

## Project 1 - Interface Analysis

You encounter “user interfaces” every day: your smart phone, your laptop computer, an ATM machine. All of these devices have interfaces that have been carefully designed for specific technical functions that guide you, the user, through the range of available tasks within the system.

We encounter so many different systems on such a regular basis that the design and functionality of these interfaces becomes invisible. This assignment asks you to step back and critically examine the interface of a web-based service or mobile app and document your findings in an analytical screencast posted on our course blog.

### Completing the Assignment

**For this assignment, you will complete four interrelated tasks:**

1. **Choose an application:** To help us become familiar with as many applications as possible, each student in the class will analyze a different application. (You can find the full list of pre-approved interfaces on our course site.) In addition to considering the applications on this list, you should seek out additional applications designed to support writers, photographers, filmmakers, storytellers, public speakers, programmers, etc. I encourage you to select an application you have never used before or have little experience with, but which you would like to explore. **By midnight, Sunday, September 8th, complete the "[Interface Project Preference Form](#)"** (which asks you to rank your four applications in order of preference). We will finalize assignments during the next class.
2. **Conduct the analysis:** Once you have selected an application, you will begin analyzing its user interface. Exploring the basic functionality of the application is a good place to start, but your analysis should not merely describe what the application does; it should investigate how the application controls or influences your interaction with it and/or other users of the application. It should also draw upon the concepts in our readings and class discussions.

Considering some broad questions might help you get started:

### Required Questions:

- What are the affordances of the application? In other words, what does the application allow or encourage you to do? What does it make easy for you? What are the constraints of the application? In other words, how does the application limit your ability to do things you want to do? What does it make difficult for you?
- What prior technology/ies are remediated through this interface?

### Potential questions (answer at least 2):

- How do aspects of the interface draw upon or require digital literacies (attention, participation, collaboration, crap detection, network knowledge)?
- What forms of composition does it afford?
- What network knowledge is necessary? (Is the system algorithm-driven, or does the end product need to successfully account for algorithms of the broader web? Is surveillance a factor?)
- How do these affordances and constraints shape or drive circulation and/or filtration?

- How does your interface or the end product facilitate or require filtering?
- Think about which features of the application are intuitive and which features are “hidden” or only available to advanced users. If the site has a mobile version, visit it in your phone’s web browser or download the official app. What shortcomings do you notice when you use the mobile version? Does the mobile version have any advantages?

Rather than thinking abstractly about these questions, create an account on the site and begin exploring the user interface of your application, taking notes and screenshots as you do so. The answers to these questions will form the basis of your screencast, which is the primary component of this assignment.

1. **Draft your screencast:** The parameters for this essay are intentionally broad, which should allow you to focus on the aspects of your application you find most relevant and interesting. However, please remember that your screencast should analyze and evaluate the application, not just describe or summarize it. Using first-person voice (“I”) may be appropriate in places, but *your essay should not merely express your personal opinion about whether or not you like the application or function as a basic walk-through. Rather, it should thoughtfully critique the application’s interface.* Your initial planning draft will consist of a 1-2 page outline, storyboard, and/or proposal that details what you’ll be doing for the project.
2. **Present your findings:** We will create screencasts that present your argument along with a tour of the interface elements that you’re analyzing. This final product should introduce the application and present a clear, well-organized analytical argument that is appropriate for a broad audience. In class, we’ll be using [QuickTime Player](#) for production, but you are welcome to complete this assignment using any appropriate capture software. Others include [Apowersoft](#) (has a limit of 5 minutes for free version and limited free access), [Camtasia](#) (great but has a water mark) and [iSpring Free Cam](#) (a bit buggy until you get it) The total length of the finished product should be approximately 4 to 5 minutes.
3. **Make your work accessible:** Create closed captions for your video by either uploading your captions to [YouTube](#) or working with [Amara](#). Captions should be accurate, typo-free, and carefully synced.
4. **Submit your screencast:** Upload your finished product to your YouTube channel and send me the link. The video posting should include primary of metadata types: a good, keyworded title, description, and tags as well as the transcription that you completed for the captions. We will discuss this more in class.

