Accessibility in an Online Communications Course

A Case Study

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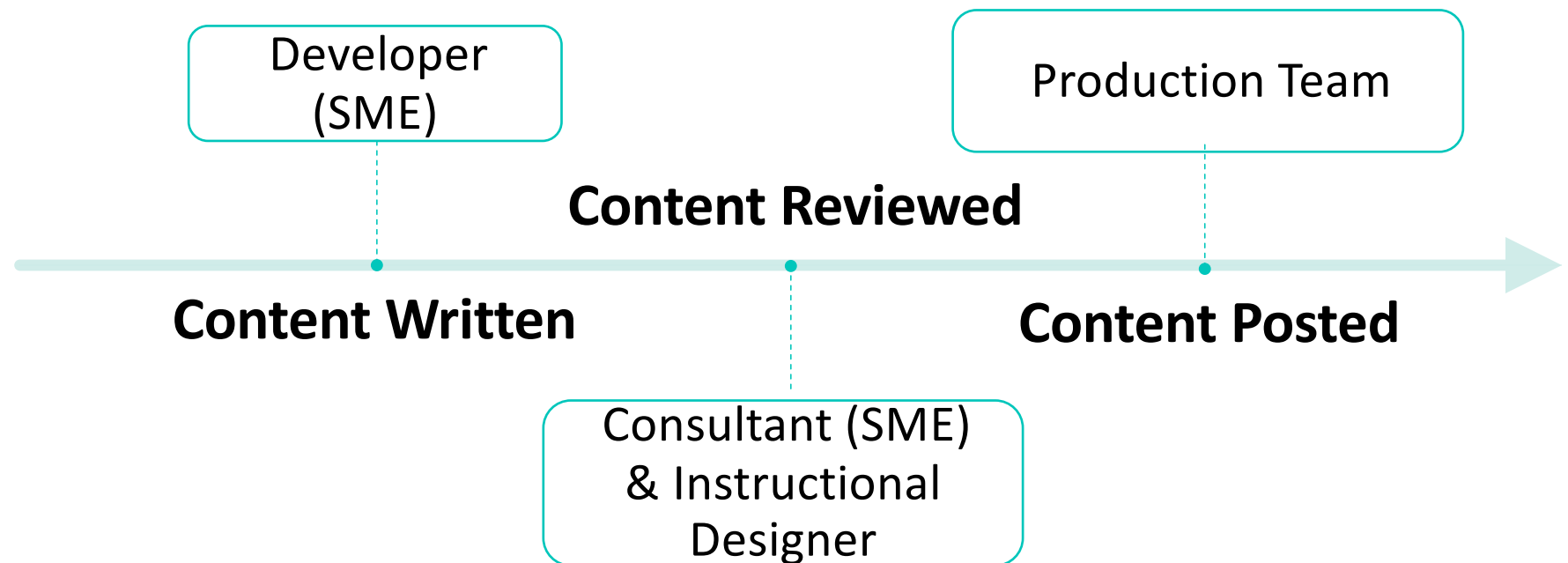
Focus

- Design.

Case Background

- CMNS 1811: Professional and Academic Communication is credit course.

- Offered through Open Learning at Thompson Rivers University.

- It is delivered in an asynchronous format. A student has 30 weeks to complete it.

- The assessments are built around a case study on The City of Beautiful.

- With so many courses moving online due to COVID it is important to share ways to design an online course to be accessible.

Goal

To recognize some of the challenges faced by students using an assistive technology and how your choices around tables can help or hinder their success.

Open Learning Development Process

Developer (SME)

Production Team

Content Reviewed

Content Written

Content Posted

Consultant (SME) & Instructional Designer

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

o Flexibility – duration, assignment due dates & choice of topics

o Formative activities – practice quiz (multiple attempts)

o Overall assignment structure – approached in multiple formats (web, document, some video)

o Accessible format for content (e.g., suitable for a screen reader)

Course Content Accessibility Check

Task	Evaluation	Word Accessibility Checker
Heading Structure	Nested & Logical	☒
Images	Alt-Text Provided	☒
Links	Descriptive	☒
Videos	Transcripts Provided	☐
Tables	**Well-formed**	☐
Content Layout	**Optimized for Screen Reader**	☐

Format 1

Example 1

Attribute	Academic Style	Plain Style	Informal Style (Texting)
Paragraph Length	Varies; may exceed six sentences	Five to six sentences	No paragraphing
Sentence length	May exceed 20 words	20 words or less	10 words or less
Sentence Structure	Some compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences	More simple sentences	No real sentence structure

