

TECM 4300 (001): Usability and User Experience in Technical Communication

Instructor Information

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Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:30am-12:00pm or by appointment

Communication is essential to your success in this course. Connect with me via email for quick questions. If you contact me and do not receive a response within two business days, send a follow-up email. Please note I do not respond to Teams or Canvas messages.

Stop by office hours or schedule an appointment with me if you need clarification or feedback on an assignment or have another class-related issue you would like to discuss. Appointments outside of office hours will need to be scheduled at least two days in advance in most circumstances.

Course Information

Description

The purpose of this course is to develop your skills related to usability and user experience assessment as it relates to careers in technical communication.

Structure

This is a 16-week face-to-face course. Each week will correspond with a weekly module on Canvas with course content. I will open a new module each week. You will be responsible for reviewing modules prior to class meetings and are expected to submit assignments through Canvas.

Objectives

User experience (UX) is a driving force behind how documents, websites, and other web-based applications are created. Usability & User Experience covers the methods and best practices of the field, and introduces students to concepts such as information architecture, usability heuristics, and how usability and user experience tests are conducted. In this class, students will learn how to:

- Identify how usability and user experience is tested
- Develop and conduct usability tests on live websites
- Analyze data and information to write useful recommendation reports

Prerequisites

[TECM 2700](#); [TECM 3010](#); TECM major, or consent of department.

Course Requirements

Materials

- Barnum, C. *Usability Testing Essentials*. 2nd ed. Elsevier, 2020*

- Podmajersky, T. *Strategic Writing for UX*. 2nd ed. O'Reilly Media, 2025
- Supplementary materials will be available on Canvas

*An e-book version of this text is available with [unlimited user access via the UNT Library](#).

This course has digital components. To fully participate in this class, students will need internet access to reference content on the Canvas Learning Management System. If circumstances change, you will be informed of other technical needs to access course content. Information on how to be successful in a digital learning environment can be found at [Learn Anywhere](https://online.unt.edu/learn) (<https://online.unt.edu/learn>).

Assignments

- Class Activities (15%)
- Discussion Lead (15%)
- Research Plan (10%)
- Research Report (15%)
- Design Prototype (15%)
- Writing Sample (15%)
- Application Materials (15%)

Grading

The grading criteria below serve as general guidelines for evaluating all assignments. Assignment-specific rubrics will be available on Canvas.

- *A (90-100%)*: A manager would be very impressed and would remember the work when a promotion is discussed. In this course, that means work that is a pleasure to read, with excellent content, grammar, sentence structure, mechanics, and visual design. In addition, work is thorough, complete, coherent, well organized, supported sufficiently, and demonstrates a superior understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
- *B (80-89%)*: A manager would be satisfied with the job, but not especially impressed. This means that documents are well written and well produced and demonstrate a substantial addition to the learning process. Work is sufficiently developed, organized, and supported, and demonstrates a solid understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
- *C (70-79%)*: A manager would be disappointed and ask you to revise or rewrite sections before allowing clients and others to see the work. In other words, the document may have clear, but underdeveloped ideas, or it might not engage or affect the reader. The documents may contain some errors in grammar, mechanics, or logic.
- *D (60-69%)*: A manager would be troubled by the poor quality of work. This level of work forces the reader to work too hard to understand the main ideas. The documents may contain incomplete information, have serious grammar and mechanical problems, lack clear organization, or be conceptually unclear.
- *F (0-59%)*: A manager would start looking for someone to replace you. Work fails to address the tasks of the assignment, is so underdeveloped as to demonstrate incompetence, and is mechanically and grammatically incomprehensible. This grade will also be assigned for any evidence of plagiarism.

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation

Class attendance and participation are required for this course. This means being both present and engaged. If you are not participating (on your phone, laptop, or doing other activities unrelated to class), you will receive a warning and will be marked absent if it happens again.

You are allowed to have four absences without a penalty. Each absence beyond the first four will result in a loss of a letter grade. There is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences except those that fall under the UNT Student Attendance and Authorized Absences Policy (UNT Policy 06.039). Documentation concerning illness or extenuating circumstances that exceed 5 consecutive days should be provided directly to the Dean of Students' Office for consideration.

Tardiness and Early Dismissals

If you are not seated at the start of class, you will be considered late. If you arrive late more than three times, you will receive a deduction towards your professionalism grade. If you are more than 10 minutes late or leave more than 10 minutes without prior approval, you will be counted absent for the day.

Assignment Submissions

If you are not seated at the start of class, you will be considered late. For every third time you are late, you will receive an absence towards your total. If you are more than 10 minutes late or leave more than 10 minutes early without prior approval, you will be marked absent for the day.

Late Work

In-class assignments (Class Activities and Discussion Lead) will not be accepted late. Other assignments may be submitted late without prior approval from the instructor. One letter grade will be deducted per 24 hours the assignment is late. Requests for extensions must be submitted via email at least 48 hours before the assignment deadline.

