Website Genre Analysis Questions

Purpose of this Set of Questions
To help you to more closely analyze and evaluate the website you have chosen by examining the features of the various genres that comprise it.

Methods of Analysis You Can Use
You should read and carefully examine the website you have chosen, as well as some examples of sites similar to the one you have chosen. You should also look for writing about that genre such as textbook chapters, guidelines for writers, samples, templates, or other instructional material designed to help people produce websites like the one you are studying.

The questions below should help you to analyze the website you have chosen. You should modify these questions, though, to fit your specific site. As you work to answer the questions, gather evidence that you can use to back up any statements or claims you will make. You will then write up a report, using the Genre Analysis Template.

Before you start
Remember that your Web Site is a composite of many genres – you may have to run through this list of questions more than once! E.g. for Amazon.com, different groups of people “write” different parts of the site – users contribute product reviews, for example, but do not compose the help pages, etc.

Questions about Writers

• Who are the authors of the website? Most likely, the author is the organization, not simply an individual. If this is the case, who takes responsibility for the website’s content and design? Are the members of the production team “visible” or “invisible” to visitors of the site?

• How are the writers or content contributors of the document represented? Note that these folks may be different than the “authors.”

• What features of the document cue you in to the organization’s identity, purpose, and mission? What kinds of credibility appeals are used? What does the design and look of the document tell readers about the organization?

Readers

• Who are the likely users of this site? Are there primary, secondary, etc. user groups? Are there obvious links or paths that are meant to appeal to these groups, or does the site seem to present one path for all of these groups?

• How will this site be used by the various readers for which it is designed? Will it be searched, printed out, bookmarked, reviewed, used as a standard or reference?

• What features of the site seem to tailor it for the various users you identified?

Format & Organization

• Create a site structure map that includes all nodes and links. Describe what each node does in the site.
• What features of this site seem to be conventions, or parts which appear in all websites of this type? (Eg. Banner Advertisements, Search Fields, A “Contact Us” page). What parts of this document seem unique, breaking with convention or tailored to fit the particular context or audiences that the site serves?

• Describe the logic behind the way the site is organized? Does it seem to follow other key processes or logics in your context such as “the research process,” “the engineering process,” the scientific method,” etc.? Is it a pure hierarchy, or something more distributed? Does the site structure make sense in terms of the intended audiences and purposes it serves?

• What are the size and structural characteristics of the site? Number of links and nodes? Average length of each node? Variety of media? Sound, video, animation? Text Layout? % of text to white space? % of text to visuals? How do these characteristics mesh with the intended audiences and purposes for the site?

Level of Formality in this Genre

• What is the level of formality for the document and how does this formality show up in the document? Research methodology or fact-checking rigor? Linguistic and Sentence-Level correctness? Use of standard templates or style guidelines? Page Layout or the look of the document? Tone? Others?

Use of Visual Cues and Images

• How does the site visually support user tasks such as navigation, searching? What page layout and text styles are used (bold, underline, indent, chunking, bullets, etc)? What visual cues are used? Does the site use dynamic or interactive techniques to provide visual support?

• How does the site control the placement of text and images in vertical columns? Are tables used as layout guides? Does the site use frames for layout or navigation support?

• What sorts of visual representations of information appear on the site? How are these constructed?

Range of Variation Among Representative Samples of Similar Sites

• How typical of the standard genre(s) is the site you have chosen? From what you can tell, how much variation is there from site to site in the above categories (writer/reader positions, Format & Org, Formality, Use of Visuals)? Given this variation, how would you rate your site compared to sites of similar organizations?

• When deviations from accepted web standards occur on your chosen site? why do they occur? Are they mistakes or bad decisions? Are they purposeful changes which fit the particular context?

Forecasting Your Own Experience with this Genre

• Consider the conditions under which you might see yourself working on a site like this one. What did your analysis of this genre help you to see that may be beneficial in the future?