Session #9
Advanced Technical Writing
2005

Today In Class

What is an Information Model?
Our “two views” movie review exercise, revisited
Analyzing Genres & Tasks (the user perspective)
Exercise: Just the FAQ’s, ma’am

Today’s focus...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Focus on</th>
<th>Sees the site as</th>
<th>Emphasizes the point of view of</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genre and features</td>
<td>a text; or a collection of texts</td>
<td>the reader/user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure &amp; Delivery</td>
<td>objects &amp; actions; social space</td>
<td>the designers &amp; developers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Models &amp; Workflows</td>
<td>a workplace</td>
<td>the admins and “authors”</td>
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Rockley, Prior & Bazerman

What is an information model, according to Rockely?
How would Prior & Bazerman characterized the work involved in making an ad-hoc or improvised information model explicit?
Create an information model (you can use some variant of DTD syntax) for “Family Film Reviews” that would allow you to transform an XML-formatted review like the one you have into two distinct “views”:

One for parents
One for kids

Then...sketch the views, labeling the objects that would make them up. Post them for session 7 (not next time). You can consider this a dry-run for your next major project. You can go whole hog if you want...and do DTD>XML>XSLT>XHTML...or go lo-tech.

What is a genre?

“...a distinctive profile of regularities across texts, composing processes, and reading practices...”

They highlight:
- recurrent situations
- important connections with other texts
- the shared expectations of readers
- the common practices of writers

What is a Web Genre?

Usability.gov Site on Collecting, Writing, and Revising Content
http://usability.gov/methods/collecting_writing.html

Consider the following advice:
“Break the text into manageable pieces
Put in many headings
Write useful headings”

What is a Genre Analysis?

A process of identifying the comparative and contrastive features of a given information resource. Viewing the site as a text(s), emphasizing the reader/user point of view.
Genre Analysis Categories

- Authors
- Readers/Users
- Organization/Format
- Style
- Use of Visuals
- Range of Variation w/in Genres

Add the five W’s to these and you have a good start on the analysis process:
- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why

Genres: recurrent situations, not necessarily reuse

Why is the FAQ list so popular?

Or we might ask, more broadly...

What makes for good writing on the web?

Basic principles of web writing: #1 Task-Oriented

1. Effective web writing is task-oriented.
   - While it is not entirely true that people don’t read on the web, it is true that reading IS NOT usually their end goal.
   - Good web writing aims to support readers’ true goals and tasks.

Basic principles of web writing: #1 Task-Oriented

Task-Oriented, cont.

- Readers tasks may vary widely from focused to open-ended; from “What is the filing deadline for my return, “ to “I wonder if it is worth it to go ahead and my craft hobby a small business?”
Basic principles of web writing: #2 User-Centered

1. Effective web writing is User-Centered
   • All good writing is tailored for its intended audience, but on the web, that “audience” is an active user, not just a passive reader.

User-Centered, cont.
• Good web writing focuses on readers’ specific needs, eliminating everything that doesn’t address those needs well.
• The best web writing gets tested for its effectiveness in addressing user needs...with real live users!

Just the FAQ’s Ma’am: Good Web Habits

<table>
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<tr>
<th>What is a FAQ?</th>
<th>FAQ Features</th>
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| You’ve probably seen them: lists of FAQ’s. Whether they are “Frequently Asked Questions,” or “Fabricated & Answered Questions,” they represent some of the good habits of successful web writers. | FAQ’s have become popular ways to  
• Target content to reader’s needs  
• Guide reader’s to the specific info they need  
• Chunk information for easy scanning and linking |

FAQ’s are well suited for the web because...
• They are easy to scan. Readers can quickly skip over what they don’t want to read. Note: redundancy is ok!
• They are likely to address the readers’ concerns because they put the writer in the reader’s shoes. This works best if they are real Frequently Asked Questions.
• They are nicely broken up into visual chunks with a label – the question – to make everything identifiable
• They are short: long answers usually mean that more than one question has been addressed...best to break it into two or more!
From Facts to FAQs, 1
How to Turn an Info Release into a FAQ List
Go to the Ohio Dept. of Taxation Site and navigate to RELEASES>INFORMATION RELEASES>ROUNDING (Sept. 29, 2000)
1. First, determine who your readers are likely to be; in this case, ours will be “taxpayers.”
2. Next, determine the questions that taxpayers would ask
3. Group the questions into categories, if needed, and put them in a logical order to make the list easy to use

From Facts to FAQs
Turn an Info Release into a FAQ List, part 2
4. Note that the information in the press release is used to answer the questions
5. Additional information may be needed to provide a more complete answer.

How Did the Buckeyes Do it?
Now go to the FAQ page...assuming the role of your target audience members. Can you find the information from the Information Release on Rounding in the FAQ?
In how many different categories does it reside?

Try this:
1. Pick any news release issued by MSU lately...
   http://msutoday.msu.edu
2. Turn it into a FAQ list
3. Propose a format for future press releases that would allow for easy re-purposing into a FAQ list
   Refer to the genre analysis categories. They’ll be a good guide.
Next Time...

- Analyzing Objects and Views
- Performing a Content Audit
- Read Wysocki, Ch. 6 in B&P; Price (pdf); Johnsen (pdf)