AI Tools

Generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini) may be used for brainstorming and idea generation in the initial planning of an assignment. However, it may not be used to write, revise, paraphrase, edit, or generate any portion of submitted work, nor to locate, summarize, or cite sources. AI writing assistance tools (e.g. Grammarly) are also not permitted in this course.

If using generative AI for ideation, students must provide an AI disclosure statement, citation, and AI prompt and output documentation. Misuse is considered cheating under the UNT Student Academic Integrity Policy (UNT Policy 6.003) and will be reported to the Office of the Provost and the Office of Student Success.

Grade Disputes

You are required to wait 24 hours before contacting me to dispute a grade. Within that time, I expect you will review the assignment details and reflect on the quality of the work you turned in. If you would still like to meet, contact me to set up a meeting. Please note that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits me from discussing your grades via email.

You should come to our scheduled meeting with specific examples that demonstrate that you earned a higher grade than you received. If you miss your scheduled meeting, you forfeit your right to a grade dispute. If you do

not contact me to schedule a meeting within seven days of receiving your grade, you also forfeit your right to a grade dispute.

University Policies

ADA Accommodations

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

Other Academic Success Resources

To explore campus resources designed to support you, check out [UNT's student support services and policies](#), find support through [Succeed at UNT](#), and take a moment to [learn about types of wellness](#). You can also visit [Scrappy Says](#) to find information about enrollment, student records, student accounts, and financial aid.

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences. According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

Acceptable Student Behavior

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's [Code of Student Conduct](#) to learn more.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and

university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

Semester Schedule

Readings should be completed before the first day of class the week they are assigned unless otherwise instructed. Major assignments are due on Sundays. The schedule does not include in-class activities or the discussion lead assignment. Topics, readings, and assignment deadlines are tentative and subject to change.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings	Assignment
1	8/17	Introduction		
	8/19	UX essentials; Careers in UX	UTE, Chapter 1 (p. 9-19); What a UX Career Looks Like Today	Skills Inventory I (CA1)
2	8/24	Understanding users	UTE, Chapter 4 (p. 99-134); College Students on the Web	University Websites (CA2)
	8/26	Testing toolkit; Research Plan	UTE, Chapter 2 (p. 35-68)	DL Preferences
3	8/31	Planning tests I	UTE, Chapter 5 (p. 135-170)	User Profiles (CA3)
	9/2	Planning tests II	UTE, Chapter 5 (p. 171-195)	Goals-Tasks-Scenarios (CA4)
4	9/7	Labor Day (No Class)		
	9/9	Preparing tests	UTE, Chapter 6 (p. 210-245); Attitudinal and Behavioral Research	Research Plan
5	9/14	Conducting tests		Usability Test Reflection (CA5)
	9/16	Analyzing results	UTE, Chapter 7 (p. 287-314); Mental Models (DL)	
6	9/21	Reporting findings I	UTE, Chapter 9 (p. 321-358)	Descriptive Analysis (CA6)
	9/23	Reporting findings II	Introduction to Web Accessibility (DL)	Research Report
7	9/28	Principles of writing		
	9/30	Voice	SW, Chapter 2 (p. 17-46); Content Strategy vs. UX Writing (DL)	Voice Chart (CA7)
8	10/5	Conversation	SW, Chapter 3 (p. 47-56)	Conversational Text (CA8)
	10/7	Text patterns	SW, Chapter 4 (p. 57-112); UX Copy (DL)	
9	10/12	Content for LLMs	SW, Chapter 5 (p. 113-154)	UI Control Types (CA9)

	10/14	Editing	SW, Chapter 6 (p. 155-166); AI for UX: Getting Started (DL)	Writing Sample
10	10/19	Principles of design	The Basics of UX and UI Design Principles; 5 Principle of Visual Design in UX	Visual Design (CA10)
	10/21	Psychology of design	The Difference Between IA and Navigation (DL)	
11	10/26	Wireframes	What are Wireframes and Why are They Used?	
	10/28	Prototypes	Wireframe vs. Mockup--What's the Difference?; Set Up of an Eye Tracking Study (DL)	
12	11/2	Figma workshop		Figma Essential Training (CA11)
	11/4	Application Materials	Augmented Reality: What Does it Mean for UX? (DL)	Design Prototype
13	11/9	Conferences I		Career Conference (CA12)
	11/11	Conferences II		Finding a Job on Linked In (CA13)
14	11/16	Finding job opportunities	How to Read and Understand Job Postings	Job Ad Analysis (CA14)
	11/18	Creating job materials	Effective Resumes; How to Write a Cover Letter	Skills Inventory II (CA15)
		Thanksgiving Break (No Class)		
15	11/30	UX portfolios	Beginner UX Portfolio Examples	
	12/2	Materials workshop		
16	12/7	Finals Week (No Class)		Application Materials