## Project 2 - Sustained Web Publication

The purpose of this page is to provide additional detail about setting up and maintaining your Sustained Web Publication.

### Some tips about topics

- Single element topics (music, food, sports) are too general, open-ended, and difficult to maintain.

- As you add elements to the equation (food+vegetarian+on a budget), the topic becomes more workable.
- Ask yourself what you bring to the equation: What are you knowledgeable about? What are you passionate about? What will make your publication about the Yankees different from the thousands of others?
- Topics that generate their own regular “event” will be easier to sustain, so blogging about a certain type of television show will be prompted by the regular airing of the show and the other publications that might surround it; if I blog about a specific NFL team, I have the weekly game, the pregame commentary, the post game bloggers, etc. to trigger ideas for me. If your topic does not have those events occurring regularly and predictably, I suggest creating them for yourself.

### **Platforms**

If you feel strongly that another platform will do a better job for your specific project and you believe you can provide all the tech support you may need for it yourself, go for it. Otherwise, WordPress will be the default platform for this project.

### **Some Guidelines about Posting**

#### **How often should you post?**

Well, people who really do this seriously frequently post every day. That seems a little excessive for this assignment, but you are trying to do your best to emulate that process and project, so **I would shoot for at least 2 posts per week on average. The key is sustained.** There is also the element of predictability and expectations that will be present for some topics and approaches. **And how many words per week? I’d shoot for 1,000-1,200 words a week.** However, some posts may alter this. You are doing the equivalent of professional blogging, and for that to be realistic and worthwhile, those posts need to be substantive. And this is not informal writing; this is published text the world will see, read, critique, and judge.

#### **What does that mean in terms of total number of posts?**

We are blogging from the week starting **October 15** until the week of **November 26** (Thanksgiving Break); that is approximately 8 weeks. If you’re posting 3x per week to meet your 1,000-1,200 word quota, that means roughly 24 posts. 2x per week means around 16 posts.

### **Project 3 - Culminating Project**

For the final project of the course, you will produce a multimodal digital project that is related to the broad topic you’ve been blogging about this semester. The particular topic, goals, genres, media, technologies, and tools, are up to you. You will propose the project from start to finish and work to create and distribute it.

Because constraints drive creativity, I'm going to provide some very general parameters. One word, actually: *Advocate*. As we discussed in class, it can have many definitions and approaches.

This project will advocate for a position, a lifestyle, for a policy, for a group, for a location, for an event, etc., but given the variety of synonyms we're employing, that can mean many things: from producing materials advocating the use of local foods, to promoting participation in a particular community, to engaging in publicity for a relevant campus event or departmental initiative. Whatever you do, it should be relevant to your blog's topic and mission.

As you contemplate ways to develop and produce this project, ask yourself: What does my audience need? What will be engaging, fulfilling, and/or fun to make and to distribute? What skills do I want to learn or push further as I build this project?

**Proposal: Due by November 10, noon**

- 500 words, informal writing
- Description of the topic you will advocate
- Why it matters to you
- What other groups or people may be involved (the sides and the players)
- What approaches you may take
- What tools you may use
- What your overall purpose and audience is
- Three to five sources that may be relevant, briefly summarized

**Guidelines/Criteria:**

- The products can be multiple—think package, campaign, etc.
- These multiple products can be equal in weight or employ more of a one-primary-several-secondary model. This aspect should be clearly spelled out in your proposal.
- The projects will be multimodal, employing some of the tools/skills from this semester.
- Each project should have a plan/mechanisms for pushing content to social media or otherwise distributing the final products.

**A Few Possible Media Options:**

- solid GIF essay
- a carefully considered series of critical memes/macros
- video
- podcast
- series of infographics
- Twine game