

# MODULE THREE: DOCUMENTATION

Final Documentation Due by 11:59pm on Sunday, 3/10 • 10% of final grade



## OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES

All professional writers need to practice documentation at some point—not just technical and scientific ones! Folks have to document the work that they do, give instructions to others on how to complete tasks, and assist different stakeholders in procedures or processes. Most documentation that you encounter in your life comes in the form of instructions—these could be lab protocols, help manuals, user documentation, task lists... You can write instructions for this project, but “to document” is a rhetorical act that is broader than instructional text. In other words, while you might think of

documentation in terms of instructions, documentation is used to do lots of other things. In general, documentation can be used...

- To teach or train
- To guide (procedures)
- To support the work of others (reference)

Therefore, the purpose of this assignment is not just to teach you how to write documentation, but also to understand how to research and get inside the minds of *users*—your audience when creating these types of writing<sup>1</sup>.

## GETTING STARTED

Think about a need that documentation can fill or a problem that documentation can solve. This can be instructional text, or it can be descriptive (accounting for a process or an activity). You could focus on computer software or an app, or processes and activities in some other aspect of your life. Think about possibilities in both your working life (Do you need to document the job that you do as an intern or research assistant?) and your life outside of school and career (Is there something that you wish you had instructions for? Do you know how to do something that others could learn from?).

Whatever you choose to pursue here, the problem you identify should be real and well defined. You need to have a clear issue (an exigency, to return to the concept of rhetorical situation!) to create the need for documentation.

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this explanation come from one of my own professional writing teachers, Dr. Stuart Blythe. I couldn't have said it better than he did.

After you've selected your issue, you'll need to develop and implement a research plan to understand users, activities, contexts, cultural issues, contingencies—whatever seems relevant to your ability to produce documentation as a solution to a problem. This planning is important and will guide your work on the project. Then you'll have to conduct your user research and employ the results of that research to create documentation that you believe to be effective. This documentation should combine text and images in order to reach the target user(s) you've identified for your scenario.

## WHAT WILL I TURN IN?

The deliverables and deadlines for Module 3 are...

<b>Week 8</b>	Weds 2/27	In-class idea and plan workshopping: be prepared with ideas for issues to document
<b>Week 9</b>	Weds 3/6	Draft documentation due during class for peer review (10:30am)
<b>Week 10</b>	Sun 3/10	Final documentation with reflective memo due to Blackboard by 11:59pm

We'll collaboratively generate grading criteria for Module 3 in class, but you should expect to at least be graded on...

- Following the three-step **documentation process**, which includes 1) staging the work done by the end user, 2) coaching that user through the steps, and 3) alerting the user to issues and providing them with adequate explanations
- Demonstrating **attention to the end user** of the documentation you've written, through both your content and its formatting/presentation
- An understanding of **genre conventions**: the documentation should be presented in a linear technical instruction format, reflecting the expectations that users have for this kind of document
- Clear attention should be paid to **visual design principles and usability**
- **Document preparation** that includes attention to detail, consistency, and careful editing/proofreading
- A completed **reflective memo** explaining the goals you had for this module and the deliberate rhetorical, visual, and methodological choices that you made in service of those goals. For this module, think of your reflective memo as a project assessment where you describe the work that you did, as well as arguing for the quality and success of that work.