Format 1

Heading level two **example 1,** table with four rows and four columns, row one column one **attribute**, column two **academic style**, column three **plain style,** column four **informal style (texting)**. Row two. attribute column one **paragraph length**, academic style column two **varies may exceed six sentences**, plain style column three **five to six sentences.** informal style texting column four **no paragraphing**. Row three. Attribute column one **sentence length**. Academic style column two **many exceed 20 words**. Plain style column three **20 words or less. Informal style texting column four **10 words or less**. Row four. Attribute column one **sentence structure**, academic style column two **some compound, complex and compound complex sentences**, plain style column three **more simple sentences**, information style, texting column four **no real sentence structure.**

Example 1

Attribute	Academic Style	Plain Style	Informal Style (Texting)
Paragraph Length	Varies; may exceed six sentences	Five to six sentences	No paragraphing
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Format 2

Example 2

Paragraph Length

- **Academic Style:** Varies; may exceed six sentences
- **Plain Style:** Five to six sentences
- **Informal Style (Texting):** No paragraphing

Sentence length

- **Academic Style:** May exceed 20 words
- **Plain Style:** 20 words or less
- **Informal Style (Texting):** 10 words or less

Sentence Structure

- **Academic Style:** Some compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences
- **Plain Style:** More simple sentences
- **Informal Style (Texting):** No real sentence structure

Format 2

Heading level 2, **example 2**, heading level three, **paragraph length**, list with three items. Bullet **academic style varies may exceed six sentences**, bullet **plain style, five to six sentences**, bullet **informal style texting no paragraphing** out of list. Heading level three **sentence length**, list with three items, **bullet academic style may exceed 20 words**, bullet **plain style 20 words or less**. Bullet **informal style (texting) 10 words or less**. Out of list. Heading level three **sentence structure**, list with three items, bullet **academic style, some compound, complex and compound-complex sentences**. Bullet **plain style more simple sentences**. Bullet **informal style texting no real sentence structure.**

Example 2

Paragraph Length
- **Academic Style:** Varies; may exceed six sentences
- **Plain Style:** Five to six sentences
- **Informal Style (Texting):** No paragraphing

Sentence length
- **Academic Style:** May exceed 20 words
- **Plain Style:** 20 words or less
- **Informal Style (Texting):** 10 words or less

Sentence Structure
- **Academic Style:** Some compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences
- **Plain Style:** More simple sentences
- **Informal Style (Texting):** No real sentence structure

Format 3

Heading level 2, **example 3**, heading level three, **academic style**, list with three items, bullet **paragraph length may exceed six sentences**, bullet **sentence length may exceed 20 words**, bullet **sentence structure some compound complex and compound-complex sentences.** out of list. Heading level 3 **plain style**. List with three items, bullet **paragraph length five to six sentences**, bullet **sentence length 20 words or less**, bullet **sentence structure more simple sentences out of list**. Heading level three **informal style texting**. List with three items, bullet **paragraph length no paragraphing**. Bullet **sentence length 10 words or less**. Bullet **sentence structure no real sentence structure.**

Example 3

Academic Style

- **Paragraph Length:** Varies; may exceed six sentences
- **Sentence length:** May exceed 20 words
- **Sentence Structure:** Some compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences

Plain Style

- **Paragraph Length:** Five to six sentences
- **Sentence length:** 20 words or less
- **Sentence Structure** More simple sentences

Informal Style (Texting)

- **Paragraph Length**No paragraphing
- **Sentence length** 10 words or less
- **Sentence Structure** No real sentence structure

Suggested Schedule

Week/ Module	Module Title	Activities and Assessments	Calendar Date
1	Introduction to Professional and Academic Composition	Activity 1: Academic Writing—Critical Thinking and Comparison Activity 2: Reading—Chapters 1 and 2 in Meyer textbook Activity 3: Academic and Professional Writing Comparison Chart Activity 4: City of Beautiful Case (Important to Assessments)	
2	Academic Composition: The Writing Process and Thesis Statements	Activity 1: Writing Warm Up Activity Activity 2: The Writing Process Phases and Steps Activities 3a: Interpret a Topic Activity 3b: Focus a Topic Activity 4: Thinking Questions and Brainstorming Activity 5a: Strong Thesis Statements—Reading Activity 5b: Strong Thesis Statements—Practice	
3	Academic Composition: Library Research and Reference Lists	Activity 1: Tour the TRU Library Online Collection Activity 2: Develop a Research Question Activity 3: List Search Terms and Create a Key Word Matrix Activity 4: Complete the Library Scavenger Hunt Activity 5a: Create an APA Reference List Without Annotations Activity 5b: Write Annotations for Your Sources **Assignment 1a: Annotated Reference List**	

Suggested Schedule (updated)

Suggested Schedule

You have 30 weeks to complete this course. The following schedule indicates how you can complete your course in 13 weeks, the time normally available for a traditional semester-long university class.

