and learn from and collaborate with others” (Instructables.com). Instructables allows anyone with a free account to upload text, photos, and videos that explain how to do something. The site places instructions in one of 16 categories, from art to food to pets to sports to science. Before you begin thinking about your topic for this assignment, spend some time on Instructables.com clicking through tutorials in several different categories. As you browse the site, take note of which types of projects pique your interest and cause you to click on them. Finally, create an account on Instructables.com. (Note: You can select your own username, so if you are uncomfortable sharing your identity online, you should use a pseudonym and a “throwaway” email address for this assignment. The only people who will know about your project are the members of your class.)

Step Two: Select a Topic

Once you have become familiar with the Instructables community, brainstorm at least three different ideas for an Instructable of your own. Try to limit yourself to topics with which you have expertise (or at least some experience). Once you have generated three ideas, search the Instructables website to see if other users have created similar tutorials. There are so many tutorials on the site that it may be difficult to find a topic that hasn't been covered, but if one of your potential topics has been covered by 50 other users (or covered remarkably well by a single user), that's a good sign that the site doesn't need another tutorial on that topic. After you have conducted an exhaustive search and considered the feasibility of each of your potential topics, select one specific topic for your tutorial. You will submit your idea to the class website on Thursday, September 16.

Step Three: Create the Instructable

The primary deliverable for this assignment is the tutorial you will create and upload to Instructables.com. Because each tutorial is unique, the specific requirements for this assignment are intentionally broad. At minimum, however, your tutorial should include at least five steps, 10 pictures, and 1,000 words of written text. If you choose to create a series of videos as part of your tutorial, you may substitute five video segments for the 10 pictures, and the script for your videos will count toward your 1,000-word requirement. (A word of caution: the video option may seem easier, but trust me, it is not. If your tutorial will benefit from video instructions, that's great; otherwise, I would recommend sticking with still images and written text.)

Step Four: Write an Analysis Memo

In addition to creating the Instructable itself, this assignment asks you to analyze your work on the project and write a persuasive memo (1–2 pages) about it to your professor. In the memo, you should justify the need for a tutorial on the topic you chose, explain how your tutorial meets that need, and argue that it does so better than its competition. In addition, you should address any technical difficulties you encountered while creating the tutorial, explain how you overcame them, and discuss what you might do differently if you had more time, better equipment, or more experience with this genre. Finally, your memo should include the URL for your tutorial on Instructables.com.

Step Five: Submit Your URL and Analysis Memo

When you are finished with the assignment, save your analysis memo as “Full Name Instructions Memo.doc” (for instance, my file would be named “Quinn Warnick Instructions Memo.doc”), upload it to your Google Docs account, and share it with quinnwarnick@gmail.com. In addition, bring a printed copy of your memo to class that day.

Evaluation Criteria

I will evaluate your Instructable using the following criteria:

Content

- **Completeness:** Does the tutorial consist of at least five steps, 10 pictures, and 1,000 words? (Or, if the video option has been selected, does the tutorial consist of five steps, five videos, and a script of roughly 1,000 words?)
- **Originality:** Does the tutorial address a topic that hasn't been heavily covered on Instructables.com? Or, does the tutorial offer a fresh approach to a much-covered topic?
- **Readability:** Is the tutorial written in a clear and easy-to-follow manner? Does the writer provide specific, step-by-step instructions? Does the writer avoid jargon?
- **Relevance:** Does the writer stay on topic and avoid discussing unrelated concepts?
- **Memo:** Does the memo meet the minimum length requirement? Has the writer followed the guidelines on the assignment sheet regarding what the memo should contain?

Rhetorical Effectiveness

- **Adaptation:** Has the tutorial been designed specifically for use on the web? Does the tutorial address a general, educated audience?
- **Tone:** Does the writer maintain a friendly, encouraging tone? Does the tutorial seem to be written by someone who cares about this subject?
- **Reliability:** Does the writer demonstrate *ethos*, or competence and trustworthiness?
- **Persuasion:** Does the tutorial persuade the reader that the project can be successfully completed using the steps described? Does the reflection memo justify the choices the writer made in creating the tutorial?

Visual Design

- **Representativeness:** Do the photos accurately depict the instructions in the tutorial?
- **Clarity:** Are the photos crisp and well lit? Has the photographer taken care to eliminate background “noise,” such as a cluttered apartment or random strangers?
- **Integration:** Do the photographs work in harmony with the written text? Does the text refer to the pictures? Do the pictures refer to the text (using annotations)?

Standard Written English

- **Spelling:** Does the text contain any spelling errors?
- **Grammar:** Do the documents follow standard grammatical guidelines for formal workplace writing?