You may benefit from filling in your intended completion dates and printing this schedule to post around your home or workplace. An * symbol at front of week highlights suggested submission for an assessment.

Week/ Module 1: Introduction to Professional and Academic Composition

- Activity 1: Academic Writing—Critical Thinking and Comparison
- Activity 2: Reading—Chapters 1 and 2 in Meyer textbook
- Activity 3: Academic and Professional Writing Comparison Chart
- Activity 4: City of Beautiful Case (Important to Assessments)

Week/ Module 2: Academic Composition — The Writing Process and Thesis Statements

- Activity 1: Writing Warm Up Activity
- Activity 2: The Writing Process Phases and Steps
- Activities 3a: Interpret a Topic
- Activity 3b: Focus a Topic
- Activity 4: Thinking Questions and Brainstorming
- Activity 5a: Strong Thesis Statements—Reading
- Activity 5b: Strong Thesis Statements—Writing

*Week/ Module 3: Academic Composition — Library Research and Reference Lists

Course Content

Paragraphs

Individual sentences combine to make paragraphs, whether you are writing an academic essay or writing professionally. Here are some attributes of strong paragraphs. Both professional and academic writers follow these conventions, although in professional writing, paragraphs tend to be shorter.

Length	Five to six sentences, or about one-half page double spaced
Topic Sentence	Usually the first sentence in the paragraph
Body of Paragraph	Facts and supporting arguments
Transitions	Link sentences and paragraphs together; use phrases such as: for example, in contrast, consequently, however

Paragraphs

Individual sentences combine to make paragraphs, whether you are writing an academic essay or writing professionally. Here are some attributes of strong paragraphs. Both professional and academic writers follow these conventions, although in professional writing, paragraphs tend to be shorter.

Attributes of Strong Paragraphs

Length
Five to six sentences, or about one-half page double spaced

Topic Sentence
Usually the first sentence in the paragraph

Body of Paragraph
Facts and supporting arguments

Transitions
Link sentences and paragraphs together; use phrases such as: for example, in contrast, consequently, however

Original

Modified

Rubric Example

1. EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR FINAL RECOMMENDATION REPORT

Marking Criteria	A (80-100) Excellent	B (70-79) Very Good	C (60-69) Satisfactory	D or Lower
Document Format/Design Complete content/elements Organized/presented as requested Effective & accessible style Professional tone Submitted correctly (20 Marks)				
Research Essay and Recommendation Report Content Responds to client needs Well researched Professionally presented with strong organization and effective use of headings Graphics well integrated (50 Marks)				
Executive Summary and Title Page Both elements are completed professionally and accurately (10 marks)				
Writing is grammatically correct and shows evidence of clear and concise expression. Vocabulary is appropriate. (20 marks)				
Total Marks out of 100				
Total %				
Comments				

Rubric Example (updated)

Evaluation Criteria for Formal Report

Document Format/Design (20 marks)

- Complete content/elements
- Organized/presented as requested
- Effective & accessible style
- Professional tone
- Submitted correctly

Research Essay and Recommendation Report Content (50 marks)

- Responds to client needs
- Well researched
- Professionally presented with strong organization and effective use of headings
- Graphics well integrated

Executive Summary and Title Page (10 marks)

- Both elements are completed professionally and accurately

Writing (20 marks)

- Grammatically correct and shows evidence of clear and concise expression
- Vocabulary is appropriate

Marking Criteria

A (80-100) Excellent

Summary

○ Accessibility goes beyond just simple mechanical checks

○ No one way that content becomes accessible

○ Recommendation: Be aware as you build – it can make your life much easier.

○ More information: https://onestep.trubox.ca/

Accessibility…One Step Closer

Your Journey to more accessible course content.

Questions?

○ Thank you for taking the time to learn about online accessibility.

Literature Review and Gap

- o Catalano, 2014

- o Warren Haydock, 2022, Open Learning Students with Exceptionalities

- o Our thoughts on Future research, Focus on screen